

EMPOWERING UNDERPRIVILEGED PARENTS TO SUPPORT A CHILD'S ONGOING EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION

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Abstract

Approaches and methods to teaching have evolved, developed and have also gone obsolete over the centuries. The tables have turned where the teaching and learning process is student-centred. The constructivist approach to teaching and the cumulative formative evaluation are means to ensure that a child receives the optimum from what is being presented to them in a classroom. For students whose performance and competency level in academic achievement is below the average level, particularly for students who come from economically backward background, there is a possibility that continuous support for their education can be found in their homes. Parents with little or no education, particularly those who come from economically backward background, can support the learning of their children.

There are various levels at which a parent can be involved with the educational institutions of their children in contributing to the academic achievements of a child. However, in cases where poverty and poor academic achievement is closely related, the involvement of parents is almost absent. In such cases, the level of families supporting the child in academics also seems bleak. The purpose of this paper is to look into aspects where educational institutions can initiate a process of supporting parents who come from economically backward families, to support their children in academic learning. The support would primarily aim at raising the level of academic achievement of these learners from the specified economic backgrounds.

The objective of the paper is to bring together like minded academicians whose vision is also to raise the level of academic achievements among the poorer section of the student population. The objective of the paper is to also provoke thinking among academicians, administrators of educational institutions, teachers and students to work together towards building a support system in the field of education for the underprivileged families.

School going students from the economically backward background, particularly the indigenous people of the Northeast, can actually find support for their education in the homes.

Keywords:

Greatness in teachers and underprivileged parents, empowering underprivileged parents, the skill of conversation, the art of questioning and paraphrasing, networking, support system in a children's education.

Education is to liberate, uplift, empower, and sustain lives. For those who bear the responsibility of educating those who have been put under their tutelage, it is their mission to elevate the level of thinking of the students, so as to achieve the said hallmarks of education. For those who bear children and send them to school, such too, is their greater aim of putting their faith in the schools that they send their children to. This is especially true of underprivileged homes. Owing to such circumstances, the onus of educating the underprivileged children lies with the school teachers. A noble thought in the teaching profession, but equally noble when the 'secrets' of educating young minds are shared with the underprivileged, especially the uneducated parents. In educating the children, both parties move towards the same goal, and the disparity in the roles played by the parents and the teachers could be plausibly narrowed.

The motivation of both parties to reach the common goal for their children could diminish, and the efforts made by each party individually, could often be deterred by the preconceived notions each party has of the other. Often times, teachers look forward to continuous support from the parents in the children's education, irrespective of the socio-economic and educational background of the parents. Among the underprivileged parents, on the other hand, it is assumed, that the parents depend entirely on the teachers to give their children sound education. The preconceived notion of these parents may hold true especially when a teacher is regarded by the underprivileged parents, as a vessel of knowledge and skills, and a vessel of great wisdom and values. What could surpass this disparity which begins with the preconceived notions is the acknowledgement of the presence of greatness, which is often not exhibited by one or the other party.

What makes a teacher great is the weight of the learned and acquired knowledge that the teacher carries with him/her because of their years of education. This is also on account of the skills that the teacher has acquired in their years of education. What makes a parent great is the weight of learned and acquired knowledge through years of tilling the ground, networking and socialising with members of their community, to sustain the means of livelihood and providing food and educating their children.

What makes a teacher great are the hours, days and years of dedication he/she puts in preparing lessons, teaching, assessing and evaluating children's learning in schools. What makes a parent great are the hours, days and years of dedication he/she puts in providing the

basic necessities to his/her children and toil towards raising the standard of living of his or her own family.

What makes a teacher great is his/her advantage of being able to competently communicate in a foreign language which is the medium of instruction in the school where he/she teaches. What makes a parent great is his/her ability to use a few words in a foreign language, in addition to the vernacular, to understand the people he/she meets, to convey meaning in his/her utterances. Thus, in this manner, he/she is able to sustain the most suitable means of livelihood for that short or long period of time.

What makes a teacher great is the respect he/she has for individualism and uniqueness of each student, using their strengths and weaknesses to ensure the intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth of the individual students. What makes a parent great is recognising the strength and weakness of his/her child and being able to gauge the potential of the child and respecting that, thus giving the child the space and time to grow intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

What makes a teacher great is the ability to impart values to his students by examples that he/she sets in the classroom, and by the quality of life he/she leads outside the classroom. What makes a parent great is his/her ability to teach his /her children to live by sound principles and great values which they themselves have lived by.

What makes a teacher great is the wisdom that has grown with him/her in all the years of reading, teaching and counselling. What makes a parent great is the wisdom that he/ she has grown with in all the years of searching for opportunities to uplift the standard of living of his/her family.

It is only in acknowledging the strengths and positive aspects of both parties by the teachers, can the notion of drawing the underprivileged parents towards supporting their children's education be realised. The acknowledgement of the potential the underprivileged parents have in supporting their children's education by the teachers, can orient parents towards making time and creating opportunities to consciously reflect with the child on the knowledge, understanding, significance of what is being taught and learned in school.

The term 'underprivileged parents' here refers to parents who have had poor educational background. It also refers to the impact the poor educational background of the parents has had on their intellectual development. It also refers to the parents whose educational background has contributed little or nothing to the intellectual development of their child for better academic performances. For parents whose focus is to give their child the best education, being 'underprivileged', in this sense can be a hindrance in giving continuous support to their child's education.

Formal education of the underprivileged parents cannot be considered a criterion for supporting the ongoing education of one's child, if the underprivileged and uneducated parents are to be empowered to support the ongoing education of their child. It is around the hearth, or in the paddy fields, or at the well, or by the river side that a show of support may be

shown by the parents to their child's education. It requires parents initiating a discussion on what is taught and learned in schools, as a means of reflecting on what the child has learned in the classrooms. Reflecting with the child can provoke the thinking of their children and enhance their communicative, creative and critical thinking skills.

On a day to day basis, the art of conversation between parents and a child comes naturally. It is safe to have made the above statement as one assumes that conversation in underprivileged homes occur on a daily basis. It is expected that a child helps with domestic chores continuously, and in the process the parents and the child could possibly support each other in what may be important to them in their daily lives. Taking leads from this assumption, it is safe to say that parents can be empowered using the skills of Conversation.

It is in empowering the underprivileged parents in using the Conversational skills, in the vernacular, that could fill in the gap between the role of the underprivileged parents and the child's ongoing education. It is in mere conversation, that the parents can be attentive to the child's progress in the academic performance of their child. It is in the child's responses to the queries and comments of the parent, that could aid the parents, in reflecting with the child on the teaching and learning that occurs in the classrooms.

Successful conversation between parents and a child on the ongoing education of the child would depend on the attitude both parties have towards each other. In this case too, formal education cannot be considered a licence towards initiating a conversation on what is taught and learned in the classrooms of the child. Education is to empower and uplift standards of living. This may well begin in the homes of the learners through conversation.

Conversation is a two-way process, that of listening and receiving. To comprehend a conversation on daily chores is easy as the nature of the activity is understood by both parties. To comprehend a conversation on the education of the child could be at two levels: on 'how' they are being educated, a reference to the curricular and extra-curricular activities, and on the 'what' is being taught to the child. It is easy to deliberate on the 'wrongs and rights' of the activities of the child which is teacher-led, but rather difficult to be involved in the actual support of their education in terms of classwork and homework given, helping children enabling the critical view of what is learned in the class, enabling creative thinking activities in response to affirm the learning that has taken place in the class. Thus, the process of conversation could be taken three levels: initiating, sustaining and rounding up the conversation.

At the very first level, the level of initiating, the process of identifying the mood of the child, the emotional and physical of the child is important. This is with the objective of getting the maximum from the conversation. In the event of identifying the mood of the child, listening to what they say, and picking up leads for sustain the conversation. Parents listen to what is important, and listen to the key words that would ensure a prolonged discussion with the child, for the benefit of academic learning.

The art of questioning is also a skill in conversation that can reinforce learning of the child. Furthermore, question could inform parents, if not educated them, on topic or issues, in all fields of study that children are exposed to in the schools for their learning. Questioning a child not only can reinforce learning, but can be a means of showing appreciation for the task they have undertaken to learn what is presented to them in the classrooms.

Another skill in the art of conversation is paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is the art of reproducing what has been stated as a thought or idea, in the event of trying to comprehend, what has been uttered or written. When a parent is being able to paraphrase, there is learning on the part of the parent and a reaffirmation of the learning of the children in the class. This is a means so as to ensure that the child knows that the parent is interested in the learning of the child.

The art of passing positive comments on the sharing of academic learning of the child is a means of reinforcing the learning of the child positively. Positive reinforcement boost motivation among students, arousing in them the feeling of want, to attend school and act upon what is learned in the school.

The medium of instruction in the child's school, should it be a foreign language, which is not understood by the parents, ought not to be a barrier to show support. The aim of empowering parents is to enhance the communicative, creative and critical ability of the child. The skill of using a foreign language or a second language, may be confined to classrooms and the vicinity of the school. However, this is not to say that usage of a foreign or a second language by the child with parents is discouraged. In such circumstances, parents may be empowered with skills of seeking meaning of the foreign language used by means of allegories, demonstration, and visuals. The parents may also be empowered with the skill of identifying and respecting the child's need for time to be able to comprehend the new language before he /she is able to help the parent understand the meaning of foreign language used in the course of the conversation.

If education is to liberate, uplift, empower, and sustain underprivileged lives, then the aspects of intellectual growth along with emotional and spiritual growth of children with an underprivileged parent, may also be considered by the teachers teaching underprivileged children.