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Striking a chord

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Unconditional acceptance, not a demonstration of perfection, is what students seem to expect from teachers.

At a recent workshop on motivation that I facilitated, I asked the group of school teachers, who were participants in the workshop, to list on chart paper “what they expected from students and what students expected from them”. The response was intriguing and led me to question the fundamentals of the teacher-student relationship. While the teachers listed their expectations from students, succinctly, as ‘desire to learn’, their belief that students wanted much from them, such as being a role-model, motivating them, not punishing, being fair, being competent and the list went on, made me ask them a basic question, “Are these articulated expectations, or are you assuming these are what students want from you?” There was some agreement that these were their beliefs.

Then I encouraged the teachers to take a re-look at the list they had drawn up and examine whether these were truly what students expected, or were they missing something simple and basic. After much discussion, arguing, debating and what not, the teachers arrived at the consensus that students actually want the teacher to “be a happy person” and radiate that happiness.

Truly, students only want from the teacher a sense of unconditional acceptance, a feeling of positive regard and the experience of joy when with a teacher. Home life for many children is a mixed fare, with love and distress in equal measure. When they come to school, where they meet their teacher, they want to experience a neutralising effect, a removal of toxicity that they sometimes have to cope with outside in the world, and a sense of healing and celebration. It is a submission therefore to teachers, not to stress themselves with projected expectations of what they imagine students want from them, but to recognise that the role-model they desire to be is not the one that seeks to demonstrate perfection. Rather, being congruent, holistic, believing in their inherent goodness, relating to students with self-assuredness, self-approval and being kind with themselves, will endear them to the students.

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