

## How to Make Learning Meaningful

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Making learning meaningful is analogous to making food nutritious, so that it can serve the body in a better manner. The nutritious food is designed in such a way that it acts as energy booster, performance enhancer and is easily digested/assimilated in the system.

### 1. Designing

In the realm of education it also signifies a lot of 'designing', planning, experimenting, fabricating, evaluating and consolidating. Making learning meaningful is a quality issue and requires serious attention from (educational) technological points of view.

### 2. Motivation and Goal Setting

One will only drink when thirsty, one will only eat when hungry. Nobody can be forced to drink or eat as well as 'learn' unless properly motivated and utterly feels the need for it. Take an example of three men working at

a construction site. When somebody asked, "What are you doing?" The first man replied, "Don't you see I am working for a living;" the second man said, "I am making a wall;" while quality of their work will depend on their type of motivation. So, for children, proper motivation also helps to set goals and get inspiration from it. Motivation is the 'propellant' of action.

### 3. Result Oriented

Learning can only be meaningful when it yields some tangible result (accumulation of information and learning better skills), which helps one to solve some practical problems in life, helps to know the complexities of a structure and adds value to it. In other words, there must be some definite, motivating purpose to learn. Learning should never be considered superfluous and redundant. If you think 'education' is costly, would you like to be deprived of it?

### 4. Purposeful and Challenging

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Apart from finding out the purpose, the process of learning should also be challenging but not difficult to attain success, so that the effort of the learners can be sustained. It should not be remote and far-fetched; but alluring and achievable. Success begets success. In course of achieving success, one has to confront with many slips and falls; try to get lessons from each of the failures; and not repeat the same pitfalls as it will take one nowhere.

### **5. Logically Spaced and Explorative**

The steps of efforts should be logically spaced and may be given but let them enjoy the glory of success. And of course congratulate them for the efforts they have put in. Learning is also an enjoyment. A boring lesson, however, valuable, goes waste and remains ineffective.

### **6. Creating a Conducive Enabling Environment**

Making learning meaningful presupposes that the learning environment is conducive, free from any tension and imposition, non-intrusive and non-threatening. Creating and maintaining a conducive learning atmosphere require careful planning, training, preparedness and judicious time management.

### **7. The Art of Correlating and Subject Depth**

To be a master of handling any subject means knowing the subject at least

ten times more than what is required to be delivered. With deep study, we develop our own insight; be able to read between the lines and connect all the learning ladders of all other subjects so skillfully that the children will forget to be bored. They will be a part and parcel of the lesson and start thinking by themselves. Learning is a process like putting one brick upon another and cementing the two, so that it joins and becomes one and indivisible. It is called 'Constructivist approach'.

### **8. Place of Wit and Humour**

Judicious use of humour is also a very rewarding experience. But don't try to be humorous. If children are intelligent and receptive, try witty remarks. Some catchy phrases are liked by everybody. One need not be cheap and vulgar. Create a friendly atmosphere but don't sound silly. There is power in reticence. Be careful not to hurt anybody's feeling or sentiment. Don't make fun of anybody's personal defects.

### **9. Finding out the 'Centre of Gravity' (Core Concerns)**

Find out first, through a casual conversation about the subjects or topics the students are interested in, they are pre-occupied and/or engrossed with. It will be difficult for a person to look beyond one's immediate needs so that it should serve as the starting point of discussions. Once this is brought out, one will feel relieved and relaxed and become receptive.

Repeating the previous analogy is like soaking the bricks; a wet brick is ready to be joined with cement.

### **10. Education is Training and Taming of Emotions; Steps of Socialisation**

Although education is regarded as training of the mind and developing intellectual capacities, it also involves skill development, habit development and development of the positive spirit, taming and training of emotion, learning decency and positive discipline. There are different aspects of socialisation and make a man 'educated', sophisticated, accomplished and universally acceptable. One will take pride of oneself when he/she is universally acceptable and successful in life.

Learning will be meaningful when all these factors are taken into consideration. It will be worthwhile to remember that the 'prescriptions' (that is, the methodologies applied or contemplated to be implemented) for each child are 'tailor-made', so that their self-esteem is restored and they feel to be valued and given importance.

What one has learnt over the years with his/her interactivity with schools, teachers and children is that there are no shortcuts. No notebook or guidebook will tell one how to make learning meaningful and effective. If the goals are clear, right methods have been chosen, and opportunities or activities for learning provided, children will be motivated to learn and their interest- maintained learning will

take place.

### **11. Inclusive Learning Friendly Environment**

Providing quality education to every child by creating an inclusive learning friendly environment is must for social equality.

**12.** Core concept of Inclusive Learning (*in contrast with Exclusive Learning parameters propagated by the aristocrats and elites, so long*) is a human rights issue, democratic in nature and psychologically sound. It views that the progress and development of the society is not somebody's exclusive right or privilege, but a socio-economic and scientific need. No nation in the world, however rich and affluent, can progress solely depending on its indigenous resource. Regional and international cooperation is an undeniable truth and must be sought.

**13.** Apart from sustainable use of natural resources, the growing importance of human resource potentials is being felt very sharply. This shift of focus from 'hardware' (that is, materialistic prosperity) to 'software' (intellectual inputs) had been possible with the shift of focus or understanding of the concept of 'property/assets' which was bound with land to intellectual property, that is, intelligence, creativity, mental ability, etc.

**14.** So when human resources are a very important factor, then why

neglect somebody's contribution for some reasons or other? This is why industrially and economically advanced countries look for outsourcing, particularly from developing countries where the labour is cheap and demands are quite reasonable. The advent of super-industrial revolution with the advancement of electronics, communication technology and computer technology has shattered the old beliefs, customs and practices: exclusion of some part of the society on the basis of gender discrimination, caste discrimination, colour discrimination and racial discrimination.

**15.** Slowly but surely it dawns that the progress of a society or a country is not somebody's own business, the natural resources are not somebody's sole property, the pollution of environment is not affecting only a few of the upper class; the earth is to be looked as a common heritage. When some calamities strike, it does not remain limited within a small area or group, the deep sense of 'one-ness' is descending. The idea of 'global village' is very much real. So, scientific technological and economic advancement must have a human face. Right to education is granted not as a charity or mercy but as a dire need.

**16.** It has been seen that when some part of the society is left neglected in its object poverty, rampant disease and lack of education, it starts creating problems in the form of lawlessness, hooliganism, terrorism, separatism and

what not. This is a bitter experience of the last few decades all over the world. If some human beings purposely or erroneously are not given their due respect and importance in the overall progress of the society, they will indulge in negative activities and hold back the progress and development of the society. It seems that the antisocials, terrorists, anarchists and the like exercise their brains more intensely than people for creative and peaceful purposes. This trend has to be immediately addressed with proper care and love. One cannot show concern for somebody without love and regard for self-respect. Inclusiveness follows from these premises also.

**17.** Practising inclusiveness in education has its challenges also. The first thing to be remembered is that the idea of inclusiveness, however important and necessary, is like 'rubbing against the grain.' Most of us are not used to it. We tend to raise many doubts and questions. It appears that by nature, we prefer homogeneity as it is easy to deal with situation where it is less demanding and allows us ample opportunities of relaxation and slackness. All people resist change until they discover the advantages. So is the case with creating an Inclusive Learning Friendly Environment (ILFE). It seems to be an uphill task and untenable, but that is not the ultimate truth.

**18.** Think of the situation of joint family system, which was prevalent in

the society a few decades ago. How did our parents and grandparents manage such situation and look after the needs of every member of the family? We did not need the omnipresence of the 'idiot box' to keep ourselves engaged and happy. Instead we were happier, closer with our relatives and siblings, even with in-laws and neighbours. It is exclusive for economic needs and urban lifestyle, now we prefer 'nuclear family' and indeed we are not happier or more social and considerate. Inclusiveness is a step towards better socialisation, tapping the talents of all, ensuring participation of all and recognising contribution of all.

**19.** A school being inclusive does not only mean inclusion of some socially deprived or physically or mentally challenged children. It also includes so-called normal children when they are under some stress, feel sick, remain withdrawn, become irritating, uncompromising, obstinate, bully and aggressive. It is necessary that we understand that every child has his/her special needs and requirements.

**20.** Therefore, inclusiveness is more than simply integrating or accommodating, but assimilating within your 'larger family', keeping in mind their special needs and hidden talents. Show your concern not with arrogance but with humility and empathy. You will win hearts.

**21.** In an Inclusive Learning Environment all the children get better opportunity of viewing the society in a

holistic manner, get out of social stigma and learn better technique of social adjustment, become more tolerant and free from the fear of strangers, develop better skills of teamwork and human resource management.

**22.** From teachers' point of view, inclusiveness may pose a challenge to classroom management but it is not so. The children become self-dependent, cooperative, peer-guided and enjoy the company of friends of all sorts. Since the dividing line between learning and playing becomes slowly indistinguishable, children become more attracted to school than their homes.

**23.** For such changes to take place, the school administration has also to accept the elevated standard of classroom management; instead of dead silence in the classroom, it may buzz into activities but without diverting anybody's attention. The seating arrangement of the children should also be suitable to this new methodology. Frequent but purposeful movement of the children should be accepted as the new norm. The position of the teacher should also not be static; she should not be like a judge in the courtroom, but a friend and facilitator; she should be accessible to all, not engaged with a few. Interaction with the teacher will be need-based and not like a tyrant. She will be truly 'scaffolding' the learning process, not interfering with it and standing as an impediment.