

THE CRAFT OF TEACHING

AMRIK SINGH*

EDITOR'S NOTE

This article a reprint from University News of 17th April 95 written by the welknown educationist Amrik Singh. Actually, there are extracts from the author's forthcoming book "The Craft of Teaching".

It is felt that every Engineering teacher as a matter of fact every teacher teaching at u.g. or p.g. level irrespective of the discipline he belongs to, must carefully read this article, interspect and find out where he stands in his professional career, how far he has travelled and how much he has to travel before he reaches the characteristics of an Ideal Teacher.

Hence, this reprint. Hope and trust that after going through this article, the readers will agree with the views of the editor and appreciate the inclusion of this reprint.

Editor

When a newly appointed teacher stands before a class on the first day of his engagement as a teacher, how does he feel ? To put it no more strongly, the feeling is one of abject terror. Any one who has taught even briefly would confirm this fact.

The teacher is not sure if he would be able to put across what he knows. About this there can be no two opinions that he already knows the subject; that is why he has been selected to lecture to students. Unless he had a good academic record, he would not have been selected, But the fact of having been selected, often in competition with several others, does not give him that feeling of assured confidence

which he would have liked to have.

Why is that so ? It should not be difficult to understand. All these years he has been student; that is to say, at the receiving end. Now, he is required to be at the giving end. In his new role as a teacher, he has to lecture to the class and explain things to them. That he knows a good deal is not the point at issue. What he does not know is how to communicate.

Two issues have emerged so far. One is that he lacks confidence in himself and the second is that he presumably lacks the art of communication. What does he do in this situation ? He has no choice except to say something when face to face with

* Former Secretary, Association of Indian Universities,

the class, that is the only thing that he can do. If an analogy might be given, he is like a singer or a dancer who is giving his first performance. If one wants to be more academic, one might say that he is like a surgeon who is going to perform his first operation.

He knows what is to be done. He has been instructed in regard to all the problems that he can encounter and he also knows what to do about them. But then it is the first time he is doing it. And because it is the first time, he is diffident, if not also unsure. However as soon as he starts speaking, things begin to happen more or less as anticipated and even instructed. In other words, he had been taught both the do's and don'ts. He follows the instructions given to him and avoids the pitfalls against which he had been cautioned. And lo and behold, he is doing it right !

In plain words, the first cut that he makes is as per instructions. He cuts as much as he has been asked to cut; no more and no less. Then he makes the second cut and then the third cut and everything begins to happen as pre-programmed. One successful operation and the surgeon is launched on his career; indeed he is no more unsure of himself.

Something of this kind happens in the case of a fresh teacher. Primed with all the knowledge that he has acquired over the years, he walks into the classroom. Tough diffident, he starts speaking; drawing upon whatever he knows. As he goes on, minute after minute, everything seems to fall in place. He can see into the eyes of the students. It becomes clear to him that he is getting somewhere. The light in those eyes says something of that kind and this gives

him heart.

Half way through the lecture, he feels that it was not all that difficult as he had imagined. Things are going smoothly for him but then anything unexpected can happen. Somebody may ask a question. If he can answer it successfully, he has crossed the first hurdle. If he cannot, he gets stuck. But being stuck cannot help him. He has to overcome the hurdle and, sooner or latter, he manages to do so.

How he does so is difficult to specify. If his reply satisfies the students, the hurdle is crossed. But if the teacher himself is unsure of what he says or if something in the eyes of the students tells him that his reply is not satisfactory enough, it weakens his confidence. However he has no choice but to go on and as well as he can.

Being the first lecture, presumably he prepared for it carefully. However, if the lecture was for 45 minutes, he may find that he has run through the material in half an hour. Being a novice, he does not know how to improvise. Nor does he perhaps know how to illustrate the point that he is making. If he gets stuck, and this happens not unoften in the first few months, the teacher has no option except to disperse the class. If such an unforeseen thing happens, his confidence can be totally undermined. This does not happen very often however, but things like this do happen and more particularly with those who are beginning their teaching career.

This picture of what happens to a young teacher in the classroom on the first day is not imaginary. In hundreds of classrooms around the country, such a scenario is enacted day after day. The customary mode of teaching in most

places is lecturing. What is called discussion or demonstration in the classroom and so on are not what he begins with. These follow in course of time.

All the same such things can happen and indeed do. But what needs to be underlined is the fact that, however unsure the teacher might be to begin with, in course of time he gathers confidence and manages to put across whatever he knows. There may be ups and downs, he may even have forgotten certain things off and on but on the whole the teacher manages to overcome his diffidence to perform before the group of students whom he is required to teach.

II

What is it that enables him to overcome his diffidence and perform? The answer to this question should help to clarify things. The obvious answer to this question is that the teacher knows much more than the students does. Students are there to learn from him. By the time he gets to be a teacher, he has gone through the same process of learning which the students in front of him are now being put through.

In the course of his student career, he had acquired a body of knowledge. In token thereof, he has been examined, interviewed and adjudged to be suitable. Having gone through this process, he is well equipped to be able to initiate and undertake the process himself.

His initial diffidence arose from the fact that he had no experience of teaching so far. He had seen his teachers do the job though. Unless he has been expressly instructed in the art of teaching, the only meaningful thing that

he can go by is to recall how his own teachers had instructed him.

As a student, it had not occurred to him that, while teaching him, his teacher too had learnt the craft of teaching. In course of time, he had mastered the craft. Learning from his own experience and that of his colleagues, the teacher had refined and honed his teaching skills. In the first decade, almost every few months, most teachers learn one new trick after another. Each one of them helps him to understand his craft better. And that is what eventually makes him into a competent teacher.

To go back to the starting point however; what was it that enabled a teacher to overcome his lack of confidence and perform satisfactorily? One was the fact that, despite his diffidence; he could communicate and the second was the fact that the teacher knows much more than the students do. This gives him an advantage over the students. A sensible teacher however does not take this advantage for granted. He seeks to consolidate his superiority over the students by acquiring more and more knowledge.

In the beginning, the gap between what the teacher knows and what the students know is wide. At the same time, there are students in the classroom who are in a position to ask questions and raise queries which sometimes leave the teacher speechless. Why this happens is not difficult to understand. The students are following the same trail as the teacher had followed at one time. Depending upon their quickness of mind and analytical ability, they are sometimes able to either draw abreast of their teachers or even go ahead of them. If and when that happens, the

teacher is in trouble.

Cases are not unknown where a teacher might have been teaching for several years and yet he may be stumped in the classroom by a question that a student may ask. Occasionally there are students in the class, may be not more than one or two, who delight in asking such questions which would baffle the teacher. The source of knowledge both for students and teachers is the same. If a student is able to get to the same sources as the teacher has access to, and that is not all that difficult, it is not beyond the former to raise queries which the teacher would be hard put to answering.

A teacher who takes his job seriously therefore has no choice except to remain decisively ahead of the student. In other words, he has to educate himself better, discover the interrelationships, inform himself about those other disciplines which have a bearing on his own discipline and, on the whole, equip himself with a fund of knowledge which is not shallow but extensive and wide ranging and deep.

It should be clear by now that within a span of a year or a few years, almost every teacher passes through two stages. One is the stage of diffidence which he overcomes soon enough. At this stage the focus is on his own performance. Would he be able to deliver the goods or not? That is the thing bothering him most of all.

Whether it bothers him for a few days or a few months or a few years is a matter of detail. It varies from person to person. There can even be situation when his confidence is jolted by something unexpected. I remember one senior teacher complaining once with reference to a particularly inquisi-

tive student in the classroom, 'I had not read Aristotle's Poetics have had to re-read it now.'

This remark illustrates two things. One, that he was lecturing to the M.A. class without preparing for his lectures. To have read something at the Master's level as a student and then banked upon it for the next two decades indicates a state of affairs which is not all that uncommon in our country. The second thing that it illustrates is that, even after two decades of a teaching career, problems can arise and these problems cannot be brushed aside. Any inquisitive student can make life difficult for a lazy and dishonest teacher and there is no dearth of such laggards in our system.

The point however that needs to be underlined is that in the first phase of his career, the teacher is thinking more of himself than of anything else. His principal concern is how to be able to perform effectively. With a little experience he learns the tricks of the trade and relies upon them to steer him through whatever difficulties he might encounter.

But empty confidence is not enough. It has sooner or latter to be backed up with solid knowledge. And that is what compels (or prompts) him to educate himself better in his chosen field. To put it in another way, it is in the second phase that the focus shifts from his preoccupation with himself to the complexities of the subject which he is required to handle. This shift from himself to his field of self-chosen study is a crucial shift. What is more, it can be a highly productive shift.

All those who undertake any kind of research work or choose to write text books belong to this category. Having

overcome the initial hurdles of teaching and to some extent mastered the craft of teaching, they devote themselves to learning more and more about the discipline they have elected to specialize in. This phase of development can be an extended one and generally extends to several decades, even the whole teaching career of a person - if one may choose to be precise.

The first phase of uncertainty and diffidence does occasionally get prolonged. But, generally speaking, the phase does not extend beyond the first year or so of his teaching career. This is not to suggest that there are no more hurdles to be crossed. Hurdles keep on cropping up and they have to be negotiated as and when they arise. But a teacher who has weathered the first one year would generally know how to deal with the problems that might still arise.

To reiterate however, what gives him depth and solidity is not because he has mastered the craft of teaching but because he has gone into the depth of his discipline in a manner which keeps him miles ahead of his students. To start with, the distance was not much. That is why there were delicate situations to be negotiated, especially in the earlier years, indeed even latter if the teacher chooses to be indolent or intellectually incurious. An odd student can outdistance a teacher once in a while and this can give the latter uncomfortable moments. But once a teacher has been teaching for several years, the gap between him and the students is so wide that, exceptions apart, there is hardly any likelihood of a student springing a surprise on the teacher and leave him gasping for words.

However there is a certain breed of teachers who rely upon the gift of the gab and manage to perform in the classroom even when the intellectual fare that they offer is thin. At the undergraduate level, they can and, usually, do sail through. But if they are required to do somewhat more advanced work, say at the Honours or the Master's level, they are either unable to perform or they are found out.

The explanation is simple. Their intellectual ballast is poor. While it is possible to juggle with words, and some can do it more successfully than other, there are limits to that kind of jugglery. Since more than 85 per cent of our students are enrolled at the undergraduate level, the need to acquire intellectual depth is not all that urgent. It is at that level that a goodly number of teachers underperform seriously.

They are not required to perform better at the undergraduate level. The subject content has not been improved in most universities despite the fact that students are spending one year more than they used to spend a quarter-century ago. But that is another issue and need not be dilated upon here. However it does require to be emphasized that teaching is not only a matter of the craft of teaching, its content is equally important.

III

It is not only a question of confused priorities between form and content or, to put it another way, it is not a question of having to choose between the craft of teaching and the content of teaching. The issue is more basic. In the initial stages, the teacher is thinking more of himself and whether he would be able to perform or not. He thinks mainly of

himself. The content which he is presenting is meant to ensure that he should be able to handle the class with a certain amount of ease and confidence.

As already stated, the root of this confidence lies in the fact that the teacher knows much more than the student does. If he is to consolidate his position as the person at the giving end, he has to make sure that his mastery of the subject is so extensive and so strong in its fundamentals that nobody dare challenge him. It is this obligation to consolidate his position of preeminence that makes him dig deeper into the subject and explore it in its various dimensions and directions. Those who take their job seriously have no choice except to diversify into related areas as well as fortify their intellectual superiority over the students.

What about the student however ? The teacher has not yet had time to look at that dimension of the problem. He was so preoccupied with himself and then with the need to better equip himself intellectually that he never thought of those who were at the receiving end. Perhaps this statement needs to be clarified as well as amplified.

It is not that he never thought of them. He did think of them. But not in the role of students being involved in the process called teaching-learning and indeed being an integral part of it. When he was lecturing to the class, he could see that he was communicating and the students were responding. But what was the nature of their response and through what stages or sub-stages that response passed were questions that he never stopped to ask.

To be more specific, the teacher

seldom asked himself questions like these. What happens when I say something ? Do students always follow what I say ? If they do follow, what are the various stages of their understanding ? What is it that enables them to understand ? Is it because I begin with the simple and go on to the complex ? Is it because I take into account that I do not talk above their head and that I take into consideration what they already know and then try to establish a connection between what they know and what I am now telling them.

What happens when I explain something and they do not follow ? Do I guess it or do I verify this for myself through means and methods, both direct and indirect ? And if I find that they have not understood what I had said, what do I do ? Do I repeat myself ? Do I give an example ? Do I illustrate my statement with reference to what they know ? There are scores of such questions which every teacher has to ask himself and find answers to. Unless he has found answers to them and changed his technique of communication accordingly, he would not succeed; indeed he would find himself out of his depth.

Learning to ask such questions is important. Equally important is to find answers to them. And no less important than both these steps is the crucial question of how to change his ways of teaching and his approach to students. If he remains hidebound and fixed in whatever he started with, it is a sure sign of one fact : he is not learning his craft. He has to be open minded and he has to experiment and learn from them. This alone would make him an effective teacher.

It should be clear by now that it is when a teacher starts thinking of his students and their response that he enters the third phase of his teaching career. In the first phase he thought of himself and, in the second phase, the contents of his teaching or that he remained ahead of his students as much as he could. This alone would give him that sense of mastery over the subject which is a prerequisite for successful teaching.

The third phase however is equally logical and important. He would never learn to communicate effectively unless he thinks of the students as the recipient of the message that he is sending. He has to put himself in place of the students and recall, if he can and in any case, visualize what he himself felt when he was a student. Not every teacher can do this successfully. However hard we try, each one of us, in the process of growing up, tends to forget what we ourselves passed through. A young person of 25 has a better chance of recollecting what it felt like five or ten years earlier. But, as he grows older, those memories begin to recede and he finds it difficult to recall what it was to be a young person of 18-20.

But unless he can put himself in place of the student, analyze his own original process of learning, identify each single step taken, discover the inter relationships between different steps, he would not be able to learn the craft of teaching properly.

It is assumed, and not too wrongly either, that an average teacher takes five to ten years to learn the ropes, to use a colloquial phrase. If he has not learned them within the first decade or so, likely enough he would never learn them

latter. Responses cease to be quick as one grows older. Before long, what is called the generation gap begins to intervene, and that makes it even more difficult than before.

This is not to suggest that learning, however it is defined, stops after the first decade or so. On the contrary, what one learns is not the basics which one had learnt already, but something additional and wider and deeper in scope. What is important to ensure is that one never closes one's mind to new things. It also needs to be recognised that, while on the intellectual plane, one learns from books and other forms of participation, when it comes to the craft of teaching, it is one's students, more than anyone else, who become one's teachers and not the other way round.

In what manner are our students, our teachers? It is when, because of the compulsions of our profession, we are obliged to view the process of learning from the student's point of view. Once in a while, students do raise issues and those make us think. In finding an answer, we sometimes do get a clue to how students are learning. But this does not happen very often.

Students themselves are not always aware of how they learn. A competent teacher learns largely from his own experience and partly from the various situations that arise. Students are invariably involved in these situations. Whatever happens reveals the inner dynamics of what is called the process of learning and it is from an understanding of it that one learns. It is in that sense that our students are our teachers.

At the same time it must be acknowledged that, over the centuries, a body of knowledge has been generated

which tells us how the process of learning takes place. It is unfortunate that the way in which things are organized, those who begin teaching are seldom instructed in advance how to go about it.

Were they to take a course in the art of teaching, they would be much better equipped to handle their job. But the customary thing in most countries is that while at the school level this kind of training is ensured, at the college and university level, the possession of intellectual knowledge is treated as adequate enough preparation for a career in teaching. This is wrong.

What happens in consequence is that most of us learn on the job. We make mistakes and learn from them. As already stated, we recall some of our good teachers who taught us and treat them as sour models. We also learn something from others. But the one agency that we learn a great deal from is our students. Why is an experienced teacher to be preferred to a new teacher? Not only because he knows more about the subject but also because he knows the art of handling the students better than one who may be described as a beginner.

IV

What do we precisely mean by handling the students? To assume that this art is like a sleight of hand, and little more than that, would be to insult the intelligence of students. A salesman can practise a sleight of hand. One comes in contact with him **only for a few minutes**. If he can **sell something** to us, even when we do not need it, by talking persuasively and making us suspend our judgement for a brief

duration of time, he is successful. But can a teacher do the same thing?

The question does not arise. A teacher has to meet students day after day and month after month. His interaction with students is not fleeting or transitory. On the contrary, it is long lasting and intensive. In any case it is long enough for students to find out whether they are being taken for a ride or there is something solid and sincere about the teacher. In plain words, unless one is sincere, one has not taken even the first step towards competent teaching. In a sense, the first precondition of successful teaching is that the teacher must come across as sincere.

Sincerity would mean several things. It would mean, amongst other things, that the teacher has done his best to prepare for the lecture and the act of communication is lucid, logical and coherent. If a teacher comes across as shallow and not particularly well grounded in his discipline, one who has not prepared properly and is trying to pass off whatever little he knows as the sum total of all that is to be known, such a person would never be respected. Respect can be given only to someone who is sincere and not to someone who is trying to put on an act. It is possible to pretend and put on an act but it cannot be done day after day. This is something which makes teaching distinctive as a profession.

Once a teacher has got over the initial cramps of public speaking, what gives him a more durable standing with students is the sincerity and seriousness which brings to bear upon his job. This is vital. Acquisition of knowledge in all its manifestations and interconnections then ensures that he performs competently in the classroom.

Sincerity has yet another dimension. Sooner or latter, every teacher finds out himself that while competent performance on the intellectual plane is indispensable, no less important is another aspect of his personality. Students look up to him as a figure of authority. They are not yet fully grown up but are in the process of growing up. Therefore, even when they come across as fully confident, the fact of the matter is that they are far from so.

In their heart, there is an unmistakable feeling of not being sure about what they are doing and where they are going. They seek approval from their teachers and indeed look upon them as their role models. The element of sincerity is thus to be seen not as something ornamental but as fundamental to the role of a teacher.

As a matter of fact, there is much more to it. Students vary enormously in their mental make-up and personality characteristics. If a teacher has to have any impact upon his students, he has to understand that each one is to be handled differently.

So as to be able to handle each one of them successfully, a teacher must understand that what will draw a response from one student will leave the other cold and *vice versa*. In order to be successful, a teacher would therefore have to adjust his way of dealing with his students intelligently as well as skilfully.

As long as a teacher is passing through the first two stages of his growth as a professional, he did not think much about students and the wide variations that are to be found amongst them. In fact, he was thinking basically of himself and how to perform better. It is only after he has passed through

the first two phases of his growth that a new concern, interaction with the students, loom up on his horizons. Unless he has passed through the third phase as well, it goes without saying, he cannot be said to have matured as a teacher.

There is also an additional reason for it. For him to be fully and properly successful, involvement of the student is so central to the whole process of teaching that unless the teacher has reached the third phase of growth as professional and developed a sure way of understanding the students and then dealing with them, he cannot be described to be successful in the proper sense of the word.

There are several problems that this phase of encounter with students brings into the open. Perhaps the most important of them is the problem of student motivation. The problem is not as intractable as it is when one goes to school as a child. As any one would recall from his own childhood, one thing that a child cannot do is to concentrate. The primary task of the teacher at that stage is to make the child concentrate. Plato was not the first thinker to say that the way to do it is to combine work with play. That is what is generally done at the school level.

As the child grows up, other ways of making him concentrate are devised. The child is taught the alphabet, how to add and subtract and the lot. Once he acquires the rudiments, he begins to feel more and more interested. A kind of quantum jump takes place when the child learns how to read on his own. This gives him a feeling of autonomy and that is precisely the direction in which he is moving and indeed ought to move. The ability to read, unassisted,

gives him a feeling of independence. In a sense, that marks the break between dependence and independence.

By the time the child has entered his teens, got to college etc., so much work has been done upon him that a kind of differentiation between those who are interested in studying further and those who do not wish to do so has already taken place. The adolescent years are disruptive in certain other ways and a certain proportion of students always fall by the wayside. But those who have survived all these hazards would still have to be enthused and motivated.

Left to themselves, the rate of casualties amongst students would be much higher but for the positive intervention of the teachers. It is they who keep the student on the straight path. They do so partly by demanding regular hard work from them and partly by their own example of sincerity, commitment and a certain degree of sustained enthusiasm. If teachers lack enthusiasm, this gets communicated to students and has distinctly negative consequences. Once however students get enthused and begin to rise up to the challenge presented to them, the job is done.

The next job is to sustain that enthusiasm. Some teachers succeed in it while others do not. In fact, one could say that the successful teacher is one who succeeds in it and those who do not can be described as failures. During the last few years, the number of teachers who fail has been increasing at an alarming rate. Though other factors are to blame no doubt, a considerable part of the blame has to be attached to teachers also.

Both success and failure need to be understood in a much wider sense than

are usually understood. Even if one chooses to be statistical, one cannot overlook the fact that, in a large number of our institutions, half, and sometimes more than half the students, fail to complete the course which they join. Partly it may be owing to poor teaching but partly it is also owing to the inability of teachers to rouse and sustain enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is the prelude, indeed the precondition, to a high degree of motivation. Without motivation nothing ever succeeds and this is as much true of students as of teachers.

It is only a motivated who can motivate students. The tragedy of the university scene today is that the number of such teachers has been declining over the years. Quite a few of them know the technique of lecturing and of keeping the students satisfied. But the students also know that what they are being offered is far from satisfactory. The overall situation in the country however is such that, before long, the majority of students begin to develop an attitude of apathy.

In fact, one could go further and say that today we have two parallel systems of education running side by side; elite institutions which have highly motivated and competent teachers and students. This happens largely because of the earlier training they have had and the rest but the vast majority who go into the general run of institutions are not well motivated. In consequence there is a pretence at learning and not much real learning takes place.

What happens in the classroom in the course of lectures and other forms of interaction has an undeniable bearing on the kind of persons students become. Imparting of knowledge, as

anyone would recognize, is not without an undertone of emotion. While knowledge is neutral and emotion-free, the imparting of it cannot be without a touch of emotion. Without going so far as some people would suggest, teaching is some kind of a performing art and the histrionic ability counts for a great deal. The fact remains that how a teacher comes across matters enormously and this is where the element of emotion (perhaps a more acceptable word would be involvement) comes in.

This is not to suggest that those who have the performing ability do better than others precisely because they have this ability. Even when this ability is unmistakably present, though the vast majority do not have it, the personality of the teacher makes all the difference. As already stated, the basic characteristic of a teacher is his sincerity. If a teacher is sincere and awakens a corresponding chord in the mind of the student, the job is done.

In saying this, sincerity is not being counterposed against the ability of a performer which some teachers without question, possess. Anyone who has this ability would certainly make a better impact than others. But even without this ability, a teacher is not handicapped in any serious way. What shines through is his sincerity and this is more decisive than histrionic ability or anything else of that kind.

What is sincerity however? This notion needs to be examined more closely than has been done so far. The simplest way to define it is that if a teacher comes across as a 'giver', he is looked upon as being sincere. He is a giver in the sense that he is possessed of knowledge which the students do not

possess. He can give it in a mechanical way. He can also give it with a sense of enthusiasm and involvement. The ability of a performer is no substitute for enthusiasm and commitment. What tilts the balance in favour or against a teacher is the element of sincerity, which in plain words means that he gets a sense of satisfaction, even joy, in imparting knowledge to students.

The next question to ask is what is the source of that joy. There is no rational explanation for it; it is like asking a parent why he or she is prepared to do so much for the child. Similarly, there is no rational explanation for the enthusiasm with which a sincere and well meaning teacher imparts knowledge to students. This enthusiasm is not a put on act. It is a part of his personality and his inner being. If he enjoys communicating with students and thrills at the prospect of others feeling enlightened, this is because there is something within him which enjoys the act of giving.

Not everyone is born with this kind of a special make-up. Some are born with it but the majority are not. What happens is that, in the course of their academic career, they have acquired intellectual mastery over a certain field of study. If their sense of enjoyment is limited to the act of intellectual mastery, they perhaps are well qualified for further study and research.

Their intellectual quest takes them into uncharted territory. They discover new facts, establish new connections, formulate new theories and, in certain cases change the intellectual landscape such people are to be looked up to and admired. They are essentially creative and their creativity takes that mode of expression

There is also another kind of person. He too enjoys the thrill of intellectual adventure. He too acquires a lot of knowledge, sometimes becomes creative also and puts forward new formulations and makes his own contribution to the widening and deepening of the boundaries of knowledge. In brief, he excels in research.

But, in addition to this quest, there is another urge within him. This is the compulsion to share his knowledge with others. Once he starts doing so, he finds that the act of sharing has its own pleasure and its own logic. Sooner or later therefore, he develops his own philosophy of teaching. It is this philosophy which in technical jargon is called the craft of teaching.

A craft by definition can be learned. As already stated, while a few are born teachers, the large majority train themselves to become teachers. In the process of becoming teachers, they learn the craft partly through example and partly through self-experimentation. In either case, before long, they do come to acquire the craft.

While the craft can be learnt, the appropriate kind of personality which makes a model teacher cannot be developed so easily. A teacher has to have what is called the temperament of a teacher. The essence of this temperament is sharing and giving.

In this semi-parental role, the teachers has to have all those qualities which parents have : unquestioned affection, the desire to help, the pleasure of watching the children grow and flower into the right kind of human beings, an uncommon degree of forbearance and patience and the ability to wait for results and a dozen other nameless things which cannot be

enumerated here. Almost each one of these attributes has to be acquired by the teacher. But he can acquire them to the extent that he already has that kind of personality which predisposes him towards sharing and giving.

One implication of what is said above is that it is not given to everyone to become a teacher. Everyone can become a parent and the vast majority do. But when it comes to taking on the role of a teacher, only a small number do so. Another way of saying the same thing would be that even amongst the ranks of the teachers some of them would be unavoidably misfits.

They are misfits because they do not possess the right kind of temperament though they have acquired all those other abilities which go under the rubric of the craft of teaching. In such cases, what they have acquired for themselves is like a foreign implantation on their personality. They are not made for sharing and giving and yet they are obliged to play that role. Not unoften, they fail to play the role successfully.

That is why we get the odd spectacle of a teacher sometimes being sarcastic in the classroom or behaving in a manner which tends to undermine the respect which a teacher must have for this student. As in the case of a parent, a child however small, has to be respected if the child's self-image has to acquire the right kind of focus and potency. Similarly, in the case of a student, a teacher must respect him. Unless he does that, the student will feel discouraged.

A teacher who discourages his students cannot be described as a teacher. A certain number of parents are guilty of the same thing. But then, as

already stated, the difference lies in this fact. Only a certain number of persons choose to become teachers whereas in the case of parenthood the phenomenon is much more extensive, if not universal.

To put it no more strongly, if someone does not have that combination of qualities which are in the nature of a prerequisite for being an effective teacher, the right thing for him to do is to choose another profession. To persist with teaching would amount to being in the wrong profession; hence such a person would be a misfit.

VII

At this stage, it may be helpful to pose one related question. What is that constitutes the hallmark of a successful teacher? Is it the ability to communicate? Is it extensive and well-integrated stock of knowledge which enables him to come across as a person who knows his subject and can guide his students in this quest for knowledge and skills? Or, is it his ability to inspire his students to keep up that quest and even pursue the trail further?

All these attributes must be found in a teacher who aspires to be effective in the classroom, or even outside. No one can hope to succeed unless he has these qualities in abundance and, no less important, in the right combination.

Some are more skilled in the art of communication than their colleagues. Others know their subject so thoroughly and with such a touch of unerring mastery that others envy them. Without having both these attributes in ample measure, it is not possible to inspire one's students. Indeed

a precondition for this particular attribute is that the teacher must be genuinely respected by his students. This cannot happen unless a teacher can put across what he knows (and he has to know a great deal) with a certain degree of compelling effectiveness. In other words, a teacher's job is not unidimensional. It is in every sense a multi-dimensional one.

How to assess the performance of such a teacher? Is there any precise way of doing so? When, and on what basis, do we say that a particular teacher is outstanding or something like that? There is no specific way in which this question can be answered. Whatever formula, mathematical or otherwise, is discussed, it would be unavoidably inadequate, if not imperfect.

There is one yardstick however which, if applied, is likely to take us near the mark. If there is anything in the theory that a teacher is a lamp lighting another lamp and teaching is not emptying the stock of knowledge contained in one vessel (the teacher) into another vessel which is yet to be filled up (the student), it should follow that once a student has been properly taught, and has imbibed whatever there was to learn, the student can do without the teacher. He does not need him any longer. Indeed he can do without him.

He can do without him for the simple reason that the teacher has taught him how to learn. The teacher too learnt this art either from his teacher or on his own. Whichever way he learnt it, he has now learnt to be self-sufficient, or more appropriately, self-reliant. What is important is self-reliance. To be able to stand on one's own feet, without the help or guidance

of anyone else, even one's teacher, goes to indicate that the student has 'arrived'. He does not need the teacher any more. Indeed he is now autonomous or independent -- if one may prefer to recall the more popular usage.

This is precisely what happens in the parental relationship. A baby is completely dependent upon the parents, more the mother than the father. With every day that passes, the child becomes less and less dependent and more and more self-sufficient. In the beginning, the baby had to be fed. A stage comes when the child fights for the rights to eat on his own. Any attempt to feed him is resisted by him.

The same process is to be observed in the case of his mental growth. At one stage the child could see things for himself but could not express his reactions. Once he begins to speak, things begin to change. When a child is admitted to school, a new chapter begins in his life. Over the years, he continues to learn from his teacher, his peers and, equally relevant, from his parents and others at home. To say that a child becomes autonomous and does not need his parents any longer in the strict sense of the word is something so obvious that it does not have to be elaborated.

This process of increasing autonomy continues for another 10-12 years by when he gets to college and then the university. By now, he is fairly well equipped with a considerable fund of knowledge. He has also learnt the art of reading and writing. Under the guidance of his teachers and others, he can do a whole variety of things most of which are based on the knowledge and skills which he has acquired with the passage of years. He still has to

learn somewhat more than what he already knows. In other words, he is approaching the stage of maturity or intellectual self-sufficiency, but is still some distance away from it. In academic terms it is only when he has completed the master's programme that he comes anywhere within the range of self-reliance.

It is when a student is asked to do research that he may be said to have been weaned, intellectually speaking, from those who had been feeding him all these years. Weaning is painful but it is an unavoidable stage if a child is to grow up. Similarly, if a student is to finally break with the intellectual tutelage of his teachers, he has to launch on his own; and that is precisely what the advent of the research stage in a student's career means.

To come back to the starting point. The supreme test of a teacher thus lies in instructing the student in such a manner that a stage comes when the student does not need him any longer. Whatever the teacher had to teach him has been internalized by the student to such an extent that the teacher has become surplus. In brief, the supreme success of a teacher should be to render himself surplus. To the extent that he can do it, he has succeeded in his task. Put another way, the litmus test of a good and creative teacher is to work himself out of his job.

This need not cause any disquiet. As soon as one student (or a batch of them) moves on, a fresh one (or a batch of them) moves in.

[Extracts from the author's forthcoming book, "The Craft of Teaching."]

★