

‘Let students take ownership of their decisions in life’

As an educator of nearly 40 years, one of my biggest regrets and laments is that children are often forced to study subjects that they are not interested in. This happens most often during stream selection in class II and sometimes even earlier when they are making language choices at the middle school level.

Mostly parents are at the helm of this enforced decision making for various reasons. One frequently cited reason by parents is that they didn't get a chance to study so-and-so subject when they were young. Hence, in a way, they want the child to accomplish those achievements that they couldn't. The other side to this tale is when parents force students to study the same subject that they did as they believe it to be the only right stream to study or the right career option to follow. Both these approaches are fundamentally flawed. I think it's high time we give students a voice so that they can express their opinions freely and make their own decisions. It's time to give them you know, what we call student individual agency and let them decide what they truly want and what works for them. It is important to acknowledge that today children are fairly mature and aware of what they want to do and what they do not want to do. They have already charted out the way of their lives in their minds. It's very important that all of us who are adults in their lives, whether it's parents or teachers to find a way to support their dreams. Of course, this doesn't mean that we support them in wrong acts or senseless decisions. But even in such a scenario, instead of chiding or scolding them, the way out is to hold a mature conversation and talk them out of it in a dignified way.

For example, one of my acquaintance's son wanted to be a singer. To be honest, he was a fairly average singer and his mother was upset that he wanted to take up something he didn't excel at. I asked her if he was aware of the fact. She wasn't quite sure so I warned her against being the villain in this conversation and instead suggested that he find avenues to perform at perhaps pubs or hotels, for a start. Once he was on a lookout for these opportunities, he realised he wasn't very good at it. In a way, by not opposing him immediately, his parent helped show him the mirror and allow him to develop self-awareness in a mature way. Instead of telling the child outright, don't do this or don't do that and music will get you nowhere, she had a conversation about how music could be a very serious hobby but not necessarily something he could pursue as a career.

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most important conversation, which is often missing in a child's life, is where their parent talks to him or her and make them understand where they're going and what they're doing and why they're doing what they're doing. While both being fully aware of the child's freedom to make their own choice.

I've found that children who are forced to do something that they are not interested in do not fare very well in those activities.

In terms of academics, you see everybody chasing a certain threshold of marks which in turn leads to pressure on the students. As an educator, I feel bad that schools and curriculum is blamed for that pressure whereas it is emanating from a totally different source. And nobody talks about that.

Talking to students and knowing what is going on in their minds is very important. At home, conversations are important so that parents know what's brewing in the child's mind. The same is necessary in the school. Similarly, counselling is also important so that the child knows the many path s/he can take to fulfil their dreams. And after all this, leave it on the child to choose for themselves and just let them be. Sometimes we do not realise this but sheer lack of knowledge and presence of prejudices among parents really holds children back without parents realising that I've seen children who have chosen very unusual subjects and done exceedingly well. And to my joy, parents then give the credit to schools and to teachers admitting that they weren't even aware of the said stream/combination which allowed their child to enjoy learning and experience success.

Things will only change for better if students are allowed to do what they really want to do. And that can only happen with more open conversations at home. If you allow a child to do what they want to do, I think it works better for everyone in the long run. The key players here are the parents and things can improve only if they decide to keep aside their prejudices and offer their child a patient hearing. Offering students a safe space and an open platform to share their concerns or aspirations can be a game-

changer in building their self-image and self-awareness. As adults, our main task is to not live their lives or ask them to live on our behalf by forcing our decisions, but to empower them with the right tools and knowledge that they can use to think and plan for themselves.

At the end of the day, we all have their best interests at heart.

