When I first started as a teacher in Dhaka University some thirty five years ago, we, that is, teachers and students alike, were blissfully several years away from the age of information superhighway. Now we are in the age of information technology, and the students I teach are more at ease with the multifarious attendant paraphernalia of that age. Many were born into the age; others were toddlers before they were caught up in the inevitable; they are the children of the internet phenomenon, and almost certainly the harbingers of more cutting edge technologies to come. Therefore, predictably, their method and tools of learning are, in many critical aspects, different from the students I taught in Dhaka University, and, also expectedly, not always for the better. My students from the earlier years perforce had to read those objects called books, even if, on occasions, they were of the notebook variety, write in longhand, and, on the rare occasions, use that relic known as the typewriter.

And so did the teachers (although, I hasten to add, they would surely be indignant at the thought of using Cliff's or anyone else's notebooks). These days the students surf the internet to get a big chunk of information, use the computer to carry out a good deal of academic-related activities, and much else besides. So do the teachers (although, I hasten to add that they also supplement their academic pursuit with a heavy dose of book and journal reading). But the current group is the product of the times they live in and have to be accepted as such. Their numbers are much greater, they study a far greater number of subject matters, and live a more complicated life than their predecessors in, say, Dhaka University when I was a student, or, later, a teacher. In fact, at IUB, a private institution, we have at least as large a student body than when I was a student at my alma mater, the venerable public institution that is Dhaka University.

I can live with those changes; sometimes I wish I was an undergraduate in this exciting, if hectic, internet age. However, when it comes to the matter of teacher-student interface, the French proverb mentioned at the outset predominates my way of thinking, both as an ongoing exercise and as a standard for the future. Maybe that should be the eternal truth --- of what is essentially a continuum over a millennium and more, and then beyond --- but it would be wiser not to look too far into the future, because the French aphorism might someday be shoved aside in the face of the realities of the time.

The basic precepts/conventions of that relationship should remain fundamentally unchanged: the teacher a mentor and guide, the pupil a willing learner; the teacher regarding the student as a young mind to be molded towards achieving the best s/he can achieve, rather than nasty pests to be tolerated under considerable strain, the student to pick the teacher's brain to gain as much knowledge as possible, rather than an ogre who has to be endured with clenched teeth for a few years; and both having to recognize a fine line in their interaction that neither should be crossing. Although it is probably an over-hyped maxim, the teacher is as good a role model as any. But s/he will have to earn that onerous accolade, and, the hard truth is, that not many do. So many factors will conspire to ensure that outcome. However, the aim of an educator should be to earn that status. And the emphasis has to be on the word "earn", as with respect. In fact, respect will be a fundamental accompaniment of the term "role model".

Respect is an age-old attribute in teacher-student interface. The teacher is expected to be respected by the student. Obviously, it does not always happen, but respect should be the starting point of an ideal teacher-student interaction. We showed it to our teachers, and, even though I have been divorced from teaching at a public university for long, several of my former colleagues and other teachers assure me that, even in these rather turbulent times in the premier educational institutions of this country, they receive proper respect from their students at Dhaka University. That is good to know. A heartening case of plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose! I have found the same thing at IUB. That is also good to know. May this trend continue!

Obviously, in the high pressure age of information technology, students face a different set of problems from the days when I was a student or teacher at Dhaka University. From my experience at IUB, they sometimes appear vulnerable, fragile; maybe these factors manifest themselves in the public university students, although, I suspect, to a lesser degree. They need more empathy from their teachers to help them tide over their difficulties. These are young minds that need to be guided to successfully face the high pressure world they are a part of, and which is going to get more complex, furious-paced, and geared towards cutthroat competition in the job market. In other words, the present-day teachers have an onerous task on their hands. But, to a lesser degree, the teacher's role has, from time immemorial, been just that --- molding and guiding a young mind, to prepare him/her for facing up to the challenges of the post-academic life. That has not changed, as the world undergoes periodic changes down the ages.

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