

Listen to them.....

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Speech at the Institute of Music Speech & Speaking skills
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Managing Director of the Institute of Music Speech & Speaking Skills, teachers of the institute, parents, students, and friends,

First of all I would like to thank the Institute and specially Mr. Hasitha Pathirana for inviting me to this wonderful ceremony. It is a great pleasure for me to be here today as the chief guest to witness our young generation being honoured. Further thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

We are a nation that do not value or listen to kids. And we are still blind to see the subtleties and sensitivities of our kids and young adults. Therefore we are always in conflict with them and we don't hear what they think and say.

As adults and matured people we have lost our connections with our kids. We don't know what they imagine; we don't want to hear what they hear. We don't want to see what they see. So, we are also in a pathetic situation where we are being alienated from our kids. We have not been able to see the colours of what our kids see in this world. We are unable to hear the flap of a butterfly, cry of a cricket, dripping of a water drop. Why, because we are adults. We have lost our sensitivities towards the nature. Why, because, we have become so called civilised human adults.

We do think that providing food, shelter and education would fulfil their needs. Because we are adults and rational beings, we believe that providing these things would fulfil our kids' appetite of knowing the world. But unfortunately this is not what they really want. I am not going to say that they don't need food, shelter and protection. But what I say is above all

they need to be listened. We are feeding them with varieties of food that they cannot cope with. They become greedy and discontent. We try to provide the best shelter we can afford. They become fragile and vulnerable to Mother Nature, mist, rain, dust and wind. We even try to protect them with our utmost attention as they even cannot cross the road without our support. So we are being so attentive about our kind that they are becoming more and more prone to danger and uncertainties.

In our education system, this is what's been happening over the past few decades. We have not been able to understand what our future generation would like to be. As a country, we haven't even spent our time to rethink about how our education should be revised and devised according to what our kids like to learn. What we have been doing is what we want them to learn. I believe that this is not learning. We have to rethink about the ways that we think about learning and teaching. As an educator, I must say that the old word "teaching" has not its role in the learning process today. The word teaching is not a very fashionable term in education anymore. What the world thinks about today is what the learner wants to learn and how this learning process can be facilitated.

Do not think that our kids are blank slates or sponges. You cannot write what you want on them or they do not absorb what you want, like a sponge. Do not confront with them and order them to learn. This is not teaching. First of all as educators what we want to do is to stand with them side by side. This is the first step that we need to do and think about. Don't command them to learn; because as human beings, they already know the world and are continuing to learn about the world. Did you teach them to breathe when they first came out in this world from the womb? Did you teach how to open their eyes to see the mother's face? Did you teach them how to cry and ask for mother's breast? Did you really teach how to stand on their feet when they first tried to get up on their own? No, no one taught me how to cry, how to see, how to hear. We all learnt all these primal but essential things in the Mother Nature's 'school. No one taught me how to cry but when I first went to school, my teachers taught me not to cry. They taught me how to compete with my peers. They taught me how to suppress others and become the supreme. Yet finally my eyes are dry, I want to cry but tears do not come. I want to find friends, partners and likeminded people. But they are away from me.

Learning and teaching are two different things. Believe me, our kids are already human beings and they learn things every second of their being in this world. They understand and perceive the world sometimes better than us. We are of the view that they start learning when they go to school. If not they cannot learn. This is the myth that we have been nurturing for decades. We want school to mould our kids to become civilised human beings like us. We spend money and time to sculpt our kids to be machines like cyborgs. These cyborgs can do things, they have certain habituated skills but cannot think like humans or do not have organic relationships with the environment. I have heard many times that teachers claim that kids are being distracted. Of course, kids are being distracted because they have more subtle senses to see and feel the world than us. They are more attentive and sensitive than us that they hear many things, see unseens, and can touch untouched. So they get distracted which is natural and human. They get distracted because that is their natural instinct in action. Without this instinct how can they survive in this world?

If you truly observe your kids, you will begin to understand how they perceive the world. Their ways of understanding and knowing the world is different from us. They move in the world through dance, they love music, and they love to talk with the world through singing, they love to yell, and they love to play with the nature where they first germinate as an atom. In these ways they converse with the world. They even think about the universe, stars and other planets. They dive in the deep ocean and see hidden trenches and meet unknown creatures. They imagine unbelievable and create unimaginable that we would not imagine. Yet if you really want to know them, first stand with them and listen to them. Then they will tell you what they know and how they know the world. Not only that, they will tell you how to go back to their world of wonder where you could swim like a fish in the deep water or fly like a swallow over the mount Everest. If you further get close to them they will tell you stories in which animals start talking and they will show you how to climb up to heaven along the bean stork. Till then please....listen to them.....

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