

Developing the Adversity Quotient of our students

Problems associated with students as reported by teachers in the 60s and 70s were mundane like making noise in the class, homework not done, singing filmy songs, dress code violations, imitating film stars etc. But in the last decade, our country has witnessed student related problems such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, suicides, rapes, depression, assaults, dropping out of school etc. Students of every age group face diverse adversities unique with respect to time, age and culture. This struggle against adversities persists even after academic life into the adult life.

Why do some students –given equivalent capabilities and opportunities – overcome adversity and soar to new heights, while others just give up? Adversity refers to a given situation which causes a student stress, conflict, challenges, academic difficulties, misfortune during their academic life. According to Dr. Paul Stoltz, the Adversity Quotient (AQ) is the science of human resilience. Stoltz equates life's journey to mountain climbing and that people are born with a core human drive to 'ascend', which means moving toward one's purpose and goals. AQ is the underlying factor that determines one's ability to ascend. Students who successfully apply AQ perform optimally in the face of adversity – the challenges, that confront them each day. In fact, they not only learn to cope with these challenges, but they also respond to them better and faster. Adversity Quotient has four sub-sections or dimensions: C, O2, R, and E. C (control) refers to the amount of perceived control one has over and adverse event or situation. O2 (origin and ownership) refer to how a person searches for the cause of the adverse events and to the degree to which an individual is willing to own the outcome of the adverse action. Owning the outcome reflects accountability. R (reach) is a manifestation of how far the adversity reaches into other aspect of an individual's life. Lastly, E (endurance) is the measure of endurance, which reviews how long the adversity and its causes will last in one's own life.

Our education system and academic institutions would require some years to change for better. Can we educationists at least start to work with our students and help them maximise their adversity quotient? Here are a few suggestions that could be successfully initiated to up the adversity quotients of our students.

- Personality development in terms of 'self-worth': Since students spend a significant portion of their lives, being evaluated in the school classrooms, their self-worth depends upon their perception of self in the academic environment which is a function of his/her academic ability as well as the students assessment of how others in the environment perceive his/her academic behaviour. Continuous assessment through multiple avenues (cognitive and affective domains) should build a student's 'academic self-worth'. Once the academic self-concept is strengthened, the student will feel encouraged to view life's challenging situations, not with hopelessness but as an opportunity to learn and excel.
- Most students have an internal locus of control. How they feel depends on events (exams) and people (teachers/peers) they can't control. Feeling good depends on those events and people changing for the better. But this may not always be possible. They

end up feeling worse which in turn can give reason to smoking, drinking, using drugs, overeating, and deviant anti-social behaviour. We should help them make a shift to 'internal locus of control'. It involves realising that they don't have control over certain events and people and accepting them gracefully. More importantly, it involves focusing on and working with what they have control over and coming out a winner.

- Students should be made aware that each adversity that they face has certain outcomes. These outcomes depend on the three possible responses to adversity: to become broken, to become bitter or to become better. Their cognitive choices and responses can be very empowering. There is also a need to condition them, to see beyond difficulties, and essential skill for maintaining hope. This would help them feel responsible and accountable for their own well-being.
- Students thrive in diversity and achieve competence in the presence of certain protective or stress-resistant factors and within a supportive environment. Therefore there is need to build these supportive pockets in every academic institution, through partnerships with counsellors, teachers, parents and educational leadership.
- The world is rich with men, women, and children who, with strength, courage, grace, humour, resolve and hard work, rise above their circumstance of adversity. We see these modern-day heroes all around. The academic institutions should institutionalise a platform where regular interactions with such unsung heroes, inspiring movies and discussions are a part of the regular academic learning.
- The students should be involved in meaningful community development projects. This would help them value what they have also learn through their experiences.

To conclude, developing mental and emotional fitness along with the skills to overcome adversity is the simplest, cheapest and most effective way to address some important issues in the lives of our students, teachers, and families and also enhance valued relationships in our society as a whole.