

# Students, teachers have shared responsibilities

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It is that time of the year when students and teachers are busy with school reopening and the many chores that come with it. Students are recovering from their comfort zone of waking up late and enjoying days of no studies during the school holidays. Teachers, on the other hand, have been busy with school meetings and issues that need to be attended to. One important agenda is preparing the yearly plan for subjects, as most textbooks in early primary and secondary stages are new books, following the new curriculum. On the first day of school, there is always much anxiety yet excitement on the part of students. They are all bursting with new ideas for the new year. But, do teachers and students discuss what is in store for them, their expectations and how they can make another teaching and learning year meaningful? One of my effective tools is to spend the first, or even the second, day of teaching listening to what students expect in the coming weeks. Teachers can share their vision, mission or outcome that they expect from their students. Through this two-way session, there is mutual respect and teachers allow students' voices to be heard. In my three decades of teaching, this simple yet meaningful method has yielded positive results as far as students' motivation is concerned. Because students are given priority and have a say on what they expect out of each subject, they feel empowered and take responsibility for their learning. Teachers, too, have their say in explaining what is expected of them and how they are going to explore the subject to be taught. If every teacher spends some time in their classes talking to students, the teaching and learning process will become interactive and meaningful. Students come to school with expectations and teachers should tap into their potential. In some Western schools that I have visited, there is a working agreement between students and teachers that is formal, agreed upon and signed by both parties. Some even put up the agreement in the classroom. Consequently, they review and negotiate if the statements in the agreement are too rigid. Most importantly, students have the shared responsibility to ensure that the learning and teaching process is theirs to share and teachers do not teach in an autocratic manner. I encourage teachers to think creatively and construct a working agreement with their students to ensure that every student has a say in his or her learning journey. It takes a little psychology and soft skills on the teacher's part but the effects of such an agreement will last the whole year. Once students see the meaning of school beyond books and grades, they will be attracted to the inner experiences and yearn for more. It is time to provide that space and empower our students.

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