

What do we mean by teacher-quality in the school-context?

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Abstract: The school going students in modern times inhabit a borderless world that offers them a limitless connection, data and mobility for gaining information. The teacher quality in India visibly declined when the teachers stumbled to handle this complex development in the last part of 20th and the first part of 21st century. A number of curricular reforms were introduced to address this issue. Present paper discusses some of the underlying factors which led to this crisis, the nature and objective of such sweeping reforms and the reflections of the investigator on why all the stakeholders, including the trainee teachers need to build up the much required 'disposition' to make a success of all the efforts that have gone into the whole exercise.

Key-words- dispositions, teacher quality, trainee- teachers, stakeholders

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I. INTRODUCTION

The last part of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century have seen dramatic changes brought about by globalization, changing socio- political contexts, multi-culturalism, equity based education, to name a few issues, not only in India but the world over. In India it was also marked by burgeoning number of schools and short supply of trained teachers. Even the trained teachers appeared to be faltering in tackling their tasks in an effective way. In the area of research, the 21st century has seen an explosion of interest in and attention to pre-service teacher dispositions [1]. It was this attribute of 'disposition' which was found to be lacking in the practicing as well as the prospective teachers in India which affected the general teacher quality in the period mentioned above.

The term 'disposition' can be understood as attitudes and beliefs manifested in behaviour of the practitioners. A common definition of dispositions does not exist. Still the various descriptions and definitions associated with the concept of dispositions reflect a common emphasis on the values and beliefs made actual by a practitioner as they frame the practitioners approach or actions or both to the teaching and learning context. More poetically expressed, they are the "habits of heart and mind" the practitioner or aspiring practitioner brings to the formal teaching and learning environment (Rose & Terndrup, 2007)

II. DECLINE IN TEACHER QUALITY

The teacher quality was affected due to other reasons as well. There were various factors associated with the existing structure and provisions of teacher education programmes in India. Various committees and reports found a long list of drawbacks in the Teacher Education Curriculum and the manner in which it was transacted in the Teacher Education Institutions. To name some specifically mentioned subjects:[7] [8][9]

- The faulty method of selection of the students for Teachers' Training Courses,
- Short duration of teacher- training programs,
- Narrow and rigid curriculum,
- Superficial practice- teaching,
- Problem of supervision of practice- teaching,
- Insufficient content of the teaching subject's knowledge,
- Old methods of teaching by teachers' trainers,
- Segregation of teacher education department, ,
- Deficient facilities for pupil-teacher,
- Lack of regulations in demand and supply,
- Lack of facilities for professional development,
- Insufficient financial grants,
- Narrow scope of teacher education,
- Lack of culture-specific pedagogy, etc.

Actually, apart from these major issues, the incompetency of pupil teachers and their poor academic background were found to be two great hurdles in the field of teachers training programmes. An urgent need was felt to bring greater convergence between professional preparation and continuous professional development of teachers at all stages of schooling in terms of levels, duration and structure. The requirement for capacity building of teachers was deemed to be an immediate task in view of the fact that the school going students in modern times inhabit a borderless world that offers them a limitless connection, data and mobility for gaining information.

A number of efforts have been made in the area of curricular reforms in recent times to address various problems in the way of teacher education in India. The question that arises here is whether the curricular reforms have indeed been successful in improving the 'quality' of the teachers? Or whether indeed the curricular reform in itself *can* really achieve the much needed quotient of 'quality' in the teachers?

III. WHAT IS MEANT BY TEACHER QUALITY?

That the teacher quality is crucial for the success of the education system has been globally accepted. The Education Commission (1964-66) of India accepted this influence of teachers in powerful words, "No system can rise above the status of its teacher..." [5] Research on educational productivity emphasises the quality of teaching as one of the major factors influencing optimal student achievement (Hattie, 2009; Marzano, 2003; Walberg, 2006). But what exactly do we mean by 'quality'? Is it the primary goal of any teacher education programme in India? Actually, much discussion has occurred at the global platform around what is the fundamental goal of teacher education; whether to prepare teachers as autonomous professionals who can adapt the curriculum to the diverse needs of students, guided by a strong moral compass; or should this programme focus on equipping teachers with technical expertise to enable them to effectively manage the curriculum and the classrooms differentiating across ability levels, or whether teaching can be considered a craft that evolves through apprenticeship and on- the-job experience.[2]

In the knowledge society, expectations of teachers are very high. The list of qualities that the teachers are expected to have as per the global research data is too daunting. It is expected that they will have competencies for developing optimal learning environments for students and for promoting key competencies in students that will enable them to be successful in the rapidly changing society in the 21 century. It has been suggested that the key competencies are: [3]

- the ability to work in heterogeneous groups in different contexts and situations,
- the ability to be autonomous in life and work Regarding planning and decision making,
- And the Ability to use symbolic systems such as language, mathematics and ICT (Rychen & Salganick, 2001, 2003).

In Order to fulfil these expectations and develop optimal learning environments for students, teachers have to develop complex instructional, classroom management, communication and assessment competencies so as to facilitate students' cognitive, affective and social processes. According to Shulman (1987) a teacher should possess subject content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, and the knowledge of educational contexts and goals; and should be able to use this knowledge creatively to deal with ever changing classroom situations.

Another factor that is ultimately valid as an indicator of a successful teacher, over and above all such discussions, is his or her global competence. Emergence of global businesses today has brought into existence a workforce which is also global in nature. Communications within such a company often occur across many countries and cultures on a daily basis. Even small business owners need talents that can help them handle the cultural and linguistic differences when they enter the global economy. Even for general people, international mobility has increased. Therefore the communities everywhere are becoming increasingly diverse both culturally and racially. The ability to interact effectively with people who speak different languages, believe in different religions, and hold different values has become essential for all workers. The required set of skills and knowledge for all the professionals in current times can be understood as "global competence." [4]

IV. RESPONSIBILITY OF TEIs

Globally, the need for a well planned and effectively executed programme of teacher preparation is considered essential before the teacher is launched in the schools and is given the chance to shape up the children's life throughout his/her professional career. [6]. The TEIs (Teacher Education Institutions), as important stakeholders [7] must carry out their share of responsibilities. The curricular reforms are intended for enabling the TEIs to provide for a suitable system of training for the trainee teachers so that they can learn the required skills in keeping with the changing social, political, economic and intellectual environments. The teacher educators and the curriculum- both need to emphatically groom student teachers to not to adjust to a system in which education is seen as transmission of information. They must not take the school curriculum and textbooks as 'given' and train teachers to adjust to the needs of the existing school system through fastidious

planning of lessons in standardized formats and fulfilling the ritual of delivering the required number of lessons. [10]

Thus the term ‘teacher quality’ in modern Indian context refers to the range of skills required to address the needs of twenty first century learners as well as the appropriate and vast subject knowledge. However, what we actually need to understand is that teaching is fundamentally about imparting knowledge to students and shaping the young mind in a constructive, progressive and humane way. What is often less talked about in the academic circles and rarely mentioned in the research articles is the need to inculcate in the student teachers the noble attitude towards the teaching profession, and the fact that it can be imparted in the student teachers only by setting a good example by the teacher trainers.

V. THE NOBLE PROFESSION OF TEACHING: TRANSMISSION OF VALUE

Teaching is a profession and teacher education is a process of professional preparation of teachers. Preparing one for a profession is a strenuous task involving action from multiple fronts and perspectives. ‘A profession is characterized by a sufficiently long period of academic training, an organized body of knowledge on which the undertaking is based, an appropriate duration of formal and rigorous professional training in tandem with practical experience in the field and a code of professional ethics that binds its members into a fraternity.’ [11]

These dimensions acquire critical importance in view of several factors. There is, first of all, the traditional idealism, the esteem and importance attached to the role of the school teachers and very high societal expectations from them. The development of a sound value system in keeping with the ideals of our Indian philosophers is very much contextual in modern times. The teachers are concerned, in an important way, with the total development of human beings – physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral and spiritual; and it should be in sync with the cultural ethos of the Indian society. While the dimensions of teaching other than the informational and cognitive may have suffered neglect in modern times due to a variety of factors, one cannot deny that they constitute an integral part of the teachers’ role and functions. The implication of this is to give due emphasis to developing reflective teachers with positive attitudes, values and perspective, along with skills for the craft of teaching.

VI. RESPONSIBILITY OF TRAINEE- TEACHERS

But this task cannot be achieved if the trainee- teachers remain passive learners, expecting to be spoon fed at every step. Their attitude towards learning has to be proactive if any positive outcome is to be achieved. The pupil teachers need to recognise and appreciate the nobility of the profession of teaching and the higher order objectives involved with it. Effective communication and use of technology have to be a priority for them and they must learn to blend their pedagogy with the ways and methods familiar to the children, while adding value to every subject that they teach. In a nutshell, the trainee teachers need to develop the right dispositions in them; this would only lead to a qualitative improvement in the process of teaching and learning.

VII. CONCLUSION

The quality of teachers in school context needs to improve by working upon the subject knowledge, the teaching skills, incorporation of strategies to increase the degree of learning, and the global competence. But improving the right disposition and developing a value oriented attitude in keeping with our cultural ethos is also crucial. And that all the stakeholders in this endeavour- the teacher, the learner, the parents, the community and the society as well as the service provider agencies and the policy makers- have to give it a patient, humane and practical consideration, is imperative.

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