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***NEW VISTAS IN ELT: EMPOWERING ENGINEERS FOR
EMPLOYMENT***

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**Being a Professional Teacher by Adopting a Reflective Approach
in the Classroom**

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Abstract

There has been considerable pressure on the higher education system in India in terms of its' performance. The pressure arises out of a certain compulsion for substantial improvement in the education sector. There are hiccups and hindrances in the efforts channelized in this direction because of a lack of a professional attitude, chiefly among many teachers. This is further aggravated by an absence of an agreed model to enhance quality in

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education. Whatever it is, the focus eventually shifts to the teacher who is indispensable in any academic sphere. Teachers need to manage their own professional development and attitudes which will eventually percolate and will contribute to the body of knowledge and to the reputation of the institution they work with. In order to become a professional teacher and to teach professionally, a Reflective Approach to the curriculum and the pedagogy seems viable on many fronts. The Reflective Approach derives its values from the fact that it is based on how professionals develop professionalism and is therefore, 'grounded on a broad base of professional knowledge and experience' (Wallace 1991:165). Mainstream to professional development is the process of reflecting on one's own practice in the classroom. This involves not only collecting data about one's practice but also reflecting critically on the findings and using the data for professional development. This will mean teachers observing their own classroom practices, collecting data and using the same as a basis for self-evaluation and professional growth. This achieved with the right intention, will ensure the higher education system a definite facelift. The paper intends to look at the Reflective Approach as a means to ensure professionalism among teachers which will in turn ensure quality in higher education in India.

Keywords: Quality education, Reflective Approach, Professional Development, Teachers' Self-evaluation.

Introduction

India has the world's third largest higher education system. This is next to the United States and China. The era post-independence has witnessed remarkable growth in the existing education system in India. However, unfortunately, many pressing issues weigh the system down presently. A close inspection and interrogation into the quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation becomes very significant and important. These issues are important for the country, as it is now engaged in the use of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based information society of the 21st Century.

In an environment of global competitiveness it is important that Indian students of the higher education institutions are as competent as graduates of any other country, not only in their scholastic attainments, but also in terms of rich value systems and personalities. Unless

the quality and the standard of Indian higher education institutions is enhanced zealously and sustained at a high level through innovation, creativity and regular monitoring, it seems to be difficult for the Indian academics/professionals to compete in the world scene. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that quality be paid a very close attention to from every dimension of the higher education sphere.

Quality has two chief connotations, namely an absolute connotation and a relative connotation. The idea of absolute quality propels the morale of any higher education system at the level of the institution. This also happens at the level of the learners. The dynamics for teacher preparation and the sustaining quality in teacher input, like: Designing innovative Curriculum, Developing productive Curriculum, Innovative Curricular practices, foregrounding pedagogic principles, Evaluating learners' performance and progress, Evaluating the curriculum, and, Quality management practices become crucial. In this context, Reflective Teaching becomes necessary, important and unavoidable.

What is Reflective Teaching?

The understanding of Reflective Teaching is to understand that teaching is not only a complicated activity alone but an activity that should be dealt with great skill. It definitely requires the teacher or the facilitator to decide what needs to be done in any given scenario and how best it can be done so that maximum learning takes place among students. Therefore, it requires the teacher to be immensely resourceful, creative, dynamic and tactful in order to take charge of the learning situation and to be able to call the shots on actions to be adopted in the classroom. In order that students learn well, they must be exposed to and granted well informed input from the part of the teacher. Therefore, for students to learn well high-quality teaching must be imparted. The foundation of Reflective Teaching is dependent on the existence of such professional expertise. Reflective teaching should be immensely satisfying and fulfilling for every teacher practicing it. The purpose of Reflective Teaching is to enhance the quality of education being imparted.

Reflective teaching means looking at what a teacher does in the classroom. She/he thinks about why it must be done and to what effect, if it works - a process of self-observation and self-evaluation automatically takes place. By collecting information about what goes on in one's classroom, and by analyzing and evaluating this information, the

teacher may identify and explore his/her own practices and underlying beliefs. This may then lead to changes and improvements in teaching.

Beginning the process of reflection can be done in the following ways:

1. **Teachers' diary or journal:** One of the key elements of a teacher's pedagogical practice must be keeping a diary or a journal exclusively for teaching and this must be maintained on a daily basis of not on an hourly basis. Even an online journal will be effective. This will facilitate as a space to generate teaching ideas, to work out pedagogical problems, to reflect on successes and struggles in the classroom, and to put reflections which may be useful in the future while planning. The diary or journal becomes a record for all that has been done. It will also reflect how effectively a particular pedagogy was used in a class and how effectively the lesson was taught. It also becomes a pool of resources from which strategies and pedagogic practices may be adopted from for future use. This diary or journal is written as soon as possible after each class session. It keeps what happened during that class fresh in the teacher's mind. It may be composed of a summary of the class and the strategies adopted and how effective it was or the results yielded. It provides time to reflect on and evaluate how the lesson progressed. It must be kept with the teacher all the time so that at the spur of the moment ideas can be jotted down. It can also be used during class sessions—for example, to write down smart things students say. This may also be done by jotting down some questions asked by the students, or some points discussed while taking classes in the margin of the book. It may later be transferred to the journal as an entry.

A teacher can only but improve the quality of classroom input by constantly reflecting on and writing about what transpires in the classroom trying to figure out what works, what doesn't, and so on. It can become a key to a teacher's success. Consistent practice and honest reflection can create a rewarding and useful document that will help the teacher for the rest of his/her teaching career. For example:

- a) If a lesson went well it can be described and the teacher can write why it was successful.

- b) If a lesson was not very successful, it can also be described and the teacher can write why it was not successful
 - c) If the students didn't understand a point introduced, teachers need to think about what was done and why it may have been unclear.
 - d) The teacher can also reflect upon the kinds of interpretations given by students s/he may even list out the academic inputs and contributions made by the students in the teaching-learning process
- c) the teacher can also introspect about the behavior of the students. What caused attention or took away attention. If students are misbehaving - what were they doing, when and why?
- 2. Peer Observation:** Inviting a colleague to observe an hour or two of one's classes will help in collecting information about one's style of teaching. This may be done in a simple manner by merely observing and/or through note taking. This may help one trace back to the area identified to reflect upon. For example, a teacher may ask his teacher peer observer to focus on which students contribute most during the lesson, what different patterns of interaction occur, or how the teacher being observed deals with questions raised by the learners.
- 3. Recording Lessons:** Video or audio recordings of lessons can provide very useful information for reflection. A teacher may do things in class that she/he is not aware of. It may also happen that teachers may overlook what may be happening in the class which she/he normally does not see.
- a) Audio recordings can be useful for considering aspects of teacher talk:
 - How much does one talk?
 - What about?
 - Are instructions and explanations clear?
 - How much time does one allocate to student talk?
 - How does one respond to student talk?

- d) Video recordings can be useful in showing the teacher aspects of his/her own Behavior:
- a. Where does one stand?
 - b. Who does one speak to most part of the time?
 - c. How does one come across to the students?
 - d. How effectively teaching aids were used?
 - e. How effectively was eye contact being made with the students?
 - f. What kind of body language was used in the classroom?
 - g. What were the different kinds of gestures made in the classroom?
 - h. What were the teacher's movements in the classroom?

4. Student feedback: The stakeholders themselves may be asked about what they think about what goes on in the classroom at regular intervals. Their opinions and perceptions can add a different and valuable perspective. This can be done by asking them to write down anonymous notes about the teacher, teaching methods, suggestions and improvements. It may also be done with a simple questionnaire.

Once a teacher has some information recorded about what goes on in the classroom, the teacher can actually reflect and think:

- Think about patterns adopted:** the teacher may have noticed patterns occurring in his/her teaching through the observation. The teacher may also have noticed things that she/he was previously unaware of. A teacher may have been surprised by some of the students' feedback. All of this together may already give the teacher some ideas for changes to implement.
- Talking about ideas:** Just by talking about what one has discovered - to a supportive colleague or even a friend - one may be able to come up with some ideas for how things can be done differently. Discussion can be based around scenarios from the teachers' own classes.

- **Beliefs on teaching:** Teachers may want to use a list of statements about teaching beliefs. They can discuss which ones they agree or disagree with, and which ones are reflected in their own teaching, giving evidence from observing themselves.
- **Reading for academic ideas and input:** The teacher may decide that she/he needs to find out more about a certain area. There is plenty of information available to teachers from where they can find useful teaching ideas, or more academic articles.
- **Questioning and Inquiring:** Teachers must have the humility to learn always. The best way for teachers to learn will be to learn from and about the experiences from other fellow teachers. An online forum will prove beneficial enough. This will enable teachers get ideas from other teachers in order to be better informed.

Conclusion

Reflective teaching is an ongoing process, because once one starts to implement changes, then the reflective and evaluative cycle begins again. As a result of one's reflection, one may decide to do something in a different way, or one may just decide that what one is doing is the best way. And that is what professional development is all about.

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