

Between Schooling and Education, Learning ‘Matters’

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ABSTRACT

Importance of Education has always been accepted by one and all. Developmental graph of mankind, over the years, presents a testimony to the multi dimensional efforts of one and all in understanding the nature of education and devising ways and means to carry forward the process of education with an objective of equipping young ones with skill to lead happy life and contribute towards the welfare of society. Massive efforts have been invested, both public and private, in financing and managing the education systems to build up a human capital that reflects itself in shared prosperity. However, one is confronted with a paradoxical situation with impressive levels of industrial and technological progress, successful space missions and large mass of illiterate population living below poverty line representing two ends of the spectrum in India. Global acknowledgement and recognition of IITs, IIMs and other institutes of higher learning is a well deserved pride for India but existence of a multitude of ill equipped and impoverished primary schools is a reality too. World Development Report-2018 mentions that ‘In rural India, just under three-quarters of students in grade 3 could not solve a two-digit subtraction such as $46 - 17$, and by grade 5 half could still not do so’ and emphasizes that schooling is not the same as learning. This paper attempts to put in perspective efforts geared towards schooling, available evidence to highlight the role of teacher and propose measures to act on the evidence in order to bridge the gap between schooling and learning.

Keywords: Schooling, Effective Teacher, Experiential Learning, Collaboration.

Importance of Education has always been accepted by one and all. Developmental graph of mankind, over the years, presents a testimony to the multi dimensional efforts of one and all in understanding the nature of education and devising ways and means to carry forward the process of education with an objective of equipping young ones with skill to lead happy life and contribute towards the welfare of society. Indian philosophy advocates the nurturing of inner abilities human beings to live; to help others live and to provide what one can for the future generations. Guided by this thought a massive effort has been invested, both public and private, in financing and managing the education systems to build up a human capital that reflects itself in shared prosperity. It would not be out of place to assume that diligent efforts of the policy planners and executors over the years, would present us with a thriving society. A society that is

inhabited by young adults loaded with life skills and working for shared prosperity. In reality, however, one is confronted with a paradoxical situation. Impressive levels of industrial and technological progress, successful space missions and large mass of illiterate population living below poverty line represent two end of the spectrum in India. Global acknowledgement and recognition of IITs, IIMs and other institutes of higher learning is a well deserved pride for India but existence of a multitude of ill equipped and impoverished primary schools is a reality too.

World Development Report-2018 mentions that ‘In rural India, just under three-quarters of students in grade 3 could not solve a two-digit subtraction such as $46 - 17$, and by grade 5 half could still not do so’ and emphasizes that schooling is not the same as learning. National Policy on Education (NEP 2016), being formulated after three decades, ‘recognizes the

criticality of education as the most important vehicle for social, economical and political transformation and suggests encompassing four essential components i.e. building values; awareness, knowledge and skills. Further, articulating the need for national commitment draft of NPE states 'it is the duty of Central and State governments to provide necessary resources and create conditions that are favourable for the process of teaching and learning to flourish'.

Schooling: Access

The World Declaration on 'Education for All' , article 5 states that primary education must be universal to ensure that the basic needs of all the children are met. Basic learning needs are defined in terms of essential learning tools and basic learning content that people require in order to survive, to live and work with dignity, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning.(UNESCO 1996). Concerted efforts are being made in this direction by our government through implementation of programmes like UEE, SSA and more recently the RTE Act. Private participation (for profit & not for profit) too has been encouraged in establishing educational institutions to enlarge the reach of education to more and more individuals, not only at school level but also at higher education level, catering to traditional, professional and technical courses. However optimal benefits expected out of efforts aimed at making education available to individuals are not so encouraging. Variety of context specific reasons could be attributed for such a scenario. One, of the many possible, reasons could be that whenever a new school or college is opened or existing one is upgraded much of the energy and efforts is devoted to physical infrastructure like building, furniture etc and very little to human resource, the educators, who is potentially responsible for translating the benefits of physical resource.

Past few years have seen an unprecedented increase in the number of schools and colleges, not necessarily based on the principle of demand and supply. Concentration of many educational institutes offering similar courses in one particular geographical area and others deprived of even a single one is very common. Increased access to education, devoid of planned expansion, may provide for schooling but not necessarily education.

It is to be understood if the quality of education has become a casualty of increased enrolment or there are other factors that need to be aligned with the goals of education.

Education: Learning Matters

One of the basic aspects of education is that knowledge, skills, aptitude, attitude and values with which a student leaves school are influenced by the attributes student possessed when s/he entered the school. Further, these are shaped by complex interaction of heredity and environment to which the student has been exposed to at home. Issue of specific variables that influence educational attainment of student has been a matter of debate for long. Substantial body of evidence suggests that schools can make a difference in terms of student attainment and a major portion of this is attributed to teacher. (Darling-Hammond 2000). We also have evidence that suggests that working in harmony of various factors impacts the quality of education. First and the foremost is that student be healthy, safe and ready to learn. Other factors that merit mention are enabling policy environment; a curriculum that reflects the society's values and aspiration for learning; and community support for education and parents' involvement in the schools. However, according to recent research, quality of teachers appears to be the most important element of all.

Teacher: The Initiator

Great deal of efforts and energy of thinkers and educationist has been expended to present before us the goals of education on one hand and the role of teacher in translating the goals of education on the other. Report of UNESCO International commission on Education Identified four pillars of education: *Learning to Know; Learning to Do; Learning to live Together and Learning to Be*. These four pillars suggest that education intends to develop the capacity of the learner to: absorb new knowledge, be open to new ideas and be able to differentiate what is *really significant* (know); to make sense of the knowledge and skills acquired in a manner that they are able to *contribute* their might, *productively, for themselves as well as for the society* (do); shape socially integrated individuals capable of exhibiting love and respect for each other (live together); develop sense of personal responsibility and commitment to social

values (to be). Universal search to identify and understand the mechanism of realising these objectives is all too pervasive.

It is evident that teacher plays a central role in the process of education. Teachers work in the school with certain structure and curricula. Planning, organizing and managing the class, deciding the sequencing and pacing of content as well as structure of the lesson to be taught are some of the activities indulged in by the. Further, feedback strategies to assess the progress of the learner and identification of needed corrections to be carried out are important responsibilities executed by the teacher. Subject knowledge and competence to transmit the knowledge are valuable assets of an effective teacher. A good teacher is capable of exposing the students to new ideas, experiences that potentially initiate the child into seeking more intellectual growth. Effective teachers also have an opportunity to influence the affective domain of young learners. By respecting their hopes and dreams, focusing on their good qualities and constant encouragement, teachers help students to improve their self esteem as well as a role model to shape their character as adult. In other words it can be said that such positive interactions facilitate the learner to not only discover their strengths but also to realize their potential to the fullest in a socially desirable manner.

Such an understanding exposes us to the fact that knowledge evolves from experience and is constructed through active process of exchange of ideas, beliefs and reflection on issues. Although responsibility of learning rests with the learner but an effective teacher emerges as a 'key player' in setting the stage for experiential learning. Kolb's experiential learning refers to the provision of an opportunity to indulge in activities that lead to active participation and prepare the ground for thinking critically, respecting and learning from others. Experiential learning involves: (i) *Providing an experience* (ii) *processing the experience* (iii) *generalizing and* (iv) *applying*. Four steps are enumerated for contextual comprehension.

- ❑ *Providing an experience* involves setting up and activity in a safe environment, both, physical as well as emotional, and answering queries for leading the students to self directed learning.

- ❑ *Processing the experience* involves observing and responding to interactions and understanding what is being done, thought and felt during the experience.
- ❑ Encouraging learners to analyse their experience, identify their concerns and implication and providing feedback leads to *generalization*.
- ❑ Leading students to identify any changes they could make to their behaviour after considering this experience enables the learner to *apply* learning so acquired to new situations or discuss their learning with others.

In this entire process *reflection* is the key to learning from experience because it consciously focuses our attention on what we have learnt and thus consolidates it. Reflection on the part of the teacher on nature of content, methodology adopted and other related issues increases the probability of achieving the objective of education. On the other hand encouraging and facilitating students to reflect in a manner: *I was surprised to find that...* ; *I really like...* ; *I did not like....* ; *I want to learn more about....* etc results in a kind of learning that is long lasting.

Delivering an idea clearly along with active listening, a competent teacher can skillfully initiate a learning experience or interaction. Manipulating responses, emerging out of the experience, after focused reflection and arriving at conclusion after discussion not only influences students' situational but also the ability to generalize and apply that knowledge in future too.

Prevailing Realities: Looking Forward

Over the years we have had enough evidence to suggest that education is critical for human welfare and position of the teacher is central in this process. One is prompted to ask, what are the special attributes that place the 'teacher' at the centre of it all? Is the ownership of these attributes automatic by just being designated as 'Teacher'? What does it take to acquire or master such attributes? As a practitioner in the field, the understanding arrived at suggests that only the ones with sound content knowledge and skilfully trained in pedagogical processes would be able to impact the learning outcome of the impressionable learners.

Interest and motivation are intrinsic to success in any profession. Choosing a career path right

after class 12, positions one to get acquainted with the intricacies of the knowledge base as well as its application. However, passion for a career in teaching is not seen as the first choice of present day youth. Mushroom growth of teacher education institute representing 'non attending students' and 'non attending teachers'; near absence of any need to compete for entering the course; inadequate preparation; limited opportunity to practice the skills has adversely impacted the quality of teacher preparation and training. As a result it is not only the school education that has been dealing with inadequately prepared teachers but also the teacher education programs that are struggling to make a difference in the company of so called 'teacher educators'.

Looking forward on the basis of the reflections it can be said that well thought out Teacher Education Program (TEP) that not only pass the academic scrutiny but proper implementation scrutiny too, is the prime requisite for making available the pool of competent teachers to play that central role effectively.

Systemic and seamless collaboration among the school system, teacher education institutes and affiliating universities is the need of the hour rather than a hierarchical relation. Such a collaboration should factor in the symbiotic relationship among Child, School and Society, not just in terms of collecting evidence but also on the need to act on the evidence in order to move towards the common goal of 'quality education'.

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