

# The paradigm shift in Teaching profession: Some thoughts

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In the recently conducted G-8 UNESCO world Forum on “Education, Research and Innovation : New partnership for sustainable development” (at ICTP, Trieste, 10-12 May 2007), the main message is that the three critical factors : Education, Research and Innovation need to be operated as inter-dependant. In the context of the Education in the focus of globalization, it is stated that education is a prerequisite for the supply of highly qualified / trained manpower. Also education is seen not only as a key to social cohesion but also to mitigate the consequences of globalization. The fundamental requirement for global standards of education is the trained graduates by professionally competent teachers. As it looks today, in the Indian context, where there is an explosion of education enterprise, there is a great demand for good committed teachers. This situation is common to all the developing countries.

The teaching profession has undergone a sea of change from the Gurukul system to the present McCaulay system of education; however, the perception of the society on Teachers seems did not change. Teaching is now a profession rather than a passion and thus there is a paradigm shift in the perception of teachers. The crux of the issue is : to meet the demand with necessary quality and commitment towards the profession.

The recent times, to keep the balance between the demand and supply, have seen a spurt of growth in the educational institutes; mainly catering to the Professional courses (The cry is louder now for the basic sciences which could not attract students). Education, as a responsibility of the State became an

enterprise. The private partnership has increased enormously. Still, there seems to be a need for more Institutes. This growth has given an urgency in the educational reforms which are being addressed at the Ministerial level by a number of excellent and eminent academicians. This growth, whether planned or unplanned, has given its tremendous pressure on the numbers in the teaching community. Also, the globalization has given its due of challenges and opportunities in the education sector / enterprise. The accreditation of Indian Engineers into the Washington accord makes the India trained Engineering graduates on global bench mark adds additional responsibility on the Teachers in the Engineering colleges (20 national Institutes of Technologies and 1,520 other Engineering Institutions). Over all there is a paradigm shift in the thinking, concepts, socio-economic outlook in the teaching profession.

What ever be the advancement in technology, till now, the teacher is not replaceable. From ages, teachers command good respect from the society. They are expected to be ideal role models and their main responsibility is to train young minds / shape the society. The teacher is the one who not only imparts knowledge but also shapes the character of the students which makes a society. We think twice (or a million times) before we entrust our living assets : children, to schools. The teachers are always under paid. The teacher used to exercise (till mid 70's) full authority and autonomy on teaching methods. However, there is considerable change in the recent times. There is erosion in the values, responsibilities, commitments of the teaching profession. This erosion is a result of complex structure of the society, socio-economic growth, the enterprising nature of education (we can buy seats now) and the pressure of work (in the Institutes of higher learning, the teacher is to show his visible research outputs) and the quantification of deliverables by the teacher and many more factors (direct or indirect). Today's teacher is as busy and as pressurized by a software professional.

The expanding education enterprise, the global bench marks, the transformation of higher secondary education have brought in considerable changes and challenges in the college education, but still more is to be done. Some of the present challenges are : Teacher – student ratios, coping with expanding opportunities in specific need based sectors like information technology, nano and bio technology, advanced materials, technology for home land security, dearth or development of proper / more efficient educational tools, basic infrastructure in terms of laboratories, libraries etc. Among all these challenges, the teacher is a part of everything.

In the Indian scenario, the education and research are considered as one part in evaluating the credentials of the candidates (in tune with the G-8 summit aims). Though the demand is felt, no special efforts have been made so far to meet the demand of teachers in the recent times. A good number of Technical Teacher Training Institutes are toiling hard to impart new techniques and methodologies in teaching methods. But no conscious efforts have been initiated to identify and foster good teachers to meet the ever increasing demand.

Today, teaching has transformed from passion to profession. The consumerism has pervaded into every walk of life and money seems to rule the “comforts”. The salaries of teachers, though given a priority in the Government thinking, still the emoluments lack the societal demands, thus the profession does not seem to attract the right talent. Further to these points, the selection mechanism of the teachers (for higher positions) seem to depend, in higher educational institutions, mainly on the research credentials rather than on the teaching skills.

The teacher – student ratio becoming high (approximately stands at 1:9 and is anticipated to reach 1:14 in higher educational Institutes), there is a need to rethink the teaching methodology (adopting modern tools) and evaluation mechanism. As is pointed out, our examination system is based mainly on the memory rather than on application and our admission process is an elimination

rather than a selection process. Though we desire creativity and innovation need to be inculcated through younger minds at the high school level, the infrastructure (including the professional teachers) is absolutely inadequate. Once these minds enter the portals of higher learning, the creativity (for the majority) is almost replaced by pattern recognition and memory.

Recently, it has been reported in the press, that the higher salaries for a specified sector is because they take more risks and the teaching profession is one in which risk factors are absolute minimal. But, let us all remember that the risk of teachers is not felt today but certainly when it is felt, it is rather irreparable and the society has to pay very heavily at a later time. There are enough indicators, as may be seen by the selection committee members, that the candidates appearing for teaching jobs lack the required fundamental knowledge and the desired motivation levels for teaching.

The selection methods in almost all the Universities and some Institutes of higher learning need to be redesigned to discover the teaching skills and the commitment along with research capabilities. Also, the society should recognize that teaching is a serious profession and it demands considerable time and effort. The teaching talent is to be identified as early as possible and is to be fostered. A special recognition needs to be given to the teachers for which evaluation yardsticks have to be evolved. It is to be realized that anybody and everybody cannot be a teacher. Also, it is to be noted that there are no set procedures and bench marks to evaluate the teaching methods.

As it appears that now since the demand cannot meet the supply, any teacher is welcome. This demand is there almost in every developing country and it continues to grow (as we are looking forward for a “Knowledge Society”). The onus is on the developing countries. If this demand is not met in the right direction, an overall progress towards a global society and the vision of United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) may not

be fulfilled. The question is how to meet the demand without compromising on the standards and values? One possible solution is to redefine the responsibilities of the teacher. For example, in the earlier times (may be a decade back), the teacher is responsible for collating information and imparting knowledge; he / she also is responsible for evoking interest of the pupil in the subject. Today, the information is freely available in abundance; thus the responsibility of the teachers has shifted to evoke innovative and adoptive thinking and analyses. The theme of teaching is towards global thinking with local applications. Today, the student is clearer in his career paths and is also clearer of his challenges in the global markets.

The frame work of the teaching now is to fit a complex base: free accessibility and easy dissemination of information through modern technology, pupils are more aware of their opportunities and challenges in careers, the narrow specializations are giving place to inter-disciplinary topics etc. Thus the onus on the teachers is to impart conceptual understanding, evoke analytical and unconventional thinking and facilitate problem solving skills. Since the individual attention in the class rooms is becoming almost impossible, the teaching skills have to have a broader base. The present day teacher is facing altogether new challenges. Under these transformed conditions, the commitment, dedication, teaching methodology and professional standards need to be redefined.

One possible solution to meet the demand of imparting knowledge is to employ the modern technology : web based education, like National Program on Technology Enhanced Learning (**NPTEL**); but the solution may not be complete. The other possible attempt is to identify the teaching talent quite early and to foster this young talent to become a workforce in short time. Educational Technology: the methodology to impart knowledge and analytical skills, may be identified as Thrust area and is to be developed methodically in all the institutes to invent new and novel methods in imparting knowledge to a larger student – teacher ratio without sacrificing the creativity, innovation and analyticity in the

young minds (this is not an easy task). Probably, the Educational Technology is the area where we should pioneer to lead all the developing nations in the endeavor of the program “Sustainable Development” as launched by the United Nations.