

# CAREER IN TEACHING – THE NOBLEST PROFESSION

Dr. Kirti Kapur

*“Teachers, I believe, are the most responsible and important members of society because their professional efforts affect the fate of the earth.”*

–Helen Caldicott

Today, close to half of India's population of over 1.2 billion people is below the age of 25 years. As a result quality education and skills training have become paramount for India's social and economic development. With nearly 30 per cent of our total population below the age of 14 years, quality school education, in particular, will play a pivotal role in building a strong and vibrant nation. In 2010, UNESCO estimated that India would need 20 lakh new teachers by 2015.

In this scenario, a large talent pool of quality teachers can prove to be one of India's most significant assets.

However, for the past few decades there has been an acute need for trained teachers. Given the demographic profile of our country the demand for teachers will only increase. In recent years, the Right to Education (RTE, 2009) has, to some extent, formalized this demand for teachers by setting the student to teacher ratio for primary schools and upper primary schools at 30:1 and 35:1 respectively. Such ratios are essential for ensuring that each child receives adequate attention in the classroom.



The RTE has raised the requirement for teachers in new schools and existing schools, where student to teacher ratios can be as high as 60:1 and 100:1. However, improvements in working conditions for teachers have been stymied by challenges in implementation. Nonetheless, stakeholders in education are raising the importance of investing in our teachers and the prospects for a career as teacher in India are only going to improve. More significantly, teachers entering the profession today have the unique opportu-

nity to prepare and inspire India's youth towards achieving goals such as Swachh Bharat, Digital India, Sustainable Development, Eliminating Poverty and fostering intercultural harmony.

## **Teachers as catalysts for social transformation**

Teachers can play this role because they interact with impressionable minds and their words often leave a lasting impact on youngsters. We all remember at least one teacher that has had

**CAREER IN TEACHING...**

Continued from page 1

an influence on our lives in a way that has challenged us to improve or has helped us become better human beings. A teacher's role extends from being a conduit for knowledge to that of a guide, confidante or a sounding board for our aspirations. As a result, teachers play a vital role in building a well-functioning society. In fact, one may even say that teachers in the classroom shape the destiny of a country. It is a fitting tribute to this profession that the late Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India, and an eminent scientist, often remarked that he would be happiest if remembered as a teacher.

This echoes the sentiments of another former President, late Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan who said that it would be his proud privilege if 5th September was observed as Teachers' Day. Some of the greatest minds in human history, such as Aristotle, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Albert Einstein have also acknowledged teaching as a superior pursuit. Our own history is replete with examples of firm but fair, practical yet inspirational, great yet humble teachers emerging as noble beings.

**Practical aspects**

However, there also exists a perception that teaching, as a profession, does not require much effort. Viewed as a 'soft' option, teaching isn't considered 'challenging' enough by many. However, this is far from the truth. Teaching is certainly one of the noblest professions, but at the same time it is also among the most challenging, particularly in our country, as our students come from multi-cultural, multilingual and

diverse backgrounds. If a teacher aspires to do his or her job well, then he or she must embrace the responsibility of playing multiple roles. A strong understanding of pedagogy must be accompanied by knowledge of different subjects, enthusiasm to motivate learners, and a knack for planning and administration. However, teaching is not just about overcoming barriers but also brings several opportunities. Contrary to ossified perceptions around a teacher's role in the classroom, the teaching profession affords room for creativity.

**Preparing to become a teacher**

The sheer scale and diversity of classrooms in India lends itself to options for aspiring teachers at all levels of the education pyramid. There are corresponding courses that can prepare aspirants to teach at different stages of school and higher education. This article limits itself to school education.

Diploma in Elementary Teacher Education (D.El.Ed.) programme and Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed.), a four-year integrated professional programme are some examples of courses towards becoming professionally qualified elementary school teachers. The hallmark of the B.El.Ed is its multi-disciplinary emphasis. From this year, the National Council For Teacher Education (NCTE) has also introduced a two-year B.Ed. Programme, with a focus to provide more practical experience to student teachers and help them become reflective thinkers.

To teach at the pre-primary level one requires training as a pre-primary teacher. This is to enable teachers to lay the

foundation for maximum development of children and provide them with a secure and positive learning environment.

To take courses for teaching at the nursery and/or primary level, State Education Departments prescribe a minimum percentage of marks in the qualifying examination as a requirement for admission. For those with B.A./B.Sc. qualification, some universities require a minimum percentage of marks for admission to the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.).

Elementary teacher education is organised to train teachers mainly to teach primary



classes from 1 to 5. The programme is typically for two years. The minimum qualification for admission into the elementary teacher education programme is 12 years of schooling.

There are three types of elementary teacher training institutions - government, private aided and private unaided. In the past years, District Institute of Education and Training (DIETs) have been set up in all the states. An important feature of these institutions is that besides providing pre-service teacher education, they also provide in-service education to teachers.

Secondary teacher education institutes prepare teachers to teach classes 6 to 12. The minimum education required for admission to a secondary teacher education programme is graduation in science, social sciences, humanities, commerce, agriculture, etc. A large number of postgraduates also seek admission to these training institutions. These B.Ed. Colleges are affiliated to different universities.

Regional Institutes of Education (RIEs), constituent units of the NCERT offer 4-year and 6-year integrated courses in teacher education. They also offer 2-year B.Ed. programme.

In some states, prospective teachers need to clear a Teacher Eligibility Test to teach in schools. This is similar to the National Eligibility Test for college-level teaching.

While the number of teacher training institutes has

grown in the last 10 years, a large majority of these institutes are self-financed and operate as commercial entities. However, there are concerns over the quality of training provided. Therefore aspiring teachers must conduct a thorough assessment of the suitability of an institute before investing time and resources.

**Importance of continuous professional development**

Through the course of their career, teachers have to move from pre-service to in-service professional development courses. Various types of in-service programmes such as orientation programmes, refresher courses, seminars, workshops etc. are organised at the central, state, regional, district and sub-district levels. The main focus of the programmes is the professional development of teachers.

Teachers must not think of themselves as confined to the classroom. Teaching is a practice-based profession similar to medicine or law. This means that a teacher's value or contribution is likely to grow with experience and age. However, for this to be true it is important for teachers to invest effort in their own professional development.

There are several state and national level teachers associations that teachers can join. These give teachers the opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, access to new materials and a support network. Free online courses or Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are also emerging as a massive resource. Teachers can go online to learn new activities, find engaging materials and learn different approaches to motivate learners with different capabilities. While the rapid development of technology platforms and online learning are transforming the learning and skill training experience, teachers will continue to play a central role in education particularly in schools.

**Fellowships: volunteering opportunities in teaching**

In recent years many teaching fellowships have also emerged to cater to the urgent need for high quality teachers across the country. These fellowships are aimed at giving passionate and well-educated graduates and professionals a structured opportunity to teach students from under-privileged socio-economic backgrounds and under resourced schools. Not limited to teaching, these fellowships also include support for school administration, creat-

ing infrastructure and offering classes on topics such as life-skills or career. To name a few, these include Teach for India, Gandhi Fellowship and Azim Premji Foundation Fellowship.

Youngsters that participate in such fellowships benefit from access to a global network, professional training and a platform to learn from the experience of others. Such movements are raising the profile of teaching by attracting talent and one can hope this will open new avenues for teaching professionals.

**Challenges**

Like any profession, teaching also has its fair share of challenges. In fact many would argue that the profession faces some serious questions such as low compensation, lack of resources or autonomy to adapt the teaching-learning process, limited opportunities for career progression and excessive responsibilities. For example, teachers are often given additional administrative duties not related to education or asked to teach at multiple stages in a school. All these challenges are very real and need to be addressed in a positive way. However, there are ample examples of people who are passionate about helping learners achieve their potential or contributing to society through teaching that have gained immense satisfaction from teaching.

And despite the challenges, it cannot be disputed that the demand for sincere and engaged teachers will never wane. Teachers who are passionate and invest effort in improving themselves will always find opportunities for personal and professional growth, not just in teaching, but also in emerging areas such as curriculum development, educational consulting and technology-aided learning.

"In a completely rational society, the best of us would be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilisation along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honour and the highest responsibility anyone could have." - Lea Iacocca

**Note** - The article limits itself to school education, however, it is not exhaustive. Views expressed are personal.

**(The author is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education in Languages at NCERT)**

**email: kkapur07@gmail.com)**