

Challenges before the Visually Challenged Teachers

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Facing students on the first day in school for any teacher can be both exciting and nervy , more so when a visually challenged teacher stands in front of a class of sighted students . How are the students going to react and respond, how will he or she be able to cope with them, some are confident, some nervous but it is a day they all look forward to. For some it remains etched in their memory

“I remember the day very well as if it was yesterday.” Says Pritam Sharma. It was the 5th of April 1988 and my very first class involved teaching ‘Alankars’ (figures of speech) to class VIII students. It was an interesting lesson to begin the class and the students were very responsive.”

Born in a small village in Rajasthan to illiterate parents, Pritam Sharma after a long innings of twenty years of teaching in schools, is presently working as Assistant Professor in Ramjas College in Delhi.

Mukesh Gautam who also had a long stint of teaching in schools recalls that he was quite tense on that day.

“I was very tense when I first went to school to teach normal students. Shyness and inexperience made me skeptical, I was not sure what kind of reaction I was going to get. It was kind of an ‘adventure’ which is hard to explain. But I can say one thing for sure that the first day of my encounter with sighted students was the only day when I was low in confidence. Afterwards, I never suffered from this kind of syndrome.”



For most visually challenged teachers, reaching higher levels of education in our country even today is by no means a mean task specially in the face of acute lack of even the basic tools ,aids and facilities .

“And teaching sighted students can be even more challenging.”Says Kapil Kumar Mittal.

A PGT in political science in the Government Senior Secondary School Nathupura in Delhi , visually challenged Kapil Kumar Mittal says the inability to have eye contact with the students of class is a drawback for teachers like him that one has to overcome.

“It becomes more difficult in a class that has high number of students as it is not easy to move about in the class because there is hardly any space in between the desks. As a consequence some times more responsive and active students tend to get more attention.” He says.



Kapil Kumar says if the number of students in a class is as per the RTE norms and sitting arrangements allow visually challenged to freely move in the class room to reach every student, the handicap of eye contact could be easily overcome.

“We may not be able to make eye contact but that does not mean any student can cheat us. It is not difficult for us to recognize each and every student through their voice and know where they are sitting. We only have to keep on asking questions to know whether they are attentive or not and that makes up for not being able to see the expression on the face of students, says Khem Chand Sharma, the Vice Principal of GBSSS school Palam village .”

“Disability is not a factor in controlling a class. It depends upon the teachers own initiative and ability.” He says.

Most teachers feel that it is not the disability but lack of proper infrastructure and aids for visually challenged teachers at both the school and college level of teaching, that is an area of concern. Mukesh Gautam who is now Assistant Professor in Gargi College says it is lack of these basic facilities that makes the situation difficult for visually challenged.

“Books in accessible format, computers, with screen reader and proper facility for conducting research are necessary. If government makes it mandatory for every college and school to have these facilities, it will automatically create an environment that is positive and conducive for the blind teachers to teach.”

Khem Chand Sharma who taught political science when he was a PGT says that e-books are now available and several ‘visually challenged friendly’ soft ware have come up but the question how many teachers specially in villages can access them.

He says that apart from lack of facilities, attitude of the people is also an issue.

“In college students are much more knowledgeable, mature and understanding. But in school sometimes staff is not cooperative. Either they do not want to give work to visually impaired teachers or lack of awareness about the capabilities of visually challenged makes them behave in a very unwanted manner.”

“It is the unresponsive environment that makes our task more difficult.” He says.

Harish Kumar Gulati who is the vice principal of a RSBV Jheel Khuranja school in the capital admits that acceptability by the staff is a major problem . He says the lack of acceptance by sighted colleagues is disappointing.

“It is the lack of awareness about the capabilities of the visually challenged, lack of acceptance by superiors and colleagues and lack of confidence in teachers like us that can be very demoralizing.”

While the lack of facilities, uncooperative environment can be frustrating there are occasions that keeps alive the self confidence and hope for many of them.

For the visually challenged Pritam Sharma, the most satisfying and proud moment in his teaching career was when all the students of the 10th and 12th class he taught passed the board exams. A hundred per pass percentage for any teacher is something he or she aspire for, more so for visually challenged for whom the challenges of teaching the sighted students are enormous.

It is not just about teaching, it is also the attitude he says, what really moved him was the response of the students when he met with an accident.

“As soon as they heard about my accident, the entire class – all 53 students of class 7 – left school to visit me in the hospital.”

Mukesh too was overwhelmed when two two years back some of his students came to ask him about their future plans. He asked them to go to more experienced teachers.

“I felt on top of the world when they told me that they like my way of teaching and they valued my guidance. As a teacher that was the most precious gift I could get from my students.”



Khem Chand Sharma too says that he feels nice when students where he had taught earlier get in touch with him and seek his guidance.

They all feel that spreading awareness about the visually challenged can help create a better environment for them to work.

“We can generate awareness among our colleagues through our performance. We need to give more than 100 percent to make our place in the society.”



“It is attitude of the society that makes the especially abled, disabled. Therefore, change in the attitude of society can give desired results and it can only be achieved through hard work, patience and performance. The task is difficult but not impossible. Moreover, generating sensitivity is not enough; we should focus more on creating our deserving place in the society and availability of necessary material aids and technological support that can enhance our ability.” Says Mukesh Gautam. Out of the three per cent job reservation for the disabled, one per cent he meant for the visually challenged. This has helped many visually challenged teachers get jobs in government schools and colleges .More recently in the Union Budget 2014-15 the government announced that 15 new Braille presses will be set up and ten 10 existing ones will also be revived. This will no doubt help in making more books available in Braille and benefit the visually challenged. However as many of the visually teachers pointed out, a lot more remains to be done to give proper environment and necessary aids and facilities so that they are able to give their hundred per cent to the job of teaching.

(Source: PIB)