

Empowerment of Teachers

Introduction

Every moment in the lives of teachers and pupils brings critical decisions of motivation, reinforcement, reward, ego enhancement and goal direction. Proper professional decisions enhance learning and life; improper decisions send the learner towards incremental death in openness to experience and inability to learn and contribute. Doctors and lawyers have probably neither more nor less to do with life, death and freedom than do teachers. Therefore the teaching profession must continue its negotiations with society on behalf of more perfect education for its children. Teaching is definitely a matter of life and death. It should be entrusted only to the most thoroughly prepared professionals (Howsam, Corrigan,, Denemark, Nash, 1976, P15).

The above statement represents the crucial role played by teachers in modern society. It highlights the importance of preparing teachers with the latest knowledge and skill and then placing them in appropriate work situations where they can use this knowledge and skill. It is important to avoid the stereotyped view of teachers as people who perform the same role forty years after they start their careers as they did on the first day of their job. Differentiation of roles both in schools and in a variety of human service settings should characterize teaching. Support systems should be established in which teachers share their specific knowledge and skills with other human professionals with dignity, confidence and prestige. In other words the teachers like all other human beings should be allowed to become all they are capable of becoming. The end result of this would be that the teachers as a professional group would be **empowered** to practice their profession in ways that they collectively and individually consider appropriate in transaction fo knowledge and skills.

Pre-Test

- i. How do you understand the term empowerment?
- ii. List five characteristics which you think are necessary for a teacher to get empowered.

1.0 Empowerment

Even though the above descriptive account gives one an idea of the meaning of empowerment, the concept does not seem to mean the same for different people concerned with teaching profession. At the outset it is, therefore, important to understand what is meant by the term empowerment.

The term 'empowerment' is used in various contexts. This term came to be associated with the teaching profession recently. However, this has been a subject of discussion among the members of the two of the oldest and strongest professions,

law and medicine for a long time. The teaching profession at present is being confronted by new challenges with new standards being proposed in an attempt to control quality. While developments in political and economic spheres are influencing the traditional practices of teachers, including their recruitment, training and service conditions, teacher organizations have been working on ways and means of safeguarding their rights and privileges.

What exactly is the definition of empowerment? Wellins, et al (1991) indicated that empowerment occurs when power goes to employees who then experience a sense of ownership and control over their jobs. Byham and Cox (1992) stated empowering employees involves helping them take ownership of their jobs so that they take personal interest in improving the performance of the organization. According to Mckenna (1990) empowerment is building of personal self-esteem and possibly the motivation for the workers to further their training and education. Wellins et al (1991) explained that an organization empowers its people when it enables employees to take on more responsibility and to make use of what they know and can learn. In essence empowerment is advocated on the ground that a more empowered work force is a more productive work force. According to Ashcroft (1987) an empowered person is held to be someone who believes in his or her ability/capability to act, and this belief would be accompanied by able/capable action

Although the definitions of empowerment have emerged from the corporate world, the concept of teacher empowerment parallels employee empowerment in business. Bolin (1989) defined empowerment as investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach. Lucas, et al (1991) defined teacher empowerment, as a function of the readiness of top level administrators to share their autonomy with those whose commitment is necessary to make the educational programme function at the highest degree of efficiency. Lee (1991) shared this outlook by defining teacher empowerment as the development of an environment in which the teachers act as professionals and are treated as professionals. He further explained that empowerment means that school authorities provide teachers with the authority to make decisions that have, in traditional systems, been made for them – time and place to work and plan together during the school day and a voice in efforts to deepen their knowledge and improve their teaching. The most effective leaders are those whose teachers have ownership in the mission of the school and a vital interest in its effectiveness.

Covey (1989) suggested that a teacher must begin with 'self' to become effective. He suggested that the more aware one is of personal paradigms, the more likely one can take responsibility for their own paradigms. (A paradigm is defined as the way one perceives, understands and interprets everything going on.) Covey (1989) believed that it is necessary to examine one's paradigms against reality, listen, and be open to other people's perceptions. Recent research conducted in relation to empowerment (e.g. Blasé and Blasé, 1994; Goldring & Rallis, 1993) gives a more detailed perspective of the term empowerment.

According to the above authors empowerment will take place only if the hierarchical top-down approach gives way to a process of shared decision making. This approach was given several labels such as empowerment, shared governance, participatory decision making, site-based management, co-operative management and shared decision making. Whatever the label, the intent is a basic paradigm shift away from the top-down process of decision making that had been so prevalent in most of the school systems including Sri Lanka. In other words, it indicates that our schools

should be re-structured providing a climate which gives practitioners freedom to make their own professional decisions at work rather than having to follow the orders of others or guidelines established by some higher authority.

USA introduced the 'Teacher Empowerment Act (TEA) in May 1995. It emphasizes professional development programs to empower teachers primarily on innovative ways to improve and change current teacher training, recruitment and retention; programs to promote teacher testing, merit-based teacher performance systems, alternative routes to teacher certification, differential and bonus pay for teachers in 'high need' subject areas and mentoring. The Act emphasizes the improvement of student achievement through high quality professional development for teachers.

2.0 Teacher Professionalism and Empowerment

In everyday life, the term 'profession' refers to occupations that have a more distinct public identity and are somewhat more prestigious than other occupations with a special body of knowledge. However, there are certain characteristics common to most if not all intellectually based service-oriented occupations commonly thought of as professions. Such occupations are generally considered to be discrete disciplines requiring specific and intensive academic preparation and specialized knowledge and skills. In addition, practitioners of a profession must be certified as competent to practice. We discussed earlier that the teaching profession possesses such characteristics. (Please refer section 1.1 in the Essential Reading 2 to get an understanding of the concept of a profession and the teaching profession.)

When we examine the situation in Sri Lanka we can see that teachers have to operate as directed by agents of the State rather than as self-monitoring professionals. If the teachers are to be empowered they should have an institutional voice in the management of their affairs in order to provide more effective educational services to the people. In this context, official recognition of teaching as a profession is a pre-requisite. We are aware that certain conditions have to be met if we categorize teaching as a profession. Now let us look at what these conditions are-

- Recommend standards for a profession.
- Recommend standards for teacher education programmes.
- Recommend standards for obtaining licenses.
- Propose appropriate rules and regulations regarding licensing procedures and matters of professional conduct.
- Maintenance of high standards within the profession by establishing a Board of Regents or some other statutory body like the Medical Council.
- Recommend policy and develop standards to ensure continued competence.
- Independence to practice the profession.

When we look at the above terms several other factors on which we should focus attention emerge. These factors are discussed below.

.1 *Teacher Character Traits*

Research has identified effective teachers as,

- stimulating,
- enthusiastic,
- warm,
- encouraging,
- task-oriented and business like,
- tolerant,
- polite,
- tactful,
- trusting,
- flexible
- adoptable and
- democratic.

In addition such teachers -

- have high expectations for pupils,
- overcome pupil stereotypes,
- feel responsible for pupil learning,
- express feelings,
- care less about being liked,
- do not seek personal recognition,
- are less time conscious and
- have good listening skills.

It is believed that teachers have to be effective professionals if they are to get empowered. The effective teachers also should have several other characteristics, some of which described in the following.

2.2 *Subject competency*

Effective teachers are knowledgeable in their subject fields and possess a great deal of factual information. Effective teachers ensure coverage of the material for which pupils are accountable and go beyond it to provide maximum content coverage.

2.3 *Teaching skills*

- Effective teachers demonstrate clarity, make effective use of small groups, monitor and attend to pupils' needs, provide variety, structure teaching and learning, and establish and maintain momentum.
- Effective teachers take advantage of teachable moments, involve pupils in peer teaching, monitor class work, use large group instruction, use open-ended

questions, use programmed and manipulative materials, provide information in small chunks and use fewer traditional materials.

- Effective teachers demonstrate the thinking process necessary for learning and show pupils the importance of what is to be learned, anticipate and correct pupils' misconceptions and are reflective about their behaviour with regard to teaching and learning.

2.4 Teacher-student interaction

Effective teachers deal with pupils in a consistent manner, make judicious use of praise, make little but judicious use of criticism, ensure equitable pupil interaction and participation, know their pupils, names, adjust to pupil developmental levels, are accepting and supportive, are sensitive to learning differences among socio-economic or cultural groups and adjust to these differences.

Effective teachers direct questions to non-volunteers, use prompting, use appropriate wait time when asking questions, give immediate feedback to learners, individualize instruction, use incentives and demonstrate with it awareness of what is going on.

2.5 Teacher expectations

Effective teachers establish expectations for pupils hold them accountable and encourage parent participation in the pupils' academic life.

2.6 Class management

Effective teachers implement strong organization plans from the first day, demonstrate expertise in planning, are prompt in starting classes, make smooth transitions, use group methods to involve pupils who do not volunteer, are skilful in overlapping or handling two or more activities concurrently and are persistent and efficient in maintaining time-on-task. Effective teachers minimize disruptions, accept some noise in the classroom, have a repertoire of control techniques, use mild forms of punishment, hold pupils to work and success standards and maintain a relaxed atmosphere

What we referred to above are some aspects of the body of knowledge that a teacher requires to function effectively in the classroom. It would be apparent thus that teachers cannot just speak of empowerment but have to acquire certain competencies, skills, knowledge and attitudes. The acquisition of the body of knowledge and skills meets one essential condition of empowerment as this gives the teachers professional authenticity and higher levels of self-esteem. However, acquiring the body of knowledge is not a 'one time' activity. It has to be life-long endeavour for any one who chooses to be teacher.

3.0 Training

New knowledge, new techniques and rapidly changing social conditions call for constant professional development of teachers. Continuing education is therefore a basic requirement for every teacher if the person wants to feel empowered. In addition, it prevents professional obsolescence and ineffective practices. Given below are some aspects of training which the teachers have to focus on if they want to be authentic and empowered professionals

- 3.1 Job related in-service education consists of programmes that are related to the acquisition of skills for the performance of the

teacher's primary responsibility of teaching students. It may result in the acquisition of directly applicable skills or it may include content that, while not directly applicable, is clearly related to job performance as a teacher.

- 4.2 Professionally related in-service education would also include those aspects of a teacher's role in the school which are clearly required for good performance but may not be directly related to child development or classroom instruction.
- 4.3 Mobility related in-service education is primarily designed to prepare the teacher to assume new positions and/or obtain new credentials in preparation to assume higher positions within the teacher cadre. It could also be related to acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for assuming administrative responsibilities within a school.
- 4.4 Personal improvement related in-service education is characterised by the fact that its primary emphasis is on helping the teacher become a generally more effective human being rather than on acquiring specific professional expertise. This type of education experience is often self-selected and in many occasions self-directed.

4.0 Teacher empowering strategies

The discussion above highlighted broad characteristics that every teacher should possess and the type of on-job training that should be available for teachers to continually enhance their professional capabilities in order to feel authentic and professionally empowered. What strategies would facilitate the teachers to acquire necessary capabilities and become professionally empowered? There are no set formulae. This requires collaborative thinking among planners and managers of the school education system in a country along with teacher professional associations. Literature indicates the possibility of adopting several strategies for teacher empowerment. Some of these are listed in the following.

4.1 Empowering teachers to improve their practice

Terry (1992) has suggested three strategies to empower teachers to improve their practice.

- (a) Provide a supportive environment that encourages teachers to examine and reflect upon their teaching and on school practice;
- (b) use specific behaviors to facilitate reflective practice; and
- (c) make it possible for teachers to implement ideas and programmes that result from reflective practice.

By facilitating reflective practice the teachers should gain the ability to be self-critical and become capable of examining their own practice systematically. Through self-reflective methods teachers should be able to improve the rationality and justice of their own educational practice.

4.2 Empowering teachers as decision makers

Substantial interest has evolved in recent years concerning the role of teachers in decision making in the operation of schools (Husband and Short, 1994; Hess, 1994). School management tends to become decentralized and teacher participation and collaboration in decision making is encouraged. Positive outcomes have been evident when teachers collaborate with principals in site-based decision making.

4.3 Empowering teachers by developing their sense of self-efficacy

According to the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) an individual's expectations for success determines the behavioral responses. This theoretical model indicates a strong relationship between perceived self-efficacy and actual performance. Research (Hay and Woolfolk, 1993, Sachs, 1990) has focused on teacher attribution of self-efficacy as a major element in productive schooling. In order to enhance teacher efficacy teachers must believe that their behaviours affect the education of their students. Hall (1992) and Barros (1989) believe that teachers need to feel competent to do the job and be assured that the system is capable of supporting their role.

5.0 Empowering teachers as change agents

As schools have become more professionalized, they have tended to distance themselves from their local communities. The vital links between experience, work and education have been weakened. As a result schools in many rural and urban communities have lost their power as a valuable community resource, and many economically distressed towns, communities and neighborhoods have begun to struggle toward economic revitalization without the valuable contribution of the local schools.

Cunningham (1998) indicates that, education cannot be separated from the culture and community in which it occurs. Over the last decade efforts have been underway to help schools to be more responsive to the survival and growth needs of their communities. Hence teachers should be empowered for their multiple roles especially to function as change agents in the immediate community

The importance of developing strong linkage between schools and communities has been identified by many authors. (Miller, 1991). Teachers should use individualized strategies to reach the diverse and changing demographic groups in their communities. Teachers should develop partnerships with the community including parents to develop a positive relationship with them. They should be equipped with skills to identify problems in the school communities and to devise strategies to solve them. Strong relationships should be developed between the community and school especially in low-income neighborhoods where the relations between the community and the education sometimes are characterized by mistrust and misunderstandings. Teachers should be empowered to develop programmes focused on building community capacity by drawing on the inherent strengths and assets of the community with special attention centered around building partnerships between the local school system, community organizations, groups and individuals. Teachers can assist their communities by helping them to play a meaningful role as actively contributing community members.

Teachers should be equipped with skills to establish community-school partnerships aiming at career development for students so that youth make a smooth transition from school to work.

Two approaches that build strong linkages between schools and communities have been identified (Miller, 1992). The first approach reflects the school as a community center, serving as both a resource for lifelong learning and to deliver a wide range of service\'. Some schools and communities have met this challenge and managed to restructure elements of schooling to provide experiences for students that serve both educational needs and community development goals.

In the north central cascades of Washington State, the Methow School District implemented a comprehensive community-based learning project called, Community as a Classroom. A local resident coordinates more than 200 activities and classes taught by community volunteers to high school students. For 11 weeks during the fall and the winter, students are dismissed for a half-day each week to participate in the Community as a Classroom. The program is organized around four strands: (1) career/jobs skills; (2) leisure and recreational time activities; (3) informational classes; and (4) community service. In the spring, they participate in an intensive two-day experience that may range from firefighter training with the Forest Service to backpacking and survival (Miller 1995)

Miller (1992) mentions three unique, yet overlapping, approaches that build strong linkages between schools and communities. The first approach reflects the school as a community center, serving as both a resource for lifelong learning and as a vehicle for the delivery of a wide range of services (Everson, 1994). School resources such as facilities, technology, and a well-educated staff can provide a range of educational and retraining opportunities for the community. A second approach uses the community as curriculum, emphasizing the study of community in all its various dimensions. Teachers have to take the lead in this concept of 'community as curriculum'. It emphasizes the study of community wherein students generate information for community development by conducting needs assessments, studying and monitoring environmental and land-use patterns, and by documenting local history through interviews and photo essays. When students study their community and get directly involved with local residents this process helps students to value their community. A third approach, school-based enterprise (SBE), places a major emphasis on developing entrepreneurial skills whereby students not only identify potential service needs in their rural communities, but actually establish a business to address those needs.

Teachers should be empowered with knowledge and skills to develop student-community partnerships. Students can work alongside adults in the community on projects aimed at community revitalization. Teachers can empower students to participate in community wide visioning, goal setting and serve as task force groups and help to design and implement plans to achieve community development. Teachers could encourage the community and school to work together and so that adults in the community would recognize the value of youth.

6.0 Code of Ethics

Every profession is guided by a Code of Ethics which encompasses a range of values relating to personal and collective behaviour of teachers and what is considered to be 'the right behaviour' to follow in different circumstances. Every profession has implicit understandings among its members about what is right and proper which form the basis of ethical conduct for that profession. Most of the Codes of Ethics embody, good social relationships and open communication. Such a Code of Ethics guide practice. In fact, observance of the Code of Ethics by members of the teaching profession help the practitioners to maintain the dignity of the profession practices. For teachers to be empowered they too will have to adhere to a Code of Ethics very strictly.

7.0 Membership in a Professional Organization

You have already gone through Essential Reading 4 on Professional Bodies. A professional has to obtain membership in a professional organization, which will safeguard the interests of that particular profession. This guarantees the strength of one's profession and gives the professional a certain amount of power by ascertaining that the professional interests are safeguarded. Being a member of the professional group teachers get empowered to protect themselves against exploitation. The professional organization would in other words safeguard the rights of the stakeholders by maintaining a share in the decision-making process.

What you have read so far would make you realise that if teachers need to remain empowered they would have to develop themselves as professionals and maintain professional standards. Such a position only would enable them to get empowered.

Summary

We started this session by defining the concept of empowerment and discussed the importance of empowering teachers to practice their profession effectively. We found that empowerment generally refers to the process by which individuals gain increasing control over their activities. Later we examined the relationship between teacher professionalism and empowerment and further discussed some strategies of teacher empowerment. We also discussed different aspects of professionalism that would contribute to empowerment of teachers.

Objectives

Having gone through this session you should be able to,

- a) Define the concept 'empowerment'
- b) Explain what is meant by the term empowerment in relation to teachers
- c) Describe the relationship between professionalism and empowerment
- d) To describe the conditions that have to be satisfied if teachers are to become empowered professionals.
- e) Propose strategies to be used by teacher educators to empower teachers as change agents

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