



ADDRESSING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH CLASSROOM TRANSACTION: INNOVATIVE DISCOURSES

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between gender equality and violence is multifaceted. Evidence suggests that gender inequalities prevailing in the society increase the risk of violence by men against women and have tendencies to restrain the ability of those affected to seek protection. Though further research is needed, many evidences show that school, teachers and curriculum interventions can promote gender equality and prevent violence against women by challenging stereotypes that give men power over women. The present paper emphasises that the School-based programmes and Teaching –Learning interventions can deal with gender norms and attitudes before they become deeply embedded in children and youth. Though, students are taught gender sensitive values as part of the curriculum to some extent, yet it is done in a mechanical manner by developing more gender responsive pedagogy by a teacher in the classroom. Teachers can take the initiative to bring about winds of change by including "innovative ideas" in their curriculum geared towards gender sensitisation and equality.

Keywords: Gender, Equality, Violence, Pedagogy, Curriculum

Introduction

The relationship between education, gender and violence/ crimes is complex. The different roles, responsibilities and behaviours of females and males, children as well as adults, are formulated and reinforced by gender norms within society. Differences in gender roles and

behaviours often create inequalities, whereby one gender becomes empowered to the disadvantage of the other. Thus, in many societies, women are viewed as subordinate to men and have a lower social status, allowing men control over, and greater decision-making power than, women.

The national policy chapter entitled Education for **Women's Equality** states:

“The National Education System will play a positive, dominant role in the empowerment and strengthening of women. It will foster the expansion of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education will receive overriding priority.”

Research suggests that teachers who are trained on gender issues are better to address personality needs in the classroom of the male and female learners as well as promote their achievement in academics. (Aikman, Unterhalter, & Challender, 2005; “Challenges for Teacher Training”, 2005; Mlama et. al, 2005).

FAWE's 2005 Teacher's Manual for Gender- Responsive Pedagogy, suggests that the teacher's interface manner and pedagogy confines unfair non-verbal or verbal communication; promotes equal questioning of both boys and girls; and highlights strategies for selecting gender neutral textbooks and materials. A ‘gender-responsive pedagogy’ (“Challenges for Teacher Training”, 2005, p. 3), takes into deliberation the particular organic needs during puberty of both girls and boys. It allows for a classroom set-up that promotes the equal participation as well as equal access to all instructive resources.

In the international framework, the classroom pedagogy and day to day discourses and dialogues used by teachers is constantly seen as ‘the vital variable for humanizing learning outcomes’ and is significant in any reform to improve quality (UNESCO, 2005, p.152). Over the last two decades, many developing countries have embarked on major curriculum and pedagogical reforms to meet the EFA goal, often with donor involvement. However, even when well-planned, their implementation and execution has not always been as successful as desired, and evidence suggests that a wide gap exists between the expected goals of curriculum reforms and actual progress achieved in classrooms, schools and numbers of teachers (Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008 ; Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007; World Bank, 2008).

A lot of Government interventions have been passed in India to promote gender equality, such as laws and policies, which play an important role in the primary prevention of violence. But School-based interventions endeavor to address gender norms and equality early in life very effectively, before gender stereotypes and mindset become deeply ingrained and inbuilt in children and youth. These target either male peer groups, or male and female youth together, and aim to increase knowledge of intimate partner violence, challenge gender stereotypes and norms and reduce levels of dating violence. Evaluations of the programmes i.e curriculum intervention and styles of delivering the content suggest these can increase knowledge about attitude and violence, thereby improving attitudes towards it.

From the above discussion, it is very much clear that a teacher plays a very important part in the early rearing of the children and his/her thoughts and attitude can change the thought processes of young students. A teacher must therefore continuously be aware of the fact that his or her proceedings, approach, performance, viewpoint, approach, mode and mind-set will help to shape a child's gender role and socialisation. He / she may make use of manifold strategy and intervention during pedagogical discourses in the day to day conversation to ensure that students have equal opportunities to both create and obtain their goals. Studies have shown gender differences to have a direct relationship to preferential treatment, classroom dynamics and academic success. Teachers have to be serious about the gender issues and ways to tackle them in the classrooms. For the teachers to bring about a change in the social order they should be given pre hand knowledge over the issue. Teachers need not only gender responsive curriculum and textbooks but also gender impartiality education and training in teacher training institutes.

Deeply concerned with rising trends of social intolerance, and more particularly crimes against women, the author decided to take up the topic for present paper on Gender & Education. Undoubtedly efforts are being made to address the situation by the Government by formulating more legislation for the protection of women. However, simultaneously there is a growing realization that there is an imperative need to change the stereotyped mindset, especially of men and the community at large, which can only be done by purposeful and effective gender sensitization. It is increasingly being felt that the long-term solution lies in imparting gender sensitive values through education, since education is of prime significance in the communication of that which is central to the transformation of the human mind. Questions have been raised of the basic postulates of the educational structure and its various systems in India, with the conclusion that the existing models have failed and there is total lack of relevance between the human being and the complex contemporary society. Today's

modern technology driven India requires the creation of a new culture - values of democracy, respect for human rights and equality.

It is said that the family is the first school for it is within the family where children are raised and formed as human beings. Undoubtedly, with India being a vast, heterogenous country in terms of geography, culture and economic disparities, there are bound to be differences.

But in the Indian scenario it is seen that the society breeds distorted values of religion and caste, class distinctions, sense of the inferior and superior. Negative forces like religious dogma, superstition, reactionary forces and regressive patriarchy prevail. Thus parental responsibility in educating children on constitutional and human rights principles of equality becomes all the more difficult and requires the help of civil society and educational institutions. Hence, there is reason that these values be inculcated as part of syllabus in school.

Socialisation of Children and Development of Gender Equality

The general moral debasement of our society is also responsible for disrespect for women. If the morality of the child improves then he will display greater respect for women and cases of sexual abuse or assault in educational institutions will reduce. In the modern times, earning money has become the prime motive of man and the child is imbued with the same zeal. Teachers, guardians and educational institutions are geared at academic advancement as it is considered as a sure way to success in life. Success in life is equated with earning money. When the primary goal of education becomes moneymaking then moral values definitely take a back seat in schools and colleges. Cases of sexual misconduct in schools are a direct result of the failure of guardians and teachers in inculcating moral values in children. Though, students are taught moral values as part of the curriculum yet it is done in a perfunctory manner. Inculcation of moral values in children has to be done in a very systematic manner by narration of stories with moral overtones. Such narration should be done to students at a very young age by a conscientious teacher. This needs to be followed up even in the middle and senior levels in schools. Moral uprightness should be lauded so that the seeds of moral values planted in children at a young age take firm roots. Teachers and guardians have to take a joint responsibility in this regard. They must understand that they can act as catalysts in bringing about a change in children's mindsets and in society in general. The behaviour of teachers cannot be considered to be above board and they are often found to be behaving immorally. Sadly, enough schools are also not very careful in the recruitment of teachers.

Most private schools operate as business houses and the sole concern is to earn money. Thus, the noble motive of imparting man-making education is lost.

Developing Gender Sensitive Pedagogy

Gender concerns and issues in education have also been reflected and emphasised time to time in **Curriculum Frameworks** developed National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). In this context, the curriculum frameworks (1975, 1988, 2000 and 2005) have made specific expedition towards gender discrimination in education. The policy of considerable inclusion and equity was the motto of the journey. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) conveys and articulates a new vision of the school curriculum as a comprehensive space that extends ahead of the conservative textbooks into the sphere of teaching-learning processes and pedagogies. No doubt, this vision and image has the potential to enable education to become a vital catalyst in the process of societal alteration, it fails to fit into place enough with a most imperative and crucial link – **the teacher**. So the missing link in the whole process has been the teacher.

Genuine efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls must begin by educating children both in school and at home with values that promote gender equality and justice. Younger generation should be raised free from prejudice against women and girls. Violence prevention strategies must include *“cultivating in them (children) a sense of dignity as well as a responsibility for the well-being of their family, community, and the world”*.

Schools towards Gender Sensitive Curriculum

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), India’s largest school board, has prepared a gender sensitization module to train teachers and help students’ battle stereotypes against women from a young age. This module is a part of the response to the recent incidents of violence against women, to make the classes more sensitive to gender issues. Crime statistics persistently indicate that the country’s school education is failing to curb male prejudices against women.

The board has also planned to launch an optional subject for classes XI and XII on human rights and gender studies. A moral education kit launched by the human resource development (HRD) minister in November, 2013 has also elements of gender sensitization.

Over the past few years, the country has moved towards a school curriculum that increasingly works on inculcating values of gender equality in students. National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks – used by schools across education boards in India – now use male and female characters in a narrative format to break stereotypes.

But the initiatives are yet to show results, with a clear disconnect between educational standards and crimes against women according to National Crime Records Bureau data. **Kerala, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh rank significantly higher than Bihar or Uttar Pradesh in most educational parameters. But these educationally performing states also fare much higher in incidences of crimes against women.**

Conclusion

Missing Link: The Teaching Pedagogical styles

Keeping in view the above discussion, it is evident that the main challenge in education has been to put the gender sensitive policies into practice in the classroom, school management, learning environment and implementation of the gender responsive curriculum. In addition to this, purposeful efforts need to be put in place to move away from paying lip-service to gender issues of equity and equality and begin to act in a gender sensitive way at all levels from the policy makers to the teacher in the classroom. Meaning hereby is to bridge the gap between policies and teachers. Obviously, any changes in the national curriculum, content of the textbooks, teaching and learning methodologies must be linked up with classroom teachers through orientation and with simultaneous changes in teacher training institutions, as it is not only curriculum content but the teaching learning process that will have a positive impact on boys and girls. As far as Indian scenario is concerned, many teachers have not had the opportunity of receiving gender sensitive training in order to effectively deliver the engendered curriculum. The teacher training curricula also need change and modification as many teacher trainers are still insensitive to gender issues in the pre-service training of teachers.

The intend of this piece of writing is to reproduce on how teaching with gender perspectives (gender conscious pedagogy) in education can sustain students to be more positive about gender issues and, as a result, become gender actors outside the institutions in their personal and working lives. Research argues that, by using a gender conscious pedagogy, teachers can motivate the students to make gender-reflections, create better equality in the classroom, and encourage students to become gender-actors in society at large. So this has implications for

students as well as all the stakeholders of education. In the present scenario, mainstreaming gender-responsive pedagogy in teacher training institutes is viewed as a unique way to bridge the gender gap in education. This article in addition will help to raise consciousness, spark deliberations among teachers and support sensitive and fruitful learning environments for students of all genders.

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