



There are many forms of leadership which emerged during different historical contexts and continue to be in our midst, perhaps a shade differently but true to their role and interaction with society. We have the warriors who have moved from the battlefield to the boardroom or are the frontline entrepreneurs; the kings who now grace many occasions and are the patrons; there are the background advisors easily recognizable as the consultants of today; we have our shepherds who tap the stray ones in our institutions and organizations; and perhaps other kinds too. Many of these leaders live to influence the education arena of today. What confounds the present situation is that one does not acknowledge the past; which is a subconscious player, and the present is not understood in its psycho-affective dimensions.

The other 'hard spot' for leadership in schools and education programs is that the nature of the primary task that needs to be done is intangible, and the leadership has to enable the faculty, the staff to work towards these intangible results, with no clear cut principles to guide. As a result, unconsciously or consciously, the efforts by different stakeholders go towards making everything and anything into something that one can see and hold on to, to say that one has achieved what one has set out to do. These are often the non-essentials or the peripherals of the education program, hence creating an illusion, rather than addressing deeper underlying issues.

Within this culture of ambiguity and the pressure to perform, leaders, be they heads of schools, academic supervisors,

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coordinators, civil servants, trainers or consultants, fall into the trap of trying to create evidence to show the performance of the individual or the organization or the system.

As a result, schools end up assessing students on bits of information, rather than on meaningful knowledge; showcase children's talents on 'annual days' without a link to the community's means of expression; micro-plan for the teacher with results that turn into mechanistic rituals soon enough; or just give up one way or the other and abandon the children to meander through their years of schooling.

However, this does not imply that everything about schooling and learning is intangible or vague. There are areas that need to be clearly outlined, say for instance, the processes of learning, rather than content alone; or a framework for the teacher, within which s/he can plan; a range of ideas for developing certain skills; an overall schema with elements for the child to choose. These need to go to the core of conceptual learning and living which could be set out and defined. The rest that cannot be spelt out in such a mode could perhaps be described; and the education community has to arrive at a sense of comfort that some critical aspects of learning and living are amorphous by nature.

At times, educators take a stand to say that all of schooling can be made measurable and some go to the other extreme to argue that nothing of it can be made SMART. If it becomes an 'all or nothing' dichotomy, escape routes sprout up aplenty and the business of the school, creating an environment for learning as "assistance to life" for children, often runs aground.

With this as an unarticulated backdrop for the present school leaders, who are often qualified for some other functions but not trained to be leaders, most of the actions and activities taken up are ad-hoc, with slogans taking over instead of sound principles; and personal ideas becoming dominant, rather than worked through practices.

Territories are also bounded and not allowed to be porous; hierarchical relationships and status quo is maintained rigidly; as a safeguard against the fears of functioning with such

unstated objectives and an unclear overarching purpose. An outer order is maintained with the inner functions in disarray. And so, the minutiae become all important, and turn into the crutches of a disabled system.

In spite of this not-so-supportive scenario, the human spirit and the genius of the Indian mind have found ways to survive and live with energy. Recently, visiting a school for children from the tribal communities in Chindwara district, Madhya Pradesh, where an NGO was enabling the community to put in place the requirements of the Right to Education Act and other national commitments, it was with love and compassion that the community and the teacher interacted and still stood for the rights of the children. The teacher was not made a villain or a victim and he too worked with the community with a magnanimity that is not easy to come by. The children put up a play about punishments in school, making fun of a typical teacher and he took it in his stride; and even enjoyed it, without being embarrassed.

He was easy as a teacher, and was a spontaneous leader while being the 'in-charge Headmaster'. He was helping to bring in changes in the classroom culture, allowing the community to be a dynamic intrinsic part of the school; and gave space to the NGO activists; even as he, being the face of the education department in the village, stood his ground and spoke for his department when required.

Where there was a gap was in the quality of learning, for which he was not given the support from the Department or from any other source. He was limited in this area by the unprofessional training given for teachers with no continued hand-holding or a system for his own development as a teacher, or as a mentor for others. The lacunae was obvious with the children not being on par in conceptual understanding, not in comparison with any other group, but what could be expected of any child of a particular age. He relied on his own inner resources to be a wonderful leader but where the education department had to come in to help him as a teacher, as a leader, to make learning happen - the main function of the school - there was not just a gap, but a gaping chasm.

When an appraisal was done for a government program in another state, it was found that one-third of the schools in the sample had "in-charge HMs", with the posts lying vacant for many months. Why is it that the lack of a head or a leader is not taken seriously by even the forward-looking

states?

Planning, which is a necessary responsibility of any leader of an institution or a program, is often not understood in its entirety or even in a simple manner. Working along with a state in eastern India and in another instance with the principals of training institutions, when an annual plan was made, the element of scheduling within a timeframe was totally missing. Could the draft be called a plan if dates and months are not mentioned?

The education system has to realize the urgency for developing leaders, many of whom fortunately have some dormant skills -from their own life experiences, but need that little bit extra to become leaders who are not egoistic and full of themselves, but can in turn help others to come to the forefront, to be leaders in their own spheres.

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to shoulder with the teacher? Whether they have the experience of working in the elementary school or not, need not be an issue, but can they help on the classroom floor?

Could the leadership provide a ear to listen to the troubles and woes of a teacher? Even as one goes as an 'outsider', teachers bereft of anyone to listen to them, or to express their worries and their anxieties to, often lament in desperation. One may not have the advice or provide an answer but could the leader offer the time and space for the teachers to share, which may lead to finding their own solutions most times?

Could the leader be the organizer, the shepherd to arrange the academic nourishment and support required for people

under his or her care to be in line with the overall purpose of the school system?

Could the leadership enable a teacher to exercise his own power as a king or a queen of the classroom, not to patronize but develop a democratic culture, aligned to the goals of the country?

Would the teacher say to the head -

"Lead, Kindly Light... I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me."

Or would the teacher prefer to say,

"...Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action..."

Is the teacher to do as he is told, step by step, as a foot soldier; or could the vastness and the depth of his or her task be opened up for enabling and truly empowering the teacher by the education leadership of today?

Amukta Mahapatra is currently the Director of SchoolScape – an organization focused on the development of the teacher and other support cadres to enable schools, organizations and education departments to enhance the quality of learning in the classroom. Having consulted with many national and international organizations and the government on teacher education and development, her insight in the education sector is valuable. She may be contacted at amukta.m@gmail.com.

