



An intrinsically motivated and skilled Head teacher could work as a “mini-CRC” (Cluster Resource Coordinator) of her own school. She could organize a fun and professional learning environment for all staff of the school through interestingly organized academic discussions at staff meetings, develop teacher capacities through cross observation of classes, and peer feedback on teaching style and lesson plans and manage the personal development plans of teachers in line with an overall school development plan. However, instead the head teacher is reduced to an administrator – for data to be sent to “superiors”, for staff allocation to classes, for mid day meal and construction works and of course the all important census, polio and other village surveys.

In order to perform this “mini CRC” role, the Head teacher needs two things – intrinsic motivation and skills as a leader. Currently the senior most teacher in a school is automatically (and often reluctantly) “promoted” to the head teacher role without checking for motivation or leadership skills. If instead we selected the intrinsically motivated teacher and promoted her to be the Head teacher after a systematic leadership training program to help her manage staff motivations and professional development maybe we would suddenly have hundreds of thousands of “mini CRCs” in every school in the country. Kaivalya Education Foundation runs an experiment to build leadership in existing Head teachers in 100 schools in each of Jhunjhunu (Rajasthan), Ahmedbad and Mumbai through a 3 year part-time inservice programme that involves 16 days of workshops and 16 days of on-site coaching per annum.

It is possible to develop the intrinsic motivation and leadership skill in almost any person. As long as we start with the assumption that “Every human being is inherently good, wants to do good and be respected and will rise to her level of performance if provided the right environment and support”. Having said that, is it possible to systematically help create motivated a Head teacher in every school? Our experience in this regard is largely positive and hence our answer to the question is a big “YES”.

Intrinsic motivation can be created by helping discover “meaning” in one’s role, “pride” in one’s co-workers, the joy of expanding oneself through continuous “learning” and

“fun” in the daily interactions with children. Sadly each of these has been gradually corroded over time and it is thus hardly surprising that Head teachers work like it is a dull, boring job rather than being on the most exciting “nation building” activity that they were conferred with. Our program tries to systematically re-create meaning, pride, learning and fun.

Re-discovering “Meaning” In One’s Role

“What would you like your community, co-workers and ex-students to say about you if they were to give a speech on your 80th birthday?” “What are they likely to say about you based on how you currently act and behave with them?”

“Who is a teacher that you remember from your childhood and why?” “Will your children remember you as fondly?”

Teaching is one of the most meaningful professions in the world. Every day you get an opportunity to mould a child’s character, help her discover herself and the world around. It is our opportunity to be a social reformer, big brother, mentor and child all rolled into one. The joy of a student when she comes back after 20 years ago to say “Thank you Madam/Sir” is difficult to express. It is not about just about earning a decent income – it is about being helpful and of use beyond that. Sadly, most government teachers have not experienced this joy.

By conducting reflection sessions, life mapping sessions, sharing sessions and deep enquiries we help teachers question why they are doing what they are doing. We help them see the meaning in their role and thus create an ‘active’ practitioner – rather than a dull lifeless administrator.

A teacher from a small village school in Rajasthan said after a year in our program and I quote “In bachon ne mujhe jeena sikhaya. Jeevan kya hai yeh sikhaya – bas hason, khelo...” (These children taught me what life is. They taught me the meaning of life – it’s simple, just laugh, play...”

Re-building Pride In One’s Co-workers

Sport has an amazing ability to build teams. We play “Ultimate Frisbee” with teachers and Head teachers to help build their ability to work together to achieve an objective as

a team. It's a very simple "no contact" sport which involves two teams of 5 each working to try and get a Frisbee beyond the other team's goal line. We chose it because it is "no contact" and thus men and women can play together, it requires limited material (only Rs 50 frisbee) and is "self refereeing" (disputes have to be resolved through dialogue and without a third party involved).

It's amazing what doing just one joint project together successfully as a team can do to the motivation of a group of teachers working together in a school. If they start off believing that they cannot do it, but slowly learn each day and improve and finally are successful, it suddenly changes their own self image as a "Team". In most schools there is limited recognition of what one can learn from ones co-workers; teachers feel alone in their classrooms, scared to share their failings in the classrooms for fear of being perceived as incompetent. Sport creates a non threatening environment to practice learning to respect each other, learning to support and share skills with each other and achieve something together as a team.

"Why am I not willing to pass to Ms X while I am constantly passing to Ms Y? Is it because I don't think she can play well and am keener on winning than participation of all my team mates? How does that make Ms Y feel? Is Ms Y not good at anything or can she be given a key role? What is my role as a leader of a team? How did I feel when everyone participated even though we did not win? What did I learn from my teammates?"

It is not that they are not interested in learning, but that we have not been able to get them to experience the joy of learning. If we respect them as people, stir them with interesting short reading materials, organize facilitated dialogues around topics of relevance and help them reflect on their own practice, it becomes possible to create an enthusiastic learner.

A Head teacher who by his own admission had lost faith 10 years ago in his teachers' commitment and thus stopped functioning in his school, suddenly found a new tool to re-engage with them and is now running a much more energetic learning environment.

Experiencing The Joy Of Expanding Oneself Through Continuous Learning

What is the 'National Curriculum Framework?' What were the choices that the writers had to make when drafting it? What were the debates around key issues and how do they link to the values enshrined in the constitution? Why do we teach mathematics? What is the philosophy of teaching mathematics?

When engaging in dialogue and debates around interesting questions such as these, Head teachers are able to broaden their horizon of thoughts and this helps them re-engage with their work with renewed gusto and awareness. New questions arise rather than the mechanical repetition of "chalk and talk" that they have themselves got bored of. They recognize that there is so much more to 'learn' and 'experience' everyday, discuss with peers and more experienced views. They recognize that they actually have a view based on their own practice and feel proud, motivated, and energized to learn more.

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I never imagined I could sit with a bunch of government school teachers debating after workshop hours late into the evening whether grouping of children in activity based classrooms should be homogenous or mixed and the sociological implications of our choice!!! But I did. And I dare say that they enjoyed it even more than I did.

Having Fun At Work – Everyday!

When was the last time you danced? Sang really loudly like no one was watching? Laughed with children? Painted something that you yourself were amazed at? Wrote a poem that expressed how you really felt?

Art creates new emotions and connects us to a new and

gentler self. But few Head teachers have used this medium after they passed out of school. They have forgotten that they have a right to express themselves; that creating and expressing is joy by itself. Rekindling this artistic sense helps in reducing the violence within, helps in connecting to deep emotions that were buried and helps in redrafting the self image as a creator rather than consumer.

A Head teacher perceived by all his peers as patriarchal, autocratic and self involved wrote and shared a poem about love. At the end of it he had tears himself and everyone around him was aghast at what emotions he actually felt - these were very different from those of a union leader all these years. He is a much more gentle and fun loving person these days, respected by his peers for very different reasons.

Building Leadership Skills

One of the core functions of a head teacher is “Instructional Leadership” – i.e. the ability to coach and develop her teachers. For this she needs to learn to be an empathetic listener, build connections with her staff, help them articulate their problems, support them to outline courses of action, help choose the best course of action, try it and then reflect on what was achieved or not before repeating the entire cycle again. Unfortunately, as simple as these sound, it is the most difficult job and instead most teachers lapse into the more trained behavior of not empathizing, connecting, listening or problem solving but doling out “motherhood” advice that is not implementable or relevant in the circumstances.

Head teachers can be taught how to support and coach their team of teachers. This does not require them to know more on every subject and on every topic than the person being

coached. This requires them to learn listening and coaching skills. Since they have never experienced a coaching environment it requires role modeling by facilitators, self assessment questionnaires and exercises, tool kits and reading materials, role plays and feedback mechanisms from peers and experienced instructors.

“Pehle mein sochtha tha ki aadmi ko nahi badla ja sakthha hai. Abhi mujhe patha chala ki aadmi ko badalne ke liye bhi bahuth saree techniquian hain and unko use karke kissi se bhi kaam karvaya ja sakthha hai” A government school Head teacher (First I used to think that a person’s behavior cannot be changed. Now I have learnt that in order to change behavior there are many techniques and using those techniques I can get work done by others). Without providing these basic tools to our Head teachers we are doing them a dis-service.

Conclusion

Research has proven time and again that an intrinsically motivated Head teacher can dramatically improve the functioning of a school. For all of us who went to private schools in India, we all know a Father ‘Bosco’, who because of his commitment, compassion and energy, knew every child in the school, worked really hard for them to reach their potential and set a tone for all his staff. Now the question is whether we can systematically create such Head teachers through a secular professional development process.

Can we run leadership training programs for helping develop all our Head teachers into intrinsically motivated “mini CRCs”? With all due respect to Aamir Khan’s character in the movie 3 idiots who runs a vibrant school for children, can we create 700,000 idiots – one in each government school in India?

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