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## Exploring the Transformative Potential of Education

### Abstract

The present paper attempts to explore the transformative potential of education, not just for personal transformation, but also social change. However, since every attempt at transformation is not without resistance, thus, this paper also discusses a few of the struggles and road blocks that one faces on the road to transformation. The paper builds on the experiences of pupil-teachers of the Department of Education at the University of Delhi, through narratives of their significant experiences during their School Experience Program. These experiences were discussed with the teacher-educator to reflect on the possible responses and their theoretical justifications. The paper, thus, articulates questions that arose in the young minds of the pupil-teachers and some of the directions that they found to answer these questions.

**Keywords:** Reflective teacher, school experience program, dialogue, educational theory and practice

### Introduction

The School Experience Program is a component of the B.Ed. Curriculum that not only introduces the pupil-teachers to the school setting in its complexity and variety, but also brings a realisation of their future role and responsibility. During their school experience program, pupil-teachers engage in all activities of the school and learn to engage with students and school structures in different contexts and forms. It is a sustained engagement that “equips the prospective teacher to build a repertoire of professional understandings, competencies and skills, and positive attitude to schooling and teaching” (NCTE, 2016, p.1).

Since NCF-2005, the emphasis is on “self-learning, self-knowledge, and constructivist approach to teaching and learning which implies the students need to be facilitated to graduate from being mere recipients of knowledge to become assimilators and generators of knowledge” (NCTE, 2016, p.1). The pupil-teachers are expected to write their

reflections, which may be composed of their issues, dilemmas, challenges, observations, and conflicts, in order to initiate a conversation with their supervisor, whose role, for all practical purposes, seems to be a composite of being a mentor, facilitator, guide, as well as that of a supervisor. Supervisory observations and self-reflections of pupil-teachers prepare grounds to identify the need for a teacher-educator to take up other roles, focusing on the individual needs of a pupil-teacher.

The following reflections are rooted in the various issues and challenges that a beginning teacher faces in her/his classroom and the potential for personal and social transformation that these challenges provide. These challenges, once identified, were engaged with collaboratively by the pupil-teachers and the teacher-educators. It was realised that these reflections raise important issues regarding the role of a teacher, teacher-educator, curriculum, and education in giving directions to students’ ways of thinking.

### Ms. Vanshika Mahajan

I believe that being a teacher and teaching is not merely about transacting the syllabus in a way that the student is able to understand, but the teaching-learning experience goes beyond this. However, the role of the teacher became even more significant for me when the following incident took place in my class.

I taught English to class 7 of a reputed school in South Delhi. I had to teach dialogue-writing, which I planned to do through an animal fable. However, this plan met with resistance as my learners qualified it as being too simplistic. I was surprised to hear that they wanted to discuss social issues and social evils instead. These topics ranged from the everyday bullying that they faced in school to more sensitive topics such as domestic violence and rape. I was astounded to see their awareness on these issues. Even more intriguing were their responses to these evils like, these students were choosing to bully others in order to avoid getting bullied themselves. They used it for self-protection, but in doing so they also perpetrated it.

However, it wasn't as though the discussion about these concerns stopped here. The learners seemed so fervent about this topic that they tried to bring it up wherever possible. My next topic on Diary-Entry was also centred on the theme of social issues. What took me by surprise was their passion and intense engagement with the issue. It took an even more crucial turn when a few of my learners shared their personal experiences of facing harassment and molestation in different forms and contexts. The responses of the learners amazed me, they were highly critical for the social evils and the prevalent patriarchy in society. The Nirbhaya rape case had had a severe impact on them.

The irony of the entire situation arose when the regular English teacher of that class learnt about the discussion and criticised me for conducting such a 'disturbing' discussion among such 'young' learners. I was suggested not to break the "cocoon" for these children.

She felt that these are gory topics and it was not appropriate to introduce such sensitive issues at such a young age. This jolted me because the 'children', who were supposed to be protected within the apparent cocoon, had in fact initiated the discussion, while a few of them had even suffered harassment.

This episode made me reflect on the entire attempt to create a protective layer, to shield the child from experiencing the social evils in their entirety. Are we not creating a boundary around the school and preventing the child in this process from experiencing the world and its harsh realities? The idea of protecting these learners against the apparent negative thoughts, made me reflect on, probably, the undue importance that is laid on the appearance of positivity in schools. Are we not creating unreal spaces in our school by evading discussions on such issues?

In a way, I was reprimanded by the teachers, and this made me think about the role of a teacher all the more. What if a teacher has different beliefs and value system than what the school follows? What if the teacher does not believe in the values that the school wishes to promote in its students? All these questions perturbed me. The entire idea of the socio-political aspect of education, which raises the consciousness of a person to be critical, put forth by Freire (2005), seemed on its head with such an understanding of education.

But by creating such a shield and detaching the child from the real world around, are we not making him/her more vulnerable to such evils? If education is to be seen as an instrument in creating social change and reforms, then when should this begin? I wonder how many schools follow this approach. Would the practice of keeping students aloof from sensitive issues make them empathetic? Aren't we negating the importance of exposure in creating a sensitive being by not exposing him or her to issues that are so prevalent around them? If the school should be a space that promotes the holistic development of the learners, then, how would this happen if the school restrict

students from engaging with such issues? Can a child bereft of sensitivity, sympathy, and empathy for others, live a wholesome life? Should we be surprised if he grows up to be apathetic and non-sympathetic then? All these questions have been preoccupying me since that incident.

Later, the concern for sympathy and empathy towards the 'other' also came to my mind after another experience in my School Experience Program, where a class 5 student, who belonged to the economically weaker section, was labelled and called names in the class. All his actions in the classroom were associated with or linked to his family background. This child came complaining to me about the ill-treatment and bullying he faced in the class. He hardly had any friend and was constantly teased by his peers for not being fluent in English. I felt that my students were not able to relate with each other and their inability to be sensitive towards their classmates from different backgrounds made me, once again, reflect upon 'cocooning' students from the realities of the world.

Some other related questions that have stayed with me were concerning the role of the school in a society, such as does a school prepares its learners to face the real world that he or she is situated in? How desirable is it to discuss and initiate social issues? What is the most appropriate age or stage at which one should initiate and introduce a learner to such 'sensitive' social issues? If a student is considered a 'social being' then how essential is it, to enable the students to be responsible and sensitive? And how can a teacher inculcate a sense of social responsibilities in students?

### **Ms. Manika Sandhu**

As a part of my teaching experience at a reputed private school in South Delhi, I had the opportunity to extend my role from being a student to a teacher. Most students in the school belonged to economically privileged

families from various parts of South Delhi. During my brief tenure at the school, I experienced the influence of spiritual teachings (of the thinker upon whose ideas the school is established) on the culture of the school. This influence could be seen both on the method of teaching as well as on the student-teacher relationship.

One of the school's guiding principles is that 'nothing can be taught, as the soul already knows'. This made the role of the teacher more like that of a facilitator. The school also believed in the concept of self-discipline; the students had the freedom to voice their opinions in the class, which is believed to instil a sense of leadership and responsibility in them.

I taught English and Psychology to classes 7 and 11, respectively. I observed my learners closely and noticed that they were always eager to learn, to know more, to question and to think critically. They would often question the content without any hesitation or apprehension.

During the three months that I taught in the school, a number of questions came to my mind, such as 'What are we learning? What is the need for this learning?' It was as though I revisited the questions that bothered me in my own days as a student. What was the purpose of education? Is it enables us to achieve better grades, only to get a job and in turn, make our own careers? I wondered what was the need to study a certain subject and what was this process of learning doing to the learner.

The tables had turned now, and I found myself on the other side of the classroom. But I still had the same concerns, of course, as a teacher. What was I doing as a teacher? Did I promote acceptance of the written content as it was, or did I also provide a space for them to interpret that information?

While I was facing these questions, I decided to have a discussion with my students. I asked them about their future plans. I had a small class of about 12 students, with mostly science students who opted for Psychology in lieu of Mathematics.

They had considered it to be a relatively easy subject. After studying it for almost a year, they started enjoying it. In spite of this, when I asked them if they would pursue Psychology in future, they said that though they liked it they would much prefer rather becoming doctors or scientists. Many of them shared that this pressure was thrust upon them by their parents who were themselves doctors by profession.

I felt that they were not able to pursue fields that they really wanted to, or that they were passionate about. One of my learners was a passionate dancer. When I asked her if she would like to pursue dancing professionally, she rejected the idea completely. She reluctantly admitted that it was because her parents wouldn't let her take up dancing as a profession.

We discussed whether it was important to follow one's dreams; one may face opposition, but to let go of your dreams easily is not fair. I gave it some thought and realised how education was turning us into someone we didn't want to be. The process of being educated came with baggage. In this process of conforming, individuals had to compromise on their talents and creativity. The aim of education is to nurture the educand and to hone their talents and potential so that they grow as persons, but it seems that education has become quite something else.

I wondered if there was a 'right kind of education'. I realised that education should be understood as 'deeper engagement'. But what was this deeper engagement and how could it be achieved?

This could begin with attending to the content delivered in the lessons. Attention here would not be limited to just passive listening but also understanding and engaging with it critically. Moreover, if we can move beyond the level of understanding towards reflection, then it would help us have a critical approach. This 'deeper engagement' could not be only restricted to the text, but would also entail engagement with our own selves. This would involve understanding who we are, our likes and

dislikes, our preferences, our biases, our own beliefs, and perspectives. Probably, only after one has such an understanding of oneself, one can decide the path to walk on and consequently, only then would education lead to an understanding of one's own self.

These speculations were important for me because they made me realise what little space the educational system affords to give to the uniqueness of a student; how we infantilize students and reject their opinions and choices as immature and raw; how in the name of standardisation we try to shape students and how in the name of testing and 'teacher-proof pedagogy' we negate autonomy and authenticity of both students and teachers.

### **Ms. Aakanksha Bhatia**

'Striving, seeking, finding for oneself, and not to yield' is the guiding philosophy of the school where I went for my School Experience Program. The ethos of the school reflects the ideals of Maharishi Dayanand and Mahatma Hansraj. It reflects the "Value System" prevalent in India which aims at nurturing India's socio-cultural heritage as enshrined in the Vedas. Learners are expected to imbibe these values so as to become good human beings. To this effect, the Vedic ritual of performing 'Havan' has a place of pride in the school's curriculum and is performed regularly to purify the air and environment. Education in school is an amalgamation of ancient Vedic values and contemporary scientific temperament. Along with the intellectual development, the school aims to promote the traditional Indian values with due emphasis on competence, creativity and inculcation of the scientific outlook and aesthetic appreciation.

I taught Social sciences to class IX and Psychology to class XI. The majority of students in class IX were boys, whereas in class XI it was the other way round. Though the students were full of energy and enthusiasm, their curriculum permitted little time for self-reflection. Interestingly,



even though the boys in XI std were less in number and got sufficient attention from the teacher, they were still reluctant to study and attempted different means to distract the teacher in order to avoid participation in the classroom. Exploring the issue further, I learned that Psychology was offered as an option against Political Science. Perhaps it was because of a limited choice of subjects rather than the interest that compelled them to opt for Psychology. On the other hand, the girls looked forward to sharing their personal experiences which enriched the classroom discussion. This made me wonder whether the girls were more intuitive and inward-looking or were they simply more interested in studying Psychology?

At the end of the term, I felt a need to evaluate my teaching and my interaction with my learners. I asked both classes to fill a feedback proforma which consisted of ten indicators of teacher effectiveness. Besides these indicators, there were a few qualitative questions. One of the questions required them to answer what they had learnt from their teacher. Quite a few of them wrote that they learned to control their anger. They mentioned that many a time they would try to provoke me, or enrage me, but I remained tranquil and composed.

I was both perplexed and touched by their responses, and what amazed me the most was that similar feedback was received by no less than 12-13 students from both classes. They perceived anger as a negative trait and admired the teacher and her management of anger. This experience laid a path for a self-reflection of my journey as a teacher. I wanted to understand the way in which my learners conceptualised anger, why they expected me to be angry and how I was different from the other teachers? I was overwhelmed that I could make them aware of their anger and kindle a need to manage it.

I reflected on this underlying yet essential difference between the relationship they shared with me and the relationship they shared with other teachers. Before my School Experience Program, I had already

reflected on the kind of relationship I wanted to establish with my learners. I viewed my learners as sentient beings who deserve respect and dignity. I encouraged them to share their thoughts and opinions while my focus remained to inculcate sensitivity and tolerance in them. I don't claim absolute tolerance, but I never thought of using anger as a tool to establish control or discipline in the classroom.

I was amazed that the learners were aware of their naughty behaviour and deliberately tried to elicit an aggressive reaction from their teacher. Not receiving the expected reaction made them perceive the teacher as different from the rest. While pondering over these issues, I began to read Krishnamurti and got many answers from him. He believed that there is a peculiar quality to aggression which is isolation. Even I feel that an aggressive person is alienated from the world. This alienation is twofolds: one is when the world distances itself from him. Second is when the person is frustrated from the world and develops resentment towards it and creates a psychological barrier which prevents others from entering. When as teachers we get aggressive in classrooms, the students develop a fear for us and consider us as different from them. Students show their non-acceptance in the form of noncompliance. At times, this leads the teacher to develop a negative opinion about the students and distance herself from them. As far as my context is concerned, I still wonder whether I was able to form a personal connection with them at the affective level where a mutual understanding of others' emotions prevailed or not?

To my mind, for a teaching-learning process to be effective, some amount of transformation should take place in the teacher as well as the learner's personal transformation is initiated by the realisation that you are capable of looking into your inner self. While I was reading the feedback of my students I felt as though I was undergoing some kind of transformation. Though I had an idea about the kind of relationship

I will establish with my students, I never consciously behaved in a subtle way or masked my anger. At that point, I realised that it was not that I was trying to overcome my anger or control it. It was that I did not feel the emotion of anger at all. Krishnamurti said that you become what you fight. I think this happens because when you have to fight or control anger consciously, there will be an urge to keep on thinking about the ways to fight it. In this manner, the emotion of anger would still persist in our minds and no meaningful transformation would be probable. One may question how can one get rid of anger and transform oneself.

I believe this can happen through self-awareness when one can attempt to delve deeper into oneself and try to comprehend the cause of anger. But this must be done objectively as a third person who witnesses. If we initiate a dialogue between ourselves and our anger, we tend to defend and attribute reasons which will not let us view it as it is. The problem of anger can be solved when we look at it without condemning it or passing judgments. Self-awareness is the first step forward on the path of personal transformation.

The transformation which we undergo would not be worthwhile if it doesn't reach others. Would my transformation be meaningful if it was just restricted to me? I wouldn't have considered my behaviour as noteworthy if my students wouldn't have learned from it. This experience became significant only because of its power to transform me as well as initiate a transformation in my learners. Though the transformation was implicit to me, it was effective as it was able to bring me closer to my inner self and my learners.

Therefore, I believe that personal transformation can't take place in seclusion and it will lose its significance if there is no social transformation following it. The personal transformation I experienced was a result of my deeper engagement with not only myself, but also with others.

Such a transformation is central to the educational ideas of humanists such as Carl Rogers and Krishnamurti (2003), who highlight the personal dimension of being human for social transformation. Such an understanding might seem contradictory to those perspectives that consider personal identity to be dependent on social identity, however, these humanists highlight in the constant negotiations that take place in the formation of both self and identity.

### **Ms. Amanpreet Sawhney**

As a part of my school experience programme, I taught English to class 11 and 8, at a privately managed school in Delhi. The school is modelled on the teachings of Swami Dayanand. The school has huge strength, of about, 50,000 students. The following incident motivated me to reflect on my own teaching methods and the importance of emotions in the lives of students.

Like any other day, I came prepared for my class. I finished a prose piece in class 8 and then proceeded to do speech writing in class 11, for which I read out a powerful speech on democracy by Charlie Chaplin. Later in the day, I got an arrangement period, in class 8 (the section that I had taught in the morning). In the school experience days- and this I am sure that all the pupil teachers would agree- any extra class or arrangement that you get is God sent! To let it go to waste is the most unwise thing to do. But going for a class unprepared was equally unimaginable.

It was too short a notice to plan a lesson. I discussed this with my supervisor, and he suggested that I do speech writing with class 8 as well. But I felt that the speech I selected for class 11 would be inappropriate for class 8. After giving it some thought, I thought of experimenting and proceeded with the speech-writing.

As it generally happens, since it was an arrangement period, the class was not in a mood to study. They wanted me to play some games with them. Their body language

communicated that any attempt to make them study would not be welcomed. This was a free period, a breather for them, and I did not want to take that away from them, but the life of a pupil-teacher is also governed by the number of lessons she/he has to get supervised and I had no other option but to make use of this class. Thus, I started to speak about: “how I dare to be different”. In the form of a speech, I narrated how I use different methodologies for my class, how difficult it is to strike a balance between the school and the demands of my own classes at the Department of Education; how I dare to include games and ensure that it is a well-taught class and so on. I spoke for about 5-7 minutes and then paused for them to reflect.

I was amazed at the intensity and seriousness of the reflections of my young students about what they would like to do differently, what challenges they may face in being different, and how they would endeavour to overcome these challenges. I asked them to write their reflections and feelings. After 10-15 minutes, when I asked them if they would like to share their ideas, out of 53 learners, at least 30 learners raised their hands to voice their views.

The learners came up with fantastic speeches as they brought out varied issues and concerns through their speeches. One of the girls said she wants to be a geo-physicist. This is how she dared to be different, by entering the space and domain which is supposed to be available only to males. One of the boys stood up and said, I dare to be different by talking freely with girls and not worry about the judgments society will pass. The way they expressed their thoughts in the form of a speech, with the conviction they spoke, the issues they raised, and the confidence they had, brought tears to my eyes. It was overwhelming for me to hear them speak and it was equally overwhelming for my supervisor to witness the response that my sharing could evoke in my learners. It was better than all the other planned classes.

After the class was over, I reflected

upon what was it that made this attempt successful? Did I stir up their emotions, did my speech gave them the confidence to dare to speak on the matters they always thought about, but never spoke out of fear? Did I rouse their suppressed thoughts and emotions? How did I manage to do this? Was it in the way I spoke? Did I transfer my passion and confidence on to them? How did this happen?

I thought about it and realised how easily we do away with emotions and only favour reason in our classroom teaching-learning processes. It is not as if I did not realise the value and worth of emotions, but 5 years of my university education and my training in literary criticism made me think differently. I was appointed to teach literature and not stir up the emotions! Therefore in some of the discussions with my supervisor, I felt that in trying to touch upon the affective aspect of one’s being, I will have to compromise on the intellect. I now realise that even I made the same mistake of treating reason and emotions in two watertight compartments. I treated reason as superior to emotions, which I now realise was imprudent.

The same idea gets echoed in Krishnamurti’s dialogues (2003). He suggests that every individual needs to experience emotions, which alone can bring in an inner transformation. One needs to encounter feelings, sense the spontaneity of emotions and participate in it perennially. In classroom teaching and assessment, intelligence gets restricted only to cognitive aspects. The emotive is barely touched upon, either it gets categorised as ‘irrational’ or it is simply ignored. The hierarchy that is established between reason and emotion needs to be broken down. It is not as though one is superior to the other; they are both needed, to make the teaching-learning process rewarding and comforting.

The emotive added another dimension to my teaching-learning process. It helped me to establish a genuine relationship with my learners. It helped my learners to connect with my ideas better, it changed the ethos

of the class, and they could freely speak in class and voice their opinions. The learners were sure that their teacher would not judge them, which made the classroom setting democratic and I appreciated the richness brought about by a plurality of thoughts and ideas.

The emotive facilitated a dialogue with my learners. This experience definitely helped me grow as a pedagogue, and I realised what I would have lost out on if I did not incorporate the affective domain in my teaching.

## Conclusions

These experiences of the pupil-teachers highlight the importance of a pedagogy that is reflective, critical, conscious, and engaged. It does not reduce the emotional to the rational, but is socially responsive at the same time. Irrespective of how mundane these experiences might appear to one, in terms of transformation, the significance of the issues they highlight cannot be overlooked. These minor experiences form the basis for significant changes within society in general and across fields in specific. Martin (2007) highlights this transformative role of education which is often undervalued. She suggests that education is extremely powerful to bring transformation and in any dynamic social context, educational transformations are common to be witnessed. It need not be an extraordinary event, flourishing under exceptional circumstances.

These experiences may also be understood as moments of dialogue, in Buber's (2002) sense, where the pupil-teachers realised their

world-historical context and responded to it. This context is not shaped only by historical facts, but also by norms, ideas, beliefs, and relationships. In these moments, they realised their own locations, assumptions, and positions vis-a-vis the 'other' and when they respond with their whole being to the 'other', only then can there be genuineness in the relationship.

Another way of understanding the responses of the pupil-teachers is through the idea of care (Dalmiya, 2016) in which the idea of relational humility is considered at the centre of both caring and knowing, which are conventionally understood to be in the domain of emotion and reason, respectively. Both these ideas, caring and knowing, can be rooted in the discourse of feminist epistemology and care ethics to critique those theoretical perspectives that tend to present caring and knowing to be essentially different from each other and if not, then at best, to be sporadically traversing with each other.

The underlying dilemmas, conflicts, positions, and views of the pupil-teachers, thus exposit, do not submit themselves to be addressed by any particular theory, however, they do demand that constant attempts must be made to coherently understand and approach their queries. This is probably the beginning of becoming a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1987) in the true sense. Such a shift towards being a critical, humane, and conscientious person, who responds to the social context holistically is what is meant by the transformative potential of education.

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