

Collegiality in Teaching: Perceptions and Experiences of Beginning Teachers in India

Abstract

The collegiality refers to cooperation among colleagues. Studies indicate the concept of collegiality is complex and has different facets. In practice especially in the context of beginner teachers, collegiality is not just limited to, but goes beyond cooperation to include overcoming solitude, seeing support from fellow teachers, dealing with workplace issues including developing a sense of belonging and dealing with conflict, authority and bureaucracy. The Indian discourse on teachers is dominated by the idea of an isolated, meek dictator, enmeshed in administrative hierarchy but professionally alone. There is a tacit assumption that given the low status of the profession and poor quality of professional education, that workplace relationships will be casual or friendships. This paper presents findings relating to perceptions and experiences of collegiality of beginning teachers in India, based on an interview based qualitative study of 25 beginner teachers in the state of Karnataka, India. Collegiality is found to be a major theme in beginning teachers' narratives of their workplace experience, playing a significant role in both personal and professional matters. Differences on account of age of the teacher and context of management are found. The teachers' narratives provide a nuanced understanding of the workplace in relation to peers, seniors and the school head and contribute to a more holistic understanding of teacher development and of the Indian school as a workplace.

Introduction

“the role of colleagues in enabling a teacher to work efficiently is immense. In any school if functioning has to be efficient and get expected results, collegiality and support are a must. ... Here as we are newly appointed, we are all same, and we have full understanding and are friends”(NT_14)¹

Collegiality refers to cooperation among colleagues. Studies indicate

the concept of collegiality is complex and has different facets. Overcoming solitude and developing ability to seek support from fellow teachers (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Hargreaves and Dawe, 1990), dealing with conflict among the staff members (Veenman, 1984); seeking a sense of belonging (Gehrke, 1981; Bush, 1987); dealing with authority and bureaucracy (Lortie, 1975; Gehrke, 1981) are some of the aspects of work life where collegiality is found to play an important role. In more recent literature, the conception of the

¹ Note: NT_n provides the unique reference code for each respondent New Teacher (NT) within n taking values from 1 to 25. NT_14 refers to 14th respondent.

'community of practice' for professional learning of teachers (Lave and Wenger, 1991) is also gaining importance. In practice especially in the context of beginner teachers, collegiality is not just limited to, but goes beyond cooperation. It is found to be central in enabling beginning teachers to overcome the tendency to remain aloof (Veenman, 1984) and instead to interact with co-workers in order to learn from their experiences (Zeichner, 2010; Clandinin and Connelly, 1996). It also mediates changes in the perceptions of beginner teachers of the ideal versus the real school situation (Veenman, 1984). 'Consensus and cooperation among teachers' has been recognised as being among the most important school factors impacting school effectiveness and teacher development (Creemers and Reezigt, 1996; Shah, 2012). However, acceptance into the existing group in school and asking or seeking academic support are found to be difficult (Gehrke, 1981).

It is commonsensical to note that, as the school is an organisation which involves several teachers, their interactions and inter-relationships as a peer group are bound to be an important part of the organisational culture and ethos. In our use of the term 'collegiality', we wish to draw attention specifically to the potential of this community to become a source of mutual support and collaboration. In our work with beginner teachers in Indian schools we found that such an experience of collegiality is among the central facilitating factors that support a range of needs experienced by beginner teachers, and this was found to be a recurring theme in their narratives. Among the most commonly noted reasons for novices to seek support from colleagues is to learn about the rules and routines of the workplace. It may seem at the

outset to a lay observer that teaching is a simple solitary, self-centered activity revolving around the teacher and her assigned group of children. Having experienced teaching activity during one's school days, it is possible that for a beginner teacher also to believe that the business of teaching is a self-centered one (Lortie, 1975). Laymen as well as the prospective teachers think that with fairly adequate subject knowledge the "tricks of trade" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, P:301) are easily learnt. Commenting on the importance of induction of novice teachers into the culture of teaching of their new school, Feiman-Nemser notes:

"Beginning teachers have legitimate learning needs that cannot be grasped in advance or outside the contexts of teaching. ...Whether the early years of teaching are a time of constructive learning or a period of coping, adjustment, and survival depends largely on the working conditions and culture of teaching that new teachers encounter" (Feiman-Nemser, 2003 Page 27).

At the same time, it has been noted that however,

"(n)ovice teachers, in particular, are reluctant to seek colleagues' advice lest they appear less qualified or less competent" (Clement and Vandenberghe, 1997, p: 1).

In the Indian context, the teacher wrapped up with her assigned group of children in a classroom as 'meek-dictator' (Kumar, 2005) and of being an 'isolated' teacher (Batra, 2014) dominate the imagery of and discourse about mainstream teachers in mainstream government or private schools. Teachers are seen as having limited or no professional community either within their school or outside, and largely interacting for administrative purposes, in hierarchical relationships in a bureaucratic ladder of which they

occupy the lowest rung. Widely seen to have received very shallow preservice teacher preparation, resulting in poorly or weakly formed professional identities, with limited professional knowledge and skills, they are believed to approach their profession largely through a folk pedagogy that is informed by every day or cultural beliefs and personal experiences (Sarangapani, 2003; Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). There is thus limited professional recognition of, or expectation from their peers at school. The intra-school teacher community as well as any extended outside school professional peer community are significantly absent in the research literature that documents and describes teachers and their work, in the Indian context (see for example Majumdar & Mooji 2011; Kingdon, (2007); Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Sriprakash, 2009; Ramachandran et al, 2005), except to suggest connivance in covering dereliction from duty of government school teachers (see for example Muralidharan and Kremer, 2006). An exception is Thapan's study of the professional community of teachers in an elite private residential school (Thapan, 2006).

In this paper we present and discuss collegiality. We examine the forms and variations in collegiality, in relation to the contexts of work, and the diverse

needs of beginner teachers that come to be addressed through this form of support and professional learning. The experience of collegiality as articulated by the teachers who participated in this study contributes a unique, rich and novel understanding beginning teachers in their school context--their perceptions, apprehensions, expectations and interactions. It also provides a rich understanding of ordinary Indian Government and private schools as a professional space for teachers and an understanding of the internal dynamics of the school as a workplace.

The Study

This paper presents the importance of collegiality for beginner teachers working in Indian government and private schools. It draws from a qualitative exploratory study of trained beginner teachers working in Urban and Rural school around Bangalore, in Karnataka, South India. 25 teachers, with less than five years of total experience of teaching participated in this study. They were working in different school managements settings--government, private and religious/missionary/philanthropic schools, offering either or both Kannada or English as medium of instruction, in urban, semi-urban or rural locations around the city of Bangalore.

		age range			professional qualification		location		Management		level	
		19-29	30-39	≥40	BEd	DEd	urban	periurban /rural	Govt	Private	high	primary
male	8	3	4	1	2	6	3	5	5	3	1	7
female	17	10	4	3	6	9*	13	4	6	11	1	16
		13	8	4	8	15	16	9	11	14	2	23

Table 1: characteristics of the teacher respondents. Among the women teachers, One had a nursery training and one had a bachelor degree in visual arts.

Source: Researcher's data

The participants included both eight men and seventeen women, and an age range of 19 to 43. The teachers were initially identified through colleges of teacher education in the city and the roster of teacher appointments of the Department of Education, and later through a snowballing process. Data were gathered through in depth semi-structured interviews with these teachers spread over the period of a year, along with a few interviews with senior teachers and schools heads. The teachers were interviewed over a few sittings, spread in the school and more often in their homes. The data comprising 700 pages of interviews in Kannada, were transcribed and selectively translated by the researcher. The data was thematically analysed and coded, using MAXQDA.

This paper draws on the analysis to discuss 'collegiality' which was a recurrent theme among all the respondents, coming up in different contexts, drawing attention to a range of different struggles of beginner-teachers, and most importantly, the existence of, or desire for, a *professional* community, both inside and outside their school. Based on the reflections of these teachers' lived experience and their understanding of what constitutes collegiality, perceptions about its value and experiences of collegiality, the contextual variations in terms of what constitutes collegiality from different perspectives became apparent.

Becoming a part of the school

Beginner teachers seemed to be aware that organisational acceptance into the school was as important if not more, than the teaching itself.

"...we (teachers) have to learn ourselves. Our attitude and practices, the care we take in our role, our way to take responsibilities, avoiding talking about others matter...school can't give

these. It is a quality in individuals... must be honed to maintain a healthy environment in school. Teaching is not the first thing. First is creating a conducive atmosphere. Once it is created, learning happens automatically. The way we are, others are. If I speak well, others speak well. If you don't speak, I will think maybe he doesn't like. I will keep quiet."(NT_014)

The words of this teacher reflect his keensensitivitytobeingfoundacceptable in the schools' existing community, and taking care personally to establish his acceptability. Some such tensions reported by teachers were expectations to conform to extant established habits and practices, unlearn and relearn teaching techniques to match with the way senior teachers are doing, 'adjust' even when authorities openly insult the teacher/HM before colleagues and the community and expectations from the school heads from beginners to be 'obedient', expectations from seniors that the the beginners take on full fledged responsibility from day one and complete the task with minimal faults, maintain integrity by not revealing the inside story of the school with any individual outside the school.

Their words suggested a strong comparison to the tensions that accompanied a new bride trying to find acceptance in the eyes of their mothers-in-law especially in terms of learning and getting acclimatized to the new context that is very different from the daughter-in-law's roots. Eight teachers observed that their problems and challenges had no fixed common solution that can be shared across as a general guide but they had realized that it was better to keep the children in mind and not to pay heed to such adult issues and insults. One of them had also realized that good rapport with all stakeholders was the best way. He said "*I make sure to develop good relation*

with staff, parents and be cooperative. Make good adjustment with children and environment. Once this happens rest of teaching will follow."(NT_14) Beginner teachers had expectations regarding their senior teachers and heads, and also their peers. They expected their colleagues to be humble, be collaborative, ready to help, respond to all kinds of queries and requests however mundane they may be. They hoped for encouragement in their work, openness to new ideas rather than being disregarded as wasteful. They were anxious that seniors may make fun of teachers who are not up to the mark, or gossip about others. They wanted senior teachers to spread and provide positive thinking and motivation, and to be or supportive and most of all to be willing to share.

"Sharing means...suppose if it is about school...for example Nali-Kali is new to me. Last year I used to take HPS-567... Next they sent me here (to LPS)... they wanted teachers rotation...not to allow us to stay in same level. One (has) to go there and one (has) to come here. So they sent me here last year. For me I had no training in Nali-Kali...I am not trained to teach in lower class. I did not know how to do in lower level. I learnt and learnt and did. Here only Kaveri madam...was trained. I used to ask her and try". (NT_16)

This sharing related to government based programmes that were introduced into schools, the details of which were to be got only from other teachers who had already received this training. Willingness to share by the experienced teacher was essential to enable the new teacher to meet her responsibilities.

The beginner teachers wanted to be 'helped for everything' ranging from administrative to academic matters by the senior teachers. They expected that seniors should be able to guide them with all knowledge about school

rules and routines. A range of 'how-tos' including how to manage the class, how to cover portions on time, how to give notes, how and when to correct notebooks, how to use TLMs, how to prepare various records, how to prepare question papers, how to deal with diverse learners with diverse abilities and where to source resources. They sought guidance on administrative how-tos including fee collection, stock taking and distributing incentives, taking care of supervision classes when other teachers were absent, conducting meetings, and managing other non-teaching activities.

Beginners expected the experienced teachers to encourage, motivate, guide, teach and assure them with gentle words such as "don't worry, it's easy", "You may watch what I do and do the same" and provide individual advice 'gently and affectionately as a parent'. They were grateful when they received this support from their seniors.

"I am new to this place, I was scared. I used to think how this person is? How to interact with them, this and that. ...Such encouragement is important madam. Then if I need to do any preparation for next day, they she will give idea on how to prepare. Because of the encouragement I have gradually overcome the fear."(NT_01)

"I had thought that seniors may be rude and dominating...but they treat me as a child, they teach me...so it was not difficult". (NT_13)

Most of them expected the seniors to acknowledge the fact that the beginners are not fully aware of the schools' rules. They looked forward to the seniors to instruct and guide them systematically, and to give them leeway and time to learn rules and regulations in a phased manner.

From their peers, beginner teachers generally looked for and expected moral support and emotional solace to be able

to adapt to the school context and its demands. A few of them observed that with their own peer group they were able to understand each other better and they were able to discuss their problems and feelings more openly and discuss workable ideas. Classroom issues were frequently talked about; some teachers narrated instances of sharing and seeking instant ideas, helping each other and getting moral support to teach using new methods and materials and for class control to manage naughty and unruly behaviour in students. It was always difficult to enter into the existing group of teachers, particularly as schools did not offer any formal induction. Immediate collegial groups were formed when there were more than one beginning teacher joining at the same time.

From the head teachers, beginners expected able leadership. Good HM according to them is a leader who ensures unity among colleagues, helps to solve inter-colleague differences, fair distribution of tasks, instructing seniors to help the newcomers, who teaches how to perform all tasks in school, and encourages the newcomers to accept challenges. The beginning teachers noted however in practice that there were wide variations in the nature of leadership to be found across different schools, ranging from being a 'puppet' in the hands of the management to total autonomy. In private schools the extent of autonomy for school heads depended on the power accorded to them by the management. In some schools the head teachers either mentored the beginners themselves or assigned them to seek help from a particular senior or any experienced person in the school. In Government schools, the teachers reported that the quality of leadership depended on the abilities of the HM and how influential they were in the department and with the community.

In one of the government schools, the HM had left the teachers to figure out what they had to do by themselves.

While beginner teachers expected that expectations should be made from them on account of their unfamiliarity in matters such as rule following, and also expected that seniors would actively guide them, at the same time they also wanted seniors to 'interfere less' and leave them to try out new things. They also expected that seniors should not be favoured over them by head teachers, in matters such as punctuality and being given extracurricular responsibilities or in privileges of the first choice in terms of work allocation of classes and subjects to be taught, leaving beginners with the 'leftovers'.

Dissonance

Not all experiences of beginning teachers with their seniors were positive. A few teachers narrated instances of non-collegiality. A few teachers said they learnt 'what not to do' when they saw negative actions from colleagues but could not discuss this openly with anyone. A few of these 'what not to do' were using abusive language, bossing over colleagues, flouting rules and regulations, blaming others when things go wrong, snubbing proactive teachers and forcing them to conform to old established practices, not being open to share their knowledge for fear of loss of their status, and not only resorting to corporal punishment but also justifying these acts! All these things had left the beginner teachers wondering how such unacceptable practices of older teachers could be just ignored or how they could possibly become 'adjusted' to these things.

However, they also found themselves in situations where their senior colleagues were not helpful and this seemed to directly impact on their

ability to practice what they believed in (and had been taught), which was either in divergence with the view of senior teachers, or did not receive either encouragement or support from them.

“If they (senior colleagues) tell do like this, like that with patience in detail we can learn... must mingle with everyone, whatever we ask (they) should teach. They should not say things—look, she came yesterday but thinks she can do magic here, we are seniors don’t we know what works here?’ ... and discriminate as newcomers and seniors. It should not be like that.” (NT_13)

“...only when there is coordination between teachers, we can use extra ideas and new ideas can be easily implemented. Therefore if there is at least one person with coordination mentality it will be helpful” (NT_01)

“...Even if our HM is happy to give us whatever we want... we keep doing old method if they (colleagues) don’t support... we need a cooperative colleague...I feel we need a colleague who can help... now that I have found NT_22, now I am very happy. Both of us will discuss and will bring some new ideas to the children” (NT_23)

Negative views, taunts and barbs affected them deeply and impacted on their willingness and ability to ‘be different’ or do things differently. As NT_23 said (episode), in spite of the support from the HM of the school, the micro climate created by the judgments of their senior colleagues affected them deeply. The presence of another beginner teacher in the school with whom she could talk and discuss things gave her enormous support to reflect and develop her practice.

One of the teachers, also the youngest of my respondents, spoke of experiencing caste discrimination in her school. She talked about how a few senior upper caste colleagues isolated

her, and imputed lack of academic competence to her on account of her lower caste. She said not only did they visibly exhibited their annoyance whenever she approached them from clarifications, one of them even practiced untouchability!

“Some teachers don’t like my presence. They try to avoid me. One of them keeps telling caste-caste caste-caste...tells me ‘stand away, don’t touch’. By chance if we touch, she makes some kind of face...If I do small mistake also they comment saying that if I was not able to do why I had to come here. At such times I feel why at all I am continuing in this school...I feel somewhat hurt. I never go and ask them any help.”(NT_001)

Most teachers had to adjust to their colleagues and found the experience tough—filled with tension and frustration. One young teacher advised her peer saying: “*Attegondu kaala...sosegondu kaala andahaage*”, the era of mother-in-law is followed by the reign of the daughter-in-law, one of them advised her peers. This popular idiom hinted at the tensions that new teachers experience in their relationship with their older peers—like mothers-in-law these older teachers shaped the space and culture of the school, had established practices of how things are done and exerted an invisible power. “if we listen to them, understand them, in about 6 to 12 months they will stop bossing and think she is listening. So... better to listen.” Another, who compared the school HM to god saying “Our HM is *devaranthavru* (like God)... we are all here like a family”, drew attention to the psychological relief experienced by having a supportive and mentoring school head.

Differences of Younger and Older Beginning Teachers

There were differences in nature of

expectations of younger beginner teachers between 17 and 25 years, and the older women beginners who had joined teaching after a gap of five to ten years of having completed their initial teacher training, and currently settled in family life. The younger teachers said they expected their senior teachers to be role models. But the absence of peer support, the sight of seniors who argued and quarrelled among themselves or those who resorted to discrimination based on merit and experience in the school had left them disappointed. Older beginner teachers on the other hand expected professional academic support. They spoke more often of cooperation and 'adjustment' with senior colleagues. Their belief was that positive interaction and communication to share knowledge without prejudices would automatically lead to learning. They also spoke more often of trustworthy companionship in whom they could confide their professional problems and successes.

"Colleagues must be able to share their "kashTa-sukha"(to confide) without any hesitation. What I mean by kashTa-sukha it is not their family issues which I have seen teachers do all the time in our school. Not that. As soon as they come inside school, to the extent possible, they must speak only about school matters during working hours."(NT_21)

Academically, the older beginner teachers expected the colleagues to discuss on how to perform teaching tasks in a better way to achieve desired results, intellectual discussion and cross learning across subjects rather than demanding to teach only one subject or class of their choice all through their career. On the same lines of thought a few teachers suggested the need for friendly environment during training sessions where they could open up without any sort of fear with all including senior officials.

"For a teacher, good relation with children alone is not enough. We need to understand that our relation with colleagues, parents and community is important. Only then will we know their expectation. This can happen only after we are appointed. So I feel during in-service training this can be discussed I feel. One more thing I felt was during department training, if teachers are of our age, if we feel free we share freely. Instead if resource persons I think even CRP or BRP helps all teachers to speak freely it will be useful. But rarely senior teachers and junior teachers of other schools become so close that they can discuss freely".(NT_16)

Most of them wished that their colleagues were always open to receive innovative ideas from all quarters, try to implement novel strategies, and reflect upon it as a team to arrive at conclusions. A few of them said that, even if they do not believe in making changes in their practice they should not snub the ones who want to try and instead have to encourage and give them their full cooperation.

Differences of School Management Context

The nature of collegiality varied in government managed and privately management schools. In government schools, time for informal meeting with colleagues and visitors and leisure time to chat with colleagues even during working hours were common. As far as abiding by rules and regulations were concerned, the beginner teachers in government schools were aware that there would be no relaxation in terms of responsibility between beginners and veterans. Whatever was stated in the departmental rules, they had to remain updated and follow the rules. Soon after placements following recruitment, they were provided with a month long one time induction during which all the

government programs were introduced. However there were no specific academic inputs during induction. The beginner often sought non-academic support from colleagues on how to communicate with officers, visitors, parents and community, document in various registers and interpreting the message in department circulars.

In terms of collegiality the main differences they experienced seemed to be on account of the school leadership. On the encouraging side, some of the head teachers were themselves conscientious and role models. They guided the beginners based on their experience on a number of administrative and academic matters. These heads guided the beginning teachers on how to be responsible towards children's safety, unbiased to all children, impartial in the distribution of incentives and ways to reduce absenteeism. On the academic side, they had suggestions on how to meaningfully engage all classes when they had to substitute for absent teachers and on inculcating peer learning skills among children especially when they could not wait for the department to provide training at times when there were transfers across the levels – from lower primary to higher primary or vice versa. Some school heads supported beginners, narrating to them their own learning from the beginner stage to their current veteran stage. Some school heads according to beginner teachers demonstrated good practices by themselves being punctual, being considerate, transparent and supported teachers on a case to case basis in a democratic manner. In such schools the seniors volunteered to guide beginner teachers after making informal observation of the teacher or based on their experience about needs of beginner teachers.

“Teacher: Rama Miss, on her own she gave ideas.

Me: Didn't you ask her for help?
Teacher: No when she observed me, she gave the idea

Me: So she used to observe you. Is it?

Teacher: No not like sitting and watching. Generally while walking across my classroom she might have noticed. Simply whenever she saw me she used give ideas. She must have had 10-15 years' experience I think. All children liked her.”

On the discouraging side the head teachers and senior teachers in some schools promoted cliques. They isolated the beginner teachers, gossiped, quarreled amongst themselves, were corrupt and favoured some teachers and their delirict absence from work or covered for them during inspection. They, allowed teachers to eat, sleep, talk personal matters over mobile phones or chat with other teachers during class time, while children whiled away their learning time. They permitted their favourites to skip assembly, or come late, were unfair in allocating responsibilities, and expected BT to conform to traditional practices. The beginners who resisted these were considered treated as outcaste while those who adjusted had better chances of receiving similar favours.

Overall most private school teachers reported tight schedules and hardly free time to interact with colleagues. Either they had occasional, periodic staff meeting or very brief corridor talk. Every teacher said that they were supposed to follow the head teacher's instructions. In all the schools soon after their appointment they were assigned to one senior teacher or a supervisor to whom they had to report to. Beginners took help to clarify rules and regulations. In almost all schools each teacher was assigned one class per year and taught all subjects in lower primary and in higher primary they were assigned one subject per year to teach

in all sections and all classes. Rarely did teachers report seeking academic support. But they learnt other tasks such as marking attendance, recording in attendance register, marks register, writing report cards, contributing to various functions and programs, ways to interact with parent, etc. in school. The teachers who had brief experience of teaching in both private and government schools expressed to have experienced greater work satisfaction in private schools though government schools was favoured for providing them better salary and an assured job.

Informal Communities of Practice

One of the interesting observations during the course of this study was that in seven different situations, in spite of the absence of endorsed structures and institutions that promoted and fostered formal communities of practice, the beginner teachers had created for themselves their own informal communities and professional groups.

In one case teachers from a private school had difficulty to teach from the recently revised textbooks. They sought the support of teachers from the neighbourhood government school, who had undergone an inservice content enrichment training offered by the Block Resource Centre. Similar support was received by municipal corporation teachers from government school teachers to learn about CCE. The municipal corporation teachers shared that their training was inadequate when compared to the government school teachers and hence after school hours they visited the government school teachers. In a third instance, these were groups formed by beginner teachers from different schools who knew each other either because they were roommates living in the same paying guest house, or were commuting together by train or bus,

or were government teachers meeting each other in the cluster center to which their schools belonged. Such occasions they said that they used to interact with each to share their professional ideas, clarify about new circulars or orders, exchange resources or provide emotional support to each other. In one case, there was cooperation between beginning teachers belonging to two different schools run by the same management. The ones who were in the vernacular medium school benefited from Government trainings and they shared these experiences with their colleagues from the English medium school who did not receive these trainings. In turn the teachers from the English medium school provided the vernacular medium teachers with guidance on writing simple lesson plans and on teaching English. There was also an instance of government school teachers located in a peri-urban area, who received support and inputs from a religious missionary school particularly for sports, hygiene and safety.

From the two cases of particularly proactive beginning teachers' informally and self initiated professional activity was one in which they volunteered to teach each other's classes as a way of learning through cooperative teaching and observing each other. And the other of a community group formed by the alumni of a college who stayed in touch with each other and discussed challenges of their workplace and working with diverse learners and mutual motivation and support. The teacher in this group spoke of the support they received as this was a non judgmental group in which they could discuss their failures and struggles without any fear.

Discussion

By and large all beginner teachers were inducted informally into the routines

and practices of their new school by senior colleagues, and enabled to adapt to the organisations requirements. To a greater extent collegial support and time for collegial interactions were available to government school teachers. Private school teachers in contrast had little time or opportunity for such support and were largely left to figure things out on their own. Active school heads proactively support new teachers in their school, but in many cases, new teachers had to support. All beginner teachers expected and benefited from collegial support of seniors, but were also wary of negativity, of being made fun of, or being discouraged from trying out new things. Younger teachers were more anxious about these matters while older beginning teachers were more conscious of the need to be accepted by their colleagues. There were all conscious of benefitting from such support both emotionally as well as professionally. In addition to colleagues at school, they also formed collegial relationships with other teachers whom they met in spaces such as the guesthouses in which they lived together or while using public transport. The presence of other young/beginner teacher colleagues in the school made it easier for them to remain positive and handle dissonance.

When the beginner teachers had neither supportive seniors nor trustworthy peers, they have found initial stages of teaching to be quite challenging. The beginner teachers saw value in the support and guidance from seniors. The beginner teachers expected nurturing, respectful and enlightening kind of support. One of the teachers presented a comparative picture of a situation where a lone beginner had to learn the nuances of work in the new place while working with four veterans, with her own situation where with the exception of the head teacher rest of

others were beginners wondered that, “...suppose one or two were seniors here, may be either because of fear or imagining not doing something we would have not been this free. But all of us were new, all young.”(NT_16)

In NT_016’s situation where all were beginners, the head teacher had managed to lead the young teachers to build a team. In situations where there were lone beginners, the comfort with which they established rapport with other colleagues to learn nuances of the profession depended on multiple factors- beginner teacher’s level of readiness to seek support themselves, their ability to convince experienced teachers, openness of veterans to accept the beginner into their group and so on.

The transition from being a student to facilitators as teachers has also been a challenge for the beginner teachers. My observation of the teacher educators has shown that the teacher educators treat the student teachers as children. Beginner teachers have not experienced using their autonomy and discretion in making choices, taking decisions on their own. They are trained to be conformers, obedient and accept orders without questioning. Such an attitude of ‘cultural subordination’ is considered as ‘being obedient’ by most beginners and several senior teachers.

So beginner teachers who never experienced “being colleagues” with senior teachers who are older and more experienced than themselves tended to look upon senior colleagues as guides and mentors who need to instruct them which they are ready to obey. These same beginner teachers after two or three years also felt seniors to be a nuisance and interfering in their autonomy.

As long as beginner teachers conformed to the extant practice in school there were no problems. In places

where beginners had tried to try out their unconventional understanding of pedagogy, cases of tension between the beginners and the veterans were reported. The following excerpt from the narrations of veterans and the beginner teacher on the same day of my school visit illustrates the nature of such tensions. Senior teachers too spoke about dissonance in beliefs and practices and their apprehensions regarding adding novel things to their established teaching. In the episode that follows, the contrasting views of senior and new teachers on the same issue were heard, regarding the introduction of child-centric, interactive classrooms:

Senior teacher: *“these youngsters (to mean the beginner teacher) do not know how to keep a distance between a teacher and a student...they behave like friends. One fine day these children, that too from the kind of background they come from, will sit on his head that’s all. Teacher should behave like a teacher with children... In his class I wonder how they will understand. Everyone talks, talks, talks. He has no idea of class control... What is shikshaNa? shikshaNa means to teach Shistu (discipline) ... including teaching about how to behave with whom. Here if this boy allows all their monkey tricks then?? ...It seems in D.Ed they have taught him the same...As it is teachers are no longer respected, and if this boy allows them to sit on his head, don’t know what will happen”.* (Senior teacher)

Beginner Teacher: *“They (senior teachers) advise me not to be close with children. Here teachers come into my class and shout at the children in my class and say, “Keep quiet, don’t you know that he is your teacher? Learn to give respect to teacher”.* But as soon as they leave, children say, *“Sir they never allow us to speak. Please let us speak at least in your class”.* This beginner

teacher elaborated on the nature of speech that he encourages in his class. *“...speak means we don’t speak nonsense. It is just that I don’t read and explain like others. What we do is without using text book, we discuss concepts, we do many activities and then write...so it might seem noisy to senior teachers”.* (Beginner Teacher)

The senior teacher favoured a more culturally rooted notion of learning involving discipline/disciplining and was against free and unfettered talk of children. She favoured keeping a distance between teachers and children. Neither of these were favoured by the younger teacher who seemed to value both talk and the closeness with children. There was little chance of any support to this BT from the seniors in that school.

Conclusion

Collegiality is neither a new idea, a new concept nor a new phenomenon. It is a new realization to consciously nurture it in a professional manner especially in the school as an organization. The study revealed that the concept of collegiality takes different forms, meanings and the kind of support sought in different school contexts and is dependent on variables such as professional support, personal and emotional needs, prior experience, gender. Even the ease with which beginner teachers make a choice of personnel for support varies across contexts and circumstances whether they choose peers, contemporary colleagues, senior veterans, the school head or someone from the management. All these influence the personal and professional factors that impact teacher development.

The dominant motif found in Indian research literature is of isolated image of teacher for providing the support mechanisms for individual teacher or at the most improving school

leadership and management. It follows from the beginner teacher's reports in this study that collegiality is an inevitable requirement for continuous professional development of teachers. In the absence of its formal practice, beginner teachers anxiously seek collegiality in an informal manner. While informal collegiality is commendable, in the absence of mutual consent among colleagues, this study has revealed how beginners learn to conform to the situation as a survival mechanism. Such an attitude poses serious threat to introduction of novelty and innovation in pedagogic practices. As a phenomenon, collegiality needs to be inculcated in every school to reap the benefits of seamless blending of experiential knowledge of the veterans and the

novel aspirations of the beginners. Collegiality in this sense would counter the ill effects of irrational competition among colleagues and replace it with rational team spirit and collaboration across all levels of an organization so that a culture of collegiality and a CoP is established. The beginner teachers will then get opportunity to learn the nuances of the profession in an anxiety free atmosphere. We conclude with a quote by one of the beginner teachers, who said,

"...in teaching I feel there should not be who teaches better than others... everyone will have to teach well... (It is) not a secret about what and how they do or we do... I think we should share ideas on what works and what does not"(NT_012)

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