



CHAPTER 15

Pastoral Care Teaching: A Case Story Vignette

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INTRODUCTION

To this point, much of this volume has provided the macro view about teacher education in South Asia. We have surveyed teacher education programs in Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The volume has explored a number of themes related to teacher education including: active learning, continuous professional development (CPD), outcome-based education (OBE), gender gap, inclusive education, public versus private teacher education, technology-enabled reflective practice, and transformative problem-posing. One of the objectives of our *South Asia Education Policy, Research and Practice* book series

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is to capture how macro level themes are situated within South Asian context. Yet, another objective of our book series is to personify the themes at a microlevel. The purpose of this penultimate chapter of this volume is to capture the voice of a practitioner in the region, Ashwathi Muraleedharan.

Ashwathi lives in Delhi and has a background in social work and special education. In her case story vignette, she argues for an effective and affective teacher education. Ashwathi employs the metaphor of “pastoral care” to examine and explain how teaching is equal parts engagement, nurturing, and the provocation of guiding learners in meeting challenging learning goals. Please enjoy Ashwathi’s story:

A CASE STORY BY ASHWATHI MURALEEDHARAN

Coming from a background where education has always been considered an utmost priority, I wanted to get into teaching at some point in life. Besides being an organic development, it was a decision that has shaped my worldview about teaching and teaching students who need me more than I need them. Having done a Masters in Social Work and choosing to do Social Work in Education as one of my electives, it was a humongous task to maintain the delicate balance between being a social worker and a teacher at the same time. There are quite a few upsides to the combination, the most important one being that training in social work gave me a window to understand my kids with special educational needs on a much more humane level. For those reasons, I felt attuned to the concept of pastoral care.

PASTORAL CARE: TEACHING EFFECTIVELY AND AFFECTIVELY

On one of the professional development days in school, our principal introduced the term “*pastoral care*” to us. And upon reading, I found that along with providing effective education, it is important to give an affective education as well. The concept involves an active engagement from the teacher and leans heavily toward the idea of nurturing and creating a safe space for the students to grow into confident and emotionally sound individuals. It also identifies the need for setting feasible yet challenging goals for them, which in no way undermines their capabilities as an individual or a student.

As a middle school Hindi teacher in an international school in Mumbai, teaching kids with a poor foundation in the language was a difficult task. After analyzing the records, I found that there were a significant number of students who displayed a below average performance in the subject and most turned out to be students with special educational needs, mostly with specific learning disabilities. Being someone with a stuttering disorder that took years of therapy, and self-monitoring (and embarrassing communication-related anecdotes that used to make me feel worthless on occasions), I engendered a strong connection with these students. So, I handpicked the kids for my Hindi group and sensed that I owed it to them for their academic and emotional achievements.

PLAN OF ACTION: INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS AND INCLUSIVE LESSON PLANNING

I sat with the concerned parents and my colleagues and came up with a differentiated unit plan-cum-assessment pattern for the kids. I struggled to convince fellow teachers about the importance of such a plan and the discussions often resulted in statements like “*itna mehnat kyu karr rahi ho?*” (Why do you want to put so much effort?) or “*waise bhi inn baccho ko kuch samajh nahi aane wala*” (anyway, these kids will not understand anything). But after some serious altercations and my stubborn nature when it relates to inclusive practices, my senior Hindi teachers caved in and gave me the liberty to create plans and assess them differently from the norm. I performed scaffolded and differentiated lesson planning; level-wise rubric-scoring for assessments; and provided detailed feedback for each of my students at the end of each activity and test. A challenge that loomed over such a system was my kids being treated like “students with special needs” by other students. Overcoming this hurdle can be quite stressful, especially if you are dealing with hormonal teenagers! So, I decided to cut down my hour-long lunchtime and spend half an hour everyday with my students during which I performed remedial teaching and bonded with them. I attempted to troubleshoot any concerns they had regarding academics, social adaptability, and emotional adjustments. This informal time was critical for me to know their progress and their needs inside and outside the classroom.

To boost the morale of my students, I curated activities supported by Howard Gardner’s (2011) Multiple Intelligence Theory. After

identifying the forte and aptitudes of all of my students, we began doing Hindi *naatak* (plays), read aloud sessions, vine videos on social issues—which the kids loved—and creating Hindi board games. Additionally, the students of other classes were asked to join and play. It also set my kids apart from the rest as it focused on extracting the maximum potential of each and every student in my group. As a result, I received fewer behavioral concerns as the kids were continuously engaged in meaningful activities and the academic results of my group were marginally higher than what it was earlier. Luckily for me, my fellow teachers also saw the effort that I was making and proactively helped me in creating a differentiated Hindi curriculum that now serves as our guiding manual for inclusive lesson planning.

Arun's story. Educators often grapple with whether they should be nurturers and be compassionate or maintain a stoic facade so that kids take them seriously. In the case of Arun, I realized the importance of teachers being caregivers when he walked into my Grade 6 classroom on August 8, 2016. According to his previous teachers, Arun was an aggressive, troubled kid with a tendency to bully others verbally and physically. The teachers and principal had a tough time handling the frequent complaints against him. He was considered to be the “kid who must be carefully dealt with”. After the transition to middle school, the first few days with Arun were breezy as students tend to have a generally quiet demeanor. Needless to say, I found him to be a charming, docile boy with no troubling attributes. Problems began once he settled in and I began receiving calls with complaints about him for having poked someone in the face with a fork during lunch break, getting into fistfights with his peers, having difficulty in reading and writing, and distracting the class after a task had been assigned. The list grew on and on.

In a society where people find it easier to detach themselves from the problems around them, I wanted to involve myself instead. After speaking to his parents, I realized I might be working with him the wrong way. Perhaps I was not putting myself in his shoes? And so that is what I did. Arun did not misbehave because he was a bad student. He engaged in challenging ways because we failed to observe that he struggled with reading. He was struggling with dyslexia and misbehaved with his peers because he perceived his abilities as inadequate. Arun distracted the class because the instruction processing speed was not differentiated for his understanding, and that is when I changed my approach toward him. I started observing that he was gifted at construction so I requested him

to build a makeshift library for our classroom. It was bittersweet to observe his confused expression which skipped from shock to passive acceptance, finally resting at silent pride. He spammed my WhatsApp with library designs that evening. The following evenings were all about updates on how the construction could be executed. That boy was thorough!

During the project which lasted almost two weeks, the teachers viewed a different side of him. They were no longer annoyed with him! On the contrary, they were pleased to see his proactivity in class and demonstrated behavioral improvement. I took extra classes with him during my lunch break where we engaged in scaffolded reading and made our way toward higher-order critical thinking tasks. I started acknowledging his meaningful achievements, exclaiming shout-outs in the online class forum, sending positive emails to his parents, etc. That is when I noticed he appreciated my work. Arun did not need me to tell him he was misbehaving. He needed me to give him specific feedback on tasks performed well and ones he could do well so that he could be productive. I ended up making him the set design head for my class theater production for which he practically designed and constructed every little piece of furniture himself and taught his small group how to aesthetically place each prop on the stage. Interestingly, his results in the fourth quarter showed better effort grades and fairly solid academic grades. Today, Arun is in Grade 9. I do not teach him anymore but I hear that he has showed consistent improvement in his behavior and academic performance since school commenced.

ALL IT TAKES IS A LITTLE BIT OF FAITH

There was a teacher who guided me and acted as my light when I was struggling immensely in school with my stuttering disorder. She raised the bar for me academically and made sure I never quit. Her unflinching faith in me often surprised me and the reason I chose teaching was because of her. I wanted to have the same faith in my kids that she had in me. And that is why I feel it is important for teachers to offer respect and admiration for every little thing that the kids do. We need to be in constant awe of them. As teachers, we often forget that we are pursuing the profession for the kids, to make them better people, which in turn makes us better people. And teachers need to continue to improve until they find that one child who knows you trust him/her unconditionally.

And that is what Arun was to me, like I was to my teacher. He made me a better person and made me see it is important to overlook the little quirks and still believe in the innate goodness in someone. He made me see that having even the tiniest bit of faith can bring about change. Being effective teachers does not necessarily mean that you do the right things at the right time. It means you do the right things when no one else does.

REFERENCE

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