Professional Development Workshop for College Faculty

Government Degree College, Bemina, Srinagar
May 8, 2013

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Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
Foundation for Universal Responsibility
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This report is based on the proceedings of a Roundtable workshop that was organized in Srinagar on May 8, 2013. It was part the Hum Kadam: Education for Peace initiative of Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) and its partner the Foundation for Academic Excellence and Access (FAEA). We thank the Board members of FAEA for their unwavering support and Prof. V. R. Mehta for mentoring the initiative.

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Shilpi Shabita
Background

As part of the *Hum Kadam*: Education for Peace initiative, WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) organized a consultative roundtable in New Delhi in January 2013 on ‘Equity, Access and Quality in Education: Challenges before Jammu and Kashmir’ which brought together experts from the field of education. At this roundtable, several senior educationists shared the need for professional development for teachers in Jammu and Kashmir.

To this end, WISCOMP organized a *Professional Development Workshop for College Faculty* in Srinagar on May 8, 2013, in collaboration with FAEA (Foundation for Academic Excellence and Access). Prof. Madan Mohan Pant, Founder and Mentor at a new age education corporate Planet EDU, Gurgaon, facilitated this interactive workshop which brought together 30 faculty members teaching different disciplines at higher educational institutions in Srinagar. The purpose of the workshop was to equip teachers with innovative pedagogic skills and disseminate information about emerging technological tools that enhance the quality of teaching-learning experience.
Workshop Proceedings

At the outset of the session, Pant foregrounded interactive learning as his primary methodology and elicited comments and questions from the educators.

Raising a concern commonly experienced by most educators in Kashmir, a participant observed that in the conflict ridden society of Kashmir, teachers had the added responsibility of teaching young people who were disillusioned and agitated by the constant turmoil. This environment had molded a general attitude of defiance towards authority and often triggered indiscipline and unruly behavior in the youth. Their lack of respect for classroom rules laid down by teachers made interaction between students and teachers very difficult and often times conflicting. Several participants concurred with him and added that ‘disruptive’ energies emanating from the protracted conflict had permeated the educational space and negatively influenced the learning environment in Srinagar. They further stressed that ‘no fear of authority and absence of respect’ in young students had become rampant in the Valley. In this context, the participants inquired: ‘what strategies should teachers employ to deal with students?’

Given this backdrop, it becomes critical to acknowledge that in contexts marred by protracted violence, many important sectors contributing to human development are often times neglected and adversely affected. In the intractable conflict of J and K, the education system has become a casualty, pushing young students and their needs to the margins. In a culture vitiated by militarization, divisive politics, mistrust and neglect, schools and colleges struggle to respond to the new challenges posed by violent articulation of grievance and injustice. In such contexts, it becomes imperative for educators to focus on the needs of the students and to understand the causes triggering certain behaviors in them, rather than reprimand them. It also becomes crucial to make learning rooted in the lived social reality of the young people so that it builds their capacity to deal with the existing challenges.

Responding to the concerns raised by the educators, Pant cautioned them against looking for simplistic solutions and encouraged them to
delve deeper into the issue. He observed that in traditional societies, a monarch was vested with supreme authority and knowledge, and dictated over his subjects. However, as society evolved, it moved from ‘status to contract’ which is rooted in a particular notion of equality and partnership. We are witnessing similar changes in education today, he stressed. We should not seek to instill fear in or coerce students into respecting us; rather we should aid and inspire them on their exploratory journey of learning. To this end, he noted, prescriptive learning should make way for experiential and conversational forms of learning.

This elicitive approach to education, Pant stated, views learners as resources and not passive recipients, and begins by addressing key questions like: ‘What do students want? What are their needs and apprehensions? What are their interests and abilities?’ Thus, he underscored the importance of forms of teaching-learning that depart from rigid, authoritarian practices and expectations by teachers and instead stimulate continuous dialogue between teachers and students. This student-centric education, he emphasized, would serve as an effective medium to understand and deal with young students in the troubled context of J and K, specifically.

While recognizing the role of students as active agents in the process of knowledge construction as opposed to passive recipients of information, some participants shared that they often failed to elicit active participation from students in the classroom. A large majority of teachers felt discouraged by the lack of curiosity and culture of silence which prevails in most classrooms in Srinagar. To address this concern, some educators inquired: ‘How do we encourage students to actively engage in classroom discussions and ask questions?’ ‘What is the importance of asking questions?’

Pant responded to their queries with an acknowledgment of the fact that unfortunately our culture has come to systematically train us into becoming mute followers of authority and not question ideas and assumptions of those considered superior in the social hierarchy. This tendency to dissuade young minds from raising questions is further reinforced within the classroom space by educators who bear authoritarian mindsets and use teaching methods that destroy creativity and exploration. Foregrounding the necessity of being inquisitive, Pant explained that until several decades ago, there were finite sources of
knowledge, where only a few learned scholars knew the answers and everybody else followed them. In such times, asking questions was considered a waste of time, except when clarifications were desired from those considered knowledgeable. However, with knowledge explosion and world-wide accessibility to information, several new problems have emerged to which definite answers have not been found. Hence, a questioning mind becomes very important and is the first step in the process of finding solutions and hence learning, Pant contended.

Having underscored the significance of asking questions, he shared with the participants some techniques to cultivate curiosity in students. He introduced the concept of Flipped Classroom to the participants which inverts traditional teaching methods by using educational technology to influence the learning environment. Pant explained that in the Flipped Classroom model, teachers provide students selective material (free video tutorials and articles) to study at home, and allow them time to think critically into the topic and come prepared with questions to the classroom; to resolve their doubts the following day. He noted that this approach also leaves more time for learning through creative activities in school. Consequently, a critical and inquisitive temperament to ask questions gradually gets nourished in young students.

At this point, several participants interjected to share their apprehensions about excessive use of technology in the teaching-learning process. Some educators were wary that active use of internet by young students might ‘distract and deviate’ them from the path of learning, rather than enhance their educational experience. Very often, they stated, adolescents get addicted to internet surfing and squander away precious time in non-academic pursuits. Several other participants expressed concern over teachers becoming irrelevant with the growing use of technology. One participant anxiously inquired: ‘Will technology replace us—the teachers?’ Thus, the educators were skeptical about experimenting with technological aids in the teaching-learning process.

Allaying the concerns of the participants, Pant clarified that instead of teachers becoming marginalized, rapid use of technology in education actually greatly augments the role of teachers. He cautioned the
participants against holding a constricted view of a teacher as merely disseminating information in a classroom. Pant explained that the tangible presence of a teacher and existence of a concrete classroom will gradually be eliminated, with the ushering in of web-based teaching-learning avenues. However, the role of a teacher as mentor, coach, assessor, counselor, facilitator and guide will increase exponentially in the wake of constantly emerging learning opportunities.

Pant further explained that the knowledge-content for lessons will be drawn from educational websites, while teachers will facilitate the process of learning with their guidance and expertise. He also shared with the participants that the ‘Rockstar’ teacher of today teaches in cyber space (using e-mail, World Wide Web and internet) to life-long learners from across the globe and impacts thousands in a single cohort and millions over a lifetime. Thus, he encouraged the use of technological aids in teaching and assured that teachers will continue to play a pivotal role in education.

Proceeding further, Pant responded to concerns regarding technology serving as a distraction in the course of learning for students. He urged the workshop participants to introspect and understand that whenever children have access to knowledge which is more than what we have (as adults or teachers), we tend to have a problem with it. This, he noted, ensues from the fact that authoritarian mindsets thrive on hierarchy, and easy access to knowledge for all threatens our power, thereby making us insecure and suspicious. If as teachers we want our students to prosper and do better than us, we must consciously grow out of such mindsets, Pant asserted. He shared that if teachers desired progression of knowledge and innovative thinking in children, technology was one of the greatest and most creative sources of learning in contemporary era. To reap maximum benefits, Pant advised that parents must supervise the child’s usage of internet at home, and in school, teachers should encourage discussions on the topics explored by the student.

Some other concerns often experienced by educators across different contexts were also highlighted by the participants. One participant expressed the need for inclusive teaching-learning methodologies which holistically integrate students with different needs. She inquired: ‘What methods can ensure that no student gets left behind in the
classroom?’ Pant acknowledged that traditional models of education have been very exclusionary and hierarchical in nature, focusing solely on scholastic achievement. Such models assign a similar test to everyone, and reward the toppers while humiliating any failures. In contrast to this, Pant advocated moving towards achieving mastery learning\textsuperscript{1} by everybody. Mastery learning focuses on learning for everyone by drawing on the needs and internal resources of each student and encourages personalized learning.

Further elucidating this student-centered model of education, Pant underscored the need to study the learner’s profile and be sensitive to the context she/he is coming from. ‘One of your students could be coming from a family of Nobel laureates with a rich and scholarly household environment, while another student’s father could be charged with domestic violence. How can you ignore the differing psychological states and needs of these two students?’ Pant asked. Thus, he underscored that students vary in cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic status, gender, motivation, ability, disability, use of language, types of intelligence, personal interest, et al. and teachers must be conscious of these parameters as they are planning the curriculum. By acknowledging varied learning needs, teachers can develop differentiated and personalized instructions so that all children in the classroom can learn effectively and inclusively.

Pant further prodded the participants to share more problems experienced by them in their profession. A participant, who taught English to students, highlighted that majority of youth in Srinagar found it difficult to master English, especially correct pronunciation. This, she noted, adversely impacts the confidence level and self-esteem of students and also reduces their employability in the globalized world where proficiency in English

\textsuperscript{1} Mastery learning, a term coined by American educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom in 1971, focuses on learning for everyone by drawing on the needs and internal resources of each student and encourages personalized and differentiated learning. In contrast to conventional instructions, students are helped to master each learning unit before proceeding to a more advanced learning task. This school of thought presumes all students can learn if they are provided with appropriate learning conditions. Students may take different amounts of time, efforts, modes of learning, but eventually they would all have achieved what they set out to learn.
is viewed as a necessary qualification. To this end she asked: **‘How do I improve the proficiency in English language of my students?’**

Responding to this concern, Pant explained that a regular English teacher at the college level does not have to condense and summarize all the basic concepts of a traditional English course learnt in the early years of school education in one year. What is needed instead is a systematic intervention to remove only the errors that the student makes. For example, he explained that if a child’s usage of articles and singular/plural forms of words is alright, you do not have to waste precious time reiterating those concepts and instead focus on his/her weak areas. To this end, teachers must give assignments to students, observe the pattern of weaknesses in their responses, and build a better and focused understanding of only those areas.

Pant further shared with the participants that Europe has created a guideline used to determine achievements of learners of foreign languages in the areas of writing, reading, speaking and listening through Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. As a part of its framework, diagnostic tests divide the student body
into several groups based on their language ability. Accordingly, Pant noted that teachers adapt their methods of teaching and assessing. This allows faster assimilation of the focused teaching being delivered and quick progression of knowledge in the students, raising their English language ability systematically and effectively over a period of time. In this process, Pant emphasized, the use of technology by students to understand certain concepts and resolve queries in English facilitates the process of gaining proficiency in the language.

At the end of the session, Pant recapitulated the concerns raised by participants which ranged from addressing behavioral problems in young Kashmiri students to eliciting active participation and questions from students, skepticism towards using technological aids in the teaching-learning process, addressing low levels of English proficiency in students and methodologies for inclusive learning. Having generated discussions on these issues and offered solutions to the participants, Pant concluded with the thought that the ultimate benchmark to judge a teacher is to gauge to what extent ‘learning has happened’ in the students. He underscored that by maximizing students’ potential and ‘awakening the learner within them’, teachers will continue to play a pivotal role in the sphere of education.
Programme

Date: March 11, 2013 (Monday)

Venue: Government Degree College, Bemina

Time: 1: 30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Facilitator: Prof. M.M. Pant

Participants: 30 Faculty members from Colleges in Srinagar

Objectives:

• Avenues for Improving IT skills

• Enhancing communication skills

• Improving pedagogic skills

Structure:

• Technologies that will impact over the next 5 years

• Why Tablets and Smartphones are ready for the Classroom?

• The new pedagogy: OERs, MOOCs and Learning Analytics

• Skills that a 21st Century Teacher must have

• Becoming a RockStar Teacher
Profile of the Facilitator

**Prof. M.M. Pant** is an internationally renowned expert specializing in pedagogy, technology and the development of tools and curricula for 21st century education. He has been known for developing working models that enhance pedagogy using the latest available technologies. He is especially noted for his efforts in leveraging social media for improving learning and bringing the mobile and hand holds into the classroom. Prof. Pant’s current work and interests revolve around the development, delivery and promotion of educational products, processes and services that cater for the needs and interests of future learners, a framework that is named “**Learning 221: Learning for the 2nd Decade of the 21st Century**”. His past roles include being the Former Pro-Vice Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and being on the Faculty of IIT, Kanpur and MLNR Engineering College; and Faculty as well as Visiting Professor, University of Western Ontario, Canada. He has been a Visiting Scientist at European research centers in Italy, England, Germany and Sweden. Prof. Pant is the founder of the LMP Education Trust, an organization that promotes new age learning and supports underprivileged learners.
Names of Participants

Dr. Munehah Khan is a teacher at the Department of English in the Islamic University of Science and Technology, Kashmir.

Dr. Abid Shalla is a teacher at the Department of Civil Engineering in the Islamic University of Science and Technology, Kashmir.

Dr. Peer Bilal is a teacher at the Department of Mathematics in the Islamic University of Science and Technology, Kashmir.

Dr. Afroze Bisati is a teacher at the Department of Islamic Studies in the Islamic University of Science and Technology.

Ruheela Hassan is a teacher at the Department of Journalism in the Islamic University of Science and technology, Kashmir.

Aeraz Mushtaq is a teacher at the Kashmir Creative Education Foundation.

Shabnam is a teacher at the Kashmir Creative Education Foundation.

Shaista Rasool is a teacher at the Kashmir Creative Education Foundation.

Humiria is a teacher at the Kashmir Creative Education Foundation.

Aejaz Manzoor is a teacher at the Kashmir Creative Education Foundation.

Ruqaya Jabeen is a teacher at Kashmir Creative Education Foundation.

Farhat Nazish is a teacher at the Kashmir Creative Education Foundation.

Mansha Ashraf is teacher at the B.Ed Department in the Government College of Education.
Gousiya Khan is a teacher at the B.Ed Department in the Government College of Education.

Sumaira Mushtaq is a teacher at the B.Ed Department in the Government College of Education.

Drakshan Khalid is a teacher at the B.Ed Department in the Government College of Education.

Yasmeen Khan is an Associate Professor of Home Science at the Government Women’s College, M.A Road.

Kounsar Parveen is a teacher at Government Women’s College, M.A Road.

Nighat is a teacher at the Government Women’s College, M.A Road.

Prof. Aftab teaches at Government Degree College, Bemina.

Prof. Aijaz is a teacher at the Economics Department in the Government Degree College, Bemina.

Prof. Shafaak is the Head of the Urdu Department at the Government Degree College, Bemina.

Prof. Kurshid Ahmad Mir teaches at the Statistic Department in Government Degree College, Bemina.

Dr. Tasmia Mohi teaches at the Arabic Department in the Government Degree College, Bemina.

Dr. Sheikh Aijaz Bashir teaches at the Electronic Department in the Government Degree College, Bemina.

Prof. S.A Makhdoomi teaches at the Commerce Department in the Government Degree College, Bemina.

Prof. Aijaz Ahmad Mir teaches at the Government Degree College, Bemina.
Dr. Mohd. Ashraf Malla is a teacher at the Commerce Department in the Government Degree College, Bemina.

Prof. Izhar teaches at the government Degree College, Bemina.

Shabeena Kuttay teaches at the Government Degree College, Bemina.