Original Research Paper Education

BAREFOOT COUNSELLORS - THE NEED OF THE HOUR

J. M. Maheswari M.Sc., M.Phil., M.Ed., NET(Edn.) Co-ordinator and Teacher (Psychology), Yuvabharathi Public School, Coimbatore-641108.

KEYWORDS :

Having been an Assistant Professor in Education and having taught Educational Psychology at B.Ed. level, sometimes the author gets weird calls from her yesteryear students who are now working as teachers in various schools. They discuss issues ranging staff room bullying to maladjusted children who pose a problem in the daily academic transactions.

Though not a qualified counsellor or a psychologist the investigator tries her level best to answer their queries regarding the problems they face with maladjusted students in their respective classrooms/schools based on the experience she had gained through observation during her stint as a teacher. From her suggestions some get a different perspective to their problems and others see a chance to show empathy towards that particular child. When reflecting on these calls, it dawned on her that almost every teacher has had problem children in his/her classroom. The only difference is the sympathy /empathy they showed towards the child in question varied. They either chose to take note of the problem and pondered or just ignored the child with a cold heart. Those who took notice looked for a remedy like ringing up the psychology teacher at their Alma mater.

According to the author, almost all the teachers have an apprehension that handling problem children would be like opening Pandora's Box. The flip side of it is that they feel hapless and inadequate when it comes to address emotional problems of the children. Blessed are the CBSE schools where they have qualified counsellors to check these problems. They too are taxed as they have to look in to the problem children of the whole school. They neither get the fullest support from the system and colleagues nor the parents. They have few chances to interact with the students frequently or observe them in person in the class room. The buck is passed from the school to the home and vice versa.

Every academic year we read stray incidents of corporal punishments, suicides due to failure in exams, murdering of the teachers/professors by the students due to hostile student-teacher relationship. There is other equally disturbing news stemming from maladjustment problems of the students at home too. In this regard, the Government of Tamilnadu issued a circular that every school should recruit teachers who have completed B.Ed.

The syllabus of the Educational Psychology paper in the B.Ed. course covers topics on psychology methods, growth and development, learning, intelligence, mental health and adjustment problems, personality, guidance and counseling at cognitive level only. At the most, they have experiments on attention, creativity, personality etc. and a case study record. In some universities, they have action research records which are completed with bland uneventful report writing on "Correcting illegible hand writing to nail biting habits". Needless to say we cannot expect a Midas touch from the teacher trainee who spends mere 40 days at the practice teaching school as a stranger. When the trainees come out as full-fledged teachers, they too are cue less regarding the problem children.

This being a matter of concern, something has to be done to revamp this system and break this vicious cycle. The teacher trainees should become more sensitive to the adjustment problems of the students. On discussing the same, they should be enlightened with various adjustment problems ranging from poor socio-economic background of the parents to single parentage, from classroom bullying to partiality shown by the teachers and the like. The author wouldn't say that this will bring a sea change in their attitude. I reiterate that these will only make the teaching society recognise and acknowledge the problems which may or may not serve as the first step of addressing the problem. But the need of the hour is taking the first step towards finding solutions.

It is not unknown to us that a solution is found around the place where the problem originates. We cannot expect the parents to know /learn psychology and take the necessary steps to address their ward's problem. But we can give a magic wand in teacher's hand to tend his/her flock.

In mainland China there was a term once used for country health-aides – Barefoot doctors-who were neither barefoot nor doctors. Actually they were farmers who received minimal basic medical and paramedical training and worked in rural villages bringing largely preventive health care services to the rural areas in the time when they had one doctor for every 10,000 people. On the eve of Cultural Revolution in 1944 these barefoot doctors did yeoman's service to the society in a large scale. The big idea is if every teacher-every single teacher becomes a 'barefoot counsellor', they can wield their magic wand. They say that a teacher's influence continues till eternity. If every teacher is trained to be a 'barefoot counsellor' i.e., with a little hands-on training in counselling and supporting services, and a Diploma in the same, we can go a long way.

The entire system has to change-right from the policy makers to the stake holders-everyone should work in tandem to make this possible. When I want to see the change, I should be the change I want to see. As the first step, teacher educators at Education colleges should qualify themselves as counselors. Universities should introduce courses in Counselling Psychology that are tailor made for educational institutions. With these changes, it should be mandatory for the teacher trainees to do certificate courses in School Counselling Psychology while they do B.Ed. (This may be offered by the same University under which they do B.Ed.).The practice of Counselling Psychology should be a continuum. Every year, the qualified teachers should be expected to submit reports on cases they attended to in their previous academic year along with their academic plan. In-service training can be given to the teachers who are in service. Progress in this regard will be slow but surely we can bring the problem under control though not solve it completely. Imagine a school where every teacher is a para-counsellor –Bare foot Counsellor-lending a helping hand to the full-fledged counsellor at the centre of the system. We may expect a harmonious network and amicable ambience at school which may be expected to extend to the parent-teacher relationship too.

The author has just pondered and presented her perspective from the side of teacher education. It's high time the policy makers in the Department of Education and universities and School Boards took notice.