4. IMPROVING COLLEGE TEACHING : EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Students learn from the day they are born. They learn various things at various stages. Their learning starts by recognising people, understanding signs, letters, words, language etc. Learning for students is at every stage when the child is infant, when he becomes a toddler, when he starts going to KG or School or College, when he takes up job, when he becomes father, when he retires. There are also different teachers at every stage. Sometimes it is mother, father, school teacher, friends, books etc. The continuous learning of the child attains more importance if he enters into profession of teaching because he is having the baton to create tomorrow's generation. He is entrusted with responsibility of creating better tomorrow.

Teaching in colleges is marked by historic inconsistency: though institutions constantly talk about its importance, they evaluate faculty primarily on the basis of scholarly achievements outside the classroom. Teaching is what almost every professor does, but it seems to suffer from that very commonness. It occupies the greatest amount of most professors' time, but rarely operates at the highest level of competence.

2. NEED FOR IMPROVING COLLEGE TEACHING:

Whether you are an adjunct instructor at a small community college or an associate professor at a large state university, you face the same challenge every time you walk into a classroom. How can you best teach the students in your class? How can you cover the class material in ways that both engage and challenge your students? Effective teaching methods for college include preparing for classes and connecting with students, as well as helping students engage in the learning process.

Some professors even regard teaching as so straightforward that it requires no special training. Others find it so personal and idiosyncratic that no training could ever meet its multiplicity of demands. But most of the teachers share the common belief that teachers are born and not made. In fact, the marginal truth in this belief also applies to any other profession than teaching. If there are born teachers, there are born physicians, born attorneys, and born engineers. Yet those who are naturally great at these professions invariably spend an unnatural amount of time acquiring skills and practicing in the era of toady's intense competition. Potentially great teachers become great teachers by the same route: through conditioning mind, acquiring skills, and practicing amidst intense competition.

Years ago more emphasis was on improving subject matter competence of teachers. To further such competence, sabbatical leaves and attendance at professional meetings/seminars

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were encouraged. This was for deeper understanding of the content of a discipline. Practically no attention was paid to how that understanding could best be imparted to *students further.* Today, this early approach has been turned around. Now the concept is based on three assumptions: first, the primary professional activity of most professors is teaching; second, instructional behaviour is not inborn, but rather a learned web of skills, attitudes, and goals; and third, faculty can be taught how to improve their classroom performance.

Demographics have changed the student population and their educational needs. The advent of educational technology has altered concepts about teaching and learning.

3. BARRIERS TO IMPROVEMENT OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODOLOGIES:

There are several reasons for having hazards in developing teaching competence:

A. First, there is a core belief embedded in many teachers that only someone knowledgeable in a discipline can talk meaningfully about it. They believe that general ideas about teaching don't easily translate into the discipline-specific terms and concepts that a teacher of a particular course can readily act upon (Angelo, 1994).

B. Second, some teachers fail to recognize the need for improvement in their own teaching. They think that they are already doing a good job in the classroom, a perception that reduces their interest in teaching improvement programs.

C. Third, the generic nature of many teaching improvement programs sometimes doesn't respond to a given teacher's highly personal and specific needs.

D. Fourth, many faculty have yet to be motivated to cross the threshold of a teaching improvement program. Disinterest more than opposition has kept them on the sidelines.

4. WHY IMPROVE TEACHING?

The reasons for improving teaching are found in four different yet interconnected areas. They are reasons related to: 1) Institutions of higher education, 2) Faculty members, 3) Students, and 4) Society and societal forces (Cole, 1978; Seldin, 1993).

A. INSTITUTIONAL REASONS

Today, there is lot of criticism and dissatisfaction with the faculty reward system. The typical system overvalues research and scholarship and undervalues teaching. The intensified competition for students today requires institutions strengthen their claim of offering outstanding teaching. Colleges where superior teaching is the rule rather than the exception, and where it is sufficiently recognized and rewarded, enjoy a distinct advantage in the competition for students. Hence, for institutions to make a distinctive mark in today's competitive world there need to improve teaching.

B. FACULTY MEMBERS

It is most unfortunate that so many teachers have never studied the history of the teaching profession, are unaware of the professional literature in teaching and learning, and have never systematically developed their own teaching philosophies. Teachers, like other professionals, should have a hungering need to update themselves, to engage in professional growth, to expand and deepen their understanding. They must be attentive to fresh educational techniques, student learning theories, and technological advances. Even the best teachers must continue learning in order to remain the best.

C. STUDENTS

College students today are quite a different mix than they were even a decade ago. Today,

there are more students from minority groups, older students, more students who are working full-time, more students with physical handicaps, and more students without a college going tradition in their families. And those who teach today's students must learn to gear instruction to a new classroom dynamic.

D. SOCIETY AND SOCIETAL FORCES

Lastly, we come to societal reasons for improving teaching. Telecommunications and computer technology have emerged as powerful forces in teaching and learning, especially when in the form of live, two-way video connections. With these connections, the classroom experience is essentially brought into the students' homes or offices. Clearly, distance education via electronic telecommunications technology poses special requirements for the professor who needs to design and deliver instructions in a manner very different from teaching a traditional class. If their teaching is to be effective, faculty delivering distance education courses using telecommunications require formal training in using the new technology.

5. APPROACHES TO IMPROVING TEACHING

Since college professors are hired with the expectation that they will offer effective instruction, providing them with an assistance to improve their instruction is just a logical extension of this expectation.

Just as students deserve guidance as learners, professors are entitled to helpful direction in their teaching. No matter how good a teacher is in the classroom or laboratory, he or she can improve. No matter how effective a particular teaching method, it can be enhanced.

The key ingredients of effective teaching are a deep knowledge of the subject, an ability to communicate with and motivate students, enthusiasm for the subject and for teaching, clarity of presentation, and fairness.

The focus has to be set on conducting programs which would emphasise on the following areas:

A. Programs to develop the repertoire of teaching skills needed by the professor to be effective for different kinds of students and different kinds of learning goals. Included are skills in using a variety of teaching methods, skills in the use of current technology, and discipline related skills in teaching particular concepts or materials.

B. Programs to build bridges between what the teacher knows and what the student is trying to grasp. Students differ in experience, ways of thinking, and motivation. For that reason, no single method of teaching is equally effective for all students. Skills are required to recognize where individual students are and how to reach them.

C. Programs to develop skills and understanding having to do with interpersonal relationships with students. Vital to most students' learning is the sense that the teacher cares about them. Research tells us that the most effective teachers are available to students and work closely with them both inside and outside the classroom

D. Programs to help teachers gain greater understanding of how their disciplines' organizational structures facilitate or inhibit student learning. Teachers must communicate differently to students who are taking introductory classes than they do to those in doctoral seminars. Learning how to communicate at the proper student level is a key component of effective teaching.

E. Programs to assist teachers to find greater intrinsic satisfaction in their teaching. Such enhanced motivation may be individually fostered or may arise from a campus

climate that inspires commitment and enthusiasm.

F. Programs that help teachers learn how to continue learning from their experiences as teachers. That means achieving skill in monitoring one's own effectiveness and adapting one's methods to a particular class and teaching situation.

G. Programs that encourage faculty to support, critique, and assist each other's teaching, that promote conversation about teaching, that asserts a sense of common purpose, and improve dispirited faculty to a greater commitment to teaching and learning.

H. Programs that provide feedback to instructors on their teaching performance. This approach is particularly advantageous to teachers needing more individual help than can be obtained from workshops. Feedback sources vary but generally used are student ratings, videotapes of performance, and classroom observers. Simply giving the diagnosis of classroom problems is not enough; instructors must also be given remedies for the problems. Teaching improvement is much more likely when the feedback is discussed with the teacher by a sympathetic and knowledgeable colleague or teaching improvement specialist who helps interpret results, provides encouragement, and suggests specific teaching-improvement strategies.

Because teachers may need different kind of help at different career stages, instructional improvement efforts must be geared to particular faculty needs. For example, new teachers fresh from graduate school will likely need help in lecturing, leading discussions, and constructing tests. Those at mid-career will likely value learning new skills, taking part in interdisciplinary work, and adopting new technologies in the classroom. Those in the latter stages of their careers will likely benefit from systematically reflecting on their teaching and becoming mentors for their more junior colleagues.

Effective teaching methods for college include preparing for classes and connecting with students, as well as helping students engage in the learning process. The same can be achieved in following manner:

6. CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL TEACHING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS:

The guidelines and strategies suggested in the literature are the product of a wealth of experimentation and experience. They are worth careful consideration. Institutions that are considering the introduction of a teaching improvement program or that are anxious to overcome resistance or ease sticking points in an existing program can consider them for betterment of the institution. The benchmarks of successful teaching improvement programs suggest the following:

● Tailor the program to the institution's culture.

● Design it for long-term impact but build it for short- term payoffs.

● Structure it with multiple approaches to meet individual preferences, schedules, and styles.

● Gain clear and visible support from top-level administrators and be sure this support is publicly articulated.

● Use advisory groups to design and manage the program.

● Start small and rely on pilot projects targeting specific needs or groups.

● Approach the improvement of teaching positively and offer opportunities for the solid contributors and the stars, not just those who have been ineffective.

- Enable teachers to participate as partners and let them exercise significant autonomy and initiative in shaping their development experiences.

- Enlist substantial numbers of faculty in planning and administering the program.

- Simulate faculty enthusiasm and a high rate of participation in various aspects of the program. See up a feedback mechanism to learn of tangible changes in courses, Beaching strategies and methodologies, or curricula resulting from the program.

- Challenge teachers to screech their individual efforts.

- Reduce resistance to the program not by fire or muscle buy by being willing to listen to others, explain and modify the program, and allow enough time for the program's acceptance.

- Recognize and reward excellence in Teaching.

7. THE KEY ROLE OF ADMINISTRATORS IN IMPROVING TEACHING

To bring substantive improvement to college teaching requires administration to play a bigger role. Campus climate will have to be moulded for granting equal status with scholarly research and publication. If institutions are going to embrace superior teachers and superior scholars equally, the initiative and guidance for such transformation falls to administrative leaders. The studies suggest that the following approaches used in combination, work well.

A. MAKING THE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT MORE RESPONSIVE TO TEACHING -

Each professor should be encouraged to see personal professorial goals in the classroom. Experimentation should be encouraged and viewed as a normal pare of professional growth. Teaching loads should be kept to reasonable limits so that the teacher has time to keep abreast of changes in the discipline.

B. PROVIDING THE PROPER SETTING AND TOOLS TO SUPPORT INSTRUCTION –

Unfortunately, in many colleges, classroom conditions—including light, heat, air, and noise—are not even paid attention today. Floors are not swept. Equipment doesn't work. Chalk and erasers are in shore supply. Failure to pay attention to these details suggests to instructors that teaching is considered a second-class activity by the institution.

C. REWARDING IMPROVED TEACHING-

Many teachers argue that the biggest roadblock to improved teaching is the reward system that pits teaching against research. Many institutions give lip service to the importance of teaching but then turn around and reward scholarly research and publication. Clearly the reward system needs to be reworked so that there is greater recognition of superior teaching. If teaching is not given a central role in hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions, faculty will correctly perceive that only research and publication are considered important.

8. CONCLUSION

Until recent years, the widespread institutional bias toward research and scholarship outside the classroom discouraged and rendered pointless efforts to improve teaching. Today, however, teaching is being taken more seriously. Mounting pressure from growing educational institutions and also from other quarters such as Government, faculty, and students have moved institutions to reconsider the importance of teaching and the role of the teacher in the classroom. Institutions have started re-examining their commitment to teaching and exploring ways to improve and reward it. Teaching is an art and not a science. Yet, every artist needs a grounding in technique before setting to work, and there is no artist-or teacher-who cannot improve his or her skill.

For some, the effort may possibly fail. But

the stakes for teaching and learning are high, and the effort is imperative.

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