

## TEACHING AS A PROFESSION IN INDIAN CONTEXT – A DEBATABLE ISSUE

**\*Dr. Ajit Mondal**

### **Abstract**

Teachers play a vital role in the improvement of the quality of education. In any assessment of the educational system, it is important to know whether there are enough teachers, who are not only well qualified to each different subject, but are also able to cope with the changing curriculum and growth in knowledge. It is a well recognized fact that the teachers are the powerful human lever for bringing changes in the lives of the students. They are the manipulators of situations in the classroom with expected competency for which they are treated as professionals like doctors, lawyers and architects. Generally, as highly qualified group of persons the teachers are expected to be accountable to the students, parents, teacher community and others for their performances. Naturally, as a group the teachers enjoy some professional rights, responsibilities, duties and to adhere to certain code of conducts and ethics. Apart from these, the teachers are to expand continuously their own repertoire of professional knowledge and skills undergoing continuous professional development. This article throws some reflections on the characteristics of teaching profession. The final section review reveals the important characteristics that could be ascribed to teaching in terms of profession in Indian context.

### **Introduction**

Whatever be the advancement in technology, the teacher is not replaceable. Teachers are the greatest assets of any education system. They stand in the interface of the transmission of knowledge, skills and values (Pandey, 2011). They are accepted as the backbone of education system. The National Policy of Education, 1986 accepted this influence of teachers in powerful words, “The status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of a society; it is said that no people can rise above the level of its teachers. Education when imparted to dynamic human resource leads the nation towards attaining greatness. True education implies to a state when economic prosperity is gained through value based social system and baton of glorious cultural heritage is passed to younger generation with honour and confidence (Bhargava & Paty (2010:7). This dream cannot be realised in absence of professionalism among teachers. On the other hand, Teacher quality and the strength of educator’s leadership are recognised as the greatest determinants of educational success. Quality teaching has a measurable impact on student outcomes.

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\*Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Education, Surendranath College for Women  
M.G. Road, Kolkatta-9, West Bengal

The teaching profession in India has much to celebrate. Our teachers and academic leaders are having a profound impact on our society (Imam, 2011:390). The Government and the community should endeavour to create conditions, which will help motivate and inspire teachers on constructive and creative lines. Teachers should have the freedom to innovate, to devise appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs and capabilities of and the concerns of the community (Para 9.1).” Thus, understanding teachers’ role implies understanding the educational system. Whether teaching qualifies as profession is one of today’s debates. The researcher intends to analyse whether teaching falls into a category called “profession or where teaching meet or fall short of these criteria?

### **Profession – A Conceptual Framework**

A profession is calling and it implies acquisition of a fund of knowledge, range of skills and their application in the service of humanity, especially in some specific field. A profession is an occupation which performs a crucial social function. To accomplish this function it requires a considerable degree of skill requires a body of systematic knowledge grounded in theory. This acquisition of this body of knowledge and the development of specific skill entails a lengthy period of higher education. The period of education and training involves the process of socialization into professional values. These professional values tends to centre on the pre-eminence of essential for the professional values to have the freedom or autonomy to make his / her own judgements with regard to appropriate practice.

These are two main criteria that are basic to a profession. A profession professes to do two things – to serve the clients / persons and to serve with conscious understanding and efficiency. While rendering serving to others, the profession, not only serve but makes service its prime motive. The profession and other vocations differ in the sense that a profession is well grounded on its sound knowledge and expertise. A profession arises through the development of formal qualifications based upon education, apprenticeship, and examinations, the emergence of regulatory bodies with powers to admit and discipline members, and some degree of monopoly rights (Bullock & Trombley, 1999).

The term “professional” is honorific in our society, and denotes occupations characterized by certain attributes. Chief among these are body of specialized, expert knowledge together with a code of ethics emphasizing service to clients. The knowledge base typically provides substantial, but not complete, guidance for professional practice. Professionals possess expert knowledge, but often confront unique, problematic situations that do not lend themselves to formulate solutions. Professionals must cultivate the ability to cope with the unexpected and act wisely in the face of uncertainty (Hargreaves, 2003).

Professionals deal with urgent human problems: matters of life and death, justice, hope and opportunity. Essential to their work is the trust of clients. What warrants such trust is the obligation, upheld within the community of professionals, to pursue an ethic of service and to employ special knowledge and expertise in the interests of their clients.

### **Characteristics of a Profession and Professionals – An Outline**

There are many characteristics which are identified as the criteria for judging a profession and they vary from one scholar to the other. Ornstein and Levine (2003) identified ten characteristics of a full profession. They are: a) A sense of public service; a lifetime commitment to career, b) A defined body of knowledge and skills beyond that grasped by laypersons, c) A lengthy period of specialized training, d) Control over licensing standards and / or entry requirements, e) Autonomy in making decisions about selected spheres of work f) An acceptance of responsibility for judgements made and acts performed related to services rendered; a set of standards of performance, g) A self-governing organization composed of members of the profession, h) Professional associations and / or elite groups to provide recognition for individual achievements, i) A code of ethics to help clarify ambiguous matters or doubtful points related to services rendered and j) High prestige and economic standing (p. 30).

The list of characteristics is no doubt is extensive, but all of these features cannot be applied to every profession. Here a wide range of characteristics of a profession has been addressed as a whole after reviewing literature on it. They are –

- a) **Specialised Knowledge:** A profession should require specialized knowledge to equip the practitioner with the basic mental skills and sound scientific foundations of such profession. This knowledge must be acquired through specialized intellectual study and training in a formal recognized institution for a long period of intensive training.
- b) **Professional Associations:** Professions usually have professional bodies organized by their members, which are intended to enhance the status of their members and have carefully controlled entrance requirements. Such organization of a profession aims at protecting or fostering its professional interest.
- c) **Extensive Period of Education:** The most prestigious professions usually require at least three years at institutions of higher learning. Undertaking doctoral research can add a further 4–5 years to this period of education.
- d) **Testing of Competence:** Before being admitted to membership of a professional body, there is a requirement to pass prescribed examinations that are based on mainly

theoretical knowledge.

- e) **Institutional Training:** In addition to examinations, there is usually a requirement for a long period of institutionalized training where aspiring professionals acquire specified practical experience in some sort of trainee role before being recognized as a full member of a professional body.
- f) **Licensed Practitioners:** Professions seek to establish a register or membership so that only those individuals so licensed are recognized as bona fide.
- g) **Work Autonomy:** Professionals tend to retain control over their work, even when they are employed outside the profession in commercial or public organizations. They have also gained control over their own theoretical knowledge. There is absolute and complete freedom to practice the profession.
- h) **Code of Professional Conduct of Ethics:** A profession should have laid down standards which ensure control of entry into the occupation. The code should also guide the behaviour of members. This code include traditions, customs and standards of practice identified as good enough for the profession which practitioners are expected to rigidly adhere to.
- i) **Self-regulation:** Professional bodies tend to insist that they should be self-regulating and independent of government; Professions tend to be policed and regulated by senior, respected practitioners and the most highly qualified members of the profession.
- j) **Public Service and Altruism:** The earning of fees for services rendered can be defended because they are provided in the public interest.
- k) **Exclusion, Monopoly and Legal recognition:** Professions tend to exclude those who have not met their requirements and joined the appropriate professional body. This is often termed professional closure, and seeks to bar entry for the unqualified and to sanction or expel incompetent members.
- l) **Control of Remuneration and Advertising:** Where levels of remuneration are determined by government, professional bodies are active in negotiating (usually advantageous) remuneration packages for their members.
- m) **Legal Recognition by the Government and the Public:** The public should recognize a typical profession. The government also gives legal recognition to professions through act of parliament or decree.

#### **Characteristics of Professionals:**

- a) Possess a specialized skill enabling them to offer a specialized service
- b) Undergo intellectual and practical training in a well-defined area of study

- c) Maintain detachment and integrity in exercising personal judgement on behalf of a client
- d) Establish direct, personal relations with a client, based on confidence, faith and trust
- e) Collectively have a sense of responsibility for maintaining the competence and integrity of the professional as a whole
- f) Are organized in bodies which, with or without state intervention, are concerned to provide the machinery for testing competence and regulating standards of competence and conduct

### **Teaching as a Profession in Indian Context – A Review**

Teaching is a profession-indeed a noble one, conceptually and ideally. It is also different from other professions because of its multitude of dimensions. Teachers are the largest professional group engaged in human development activities. It is only in the case of teaching there is much more that is required to be accomplished than in the case of other professions. Training of the practitioners is considered to be one of the important characteristics of a profession. In order to befit the teachers to their roles, a sound professional training is needed. Induction training and continuous education thereafter equip the teachers with adequate knowledge and skills to perform their professional functions.

Teaching as a profession reflects a high degree of academic excellence, repertoire of teaching skills and practical wisdom on one hand and a well-integrated value system on the other hand both oriented toward altruistic service. Adherence to the teachers' code of ethics and urge for personal development is the core of professionalism and form the base for professional ethics. These general observations apply to teaching, but with important distinctions. While teachers employ their knowledge and skill on students, they also strive to empower students to continue the quest for understanding, so that one day the pupil may surpass the instructor. In this regard, teaching is the most democratic of professions. It aims to place within the hands, head and hearts of students the means for them to teach themselves.

Debates continue till the date as to whether teaching in our country is a profession. If so to what extent teaching does conform to the basic characteristics of a profession like law, medicine, etc.? In every profession the most important feature is that a professional person must have appropriate license to render appropriate services to the clients. Does an Indian teacher teach permanently after gaining license from appropriate controlling authority? It is known that in Germany, USA or in UK a teacher must have teaching license to teach as a permanent teacher. Of course, today, some appropriate authorities like UGC, NCERT,

NCTE, SCERT, RCI, AICTE, etc. are rendering some indirect control over the teachers at appropriate levels of education. But such control mechanisms are not strong enough to ensure professionalism of teachers in teaching in India. Most of the control mechanisms generally are linked to recruitment, promotion, gaining financial incentives. Teachers are subjected to some general control mechanisms set and / or approved by the authorities, local / state / national level. Code of conduct and professional ethics of teachers are just a talk over a cup of tea, not systematically formulated and teachers are professionally obliged to pursue them in true sense.

The ethical dimensions of teaching also distinguish it from other professions. Unique demands arise because the client's attendance is compulsory and, more importantly, because the clients are children. Thus, elementary, middle, high school and higher education teachers are obligated to meet a stringent ethical standard. Other ethical demands derive from the teacher's role as a model of an educated person. Teaching is a public activity; a teacher works daily in the gaze of his or her students, and the extended nature of their lives together in schools place special obligations on the teacher's behaviour. Students learn early to read and draw lessons from their teachers' characters. Teachers, consequently, must conduct themselves in a manner students might emulate. Their failure to practice what they preach does not elude students, parents or peers. Practicing with this additional dimension calls for a special alertness to the consequences of manner and behaviour. Standards for professional teaching ought, therefore, to emphasize its ethical nature. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, USA) and other eminent experts seek to identify and recognize teachers who effectively enhance student learning and demonstrate the high level of knowledge, skills, abilities and commitments reflected in the following five core propositions:

- a) Teachers are committed to students and their lifelong learning to satisfy themselves and other stakeholders.
- b) Teachers understand the subject they teach and how to teach those subjects to students for accomplishment of their learning objectives.
- c) Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- d) Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- e) Teachers are lifelong learners and members of learning communities.

### **Code of Professional Ethics for Indian Teachers – Current Scenario**

The Right to Education (RTE) Act encompasses a gamut of educational issues. Its successful implementation begs attention towards many issues including the clarification of

teaching standard, norms and ethics. In pursuance of the recommendations of the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in collaboration with the All India Primary Teachers Federation (AIPTF), All India Secondary Teachers Federation (AISTF) and All India Federation of Educational Associations (AIFEA) had developed, for the first time, a Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers, in 1997. Recognizing the need and importance of a Code of Professional Ethics for School Teachers, the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) appointed a Committee to review this code keeping in view the context of the relevant sections of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009. In the light of the provisions under Section 24(1) of the RTE Act, 2009 regarding duties and functions of teachers and as per the directions of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has developed a draft document on “**Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers**” with a belief that –

...like all other professions, the teaching profession should also have its Code of Professional Ethics which is the pre-requisite to ensure its dignity and integrity. It is also significant that the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Act, 2009 entails on teachers some onerous professional responsibilities to be internalised by them in the performance of their duties. Accordingly, it is considered necessary that the Code of Professional Ethics be evolved and adopted by the teaching community.

For the purpose of this Code, the term “teacher” covers all school teachers, whether in government or private schools, on full time or part time basis, at the elementary and secondary levels and the teachers holding administrative and supervisory positions. The Code of Professional Ethics for teachers provides a framework of principles to guide them in discharging their obligations towards students, parents, colleagues and community. Increased awareness of the ethical principles governing the teaching profession is essential to ensure ‘professionalism’ among teachers. This Code brackets teachers’ obligations towards students, obligations towards parents, community and society and obligation towards the profession and colleagues.

Times have changed. Today teachers aspire to be seen as true professionals with expert knowledge concerning the content and methods of instruction in their particular areas of study. Despite some gains, teaching retains an uncertain status in our society. Although it is often referred to as a profession, it does not command the same prestige as other established professions, such as law or medicine. Today, teaching has transformed from

passion to profession. The consumerism has pervaded into every walk of life and money seems to rule the “comforts”. The salaries of teachers, though given a priority in the Government thinking, still the emoluments lack the societal demands, thus the profession does not seem to attract the right talent. Further to these points, the selection mechanism of the teachers seems to depend, in educational institutions, mainly on the academic credentials rather than on the teaching skills.

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