

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers to Educational Development of Scheduled Caste Students of Cuttack City

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ABSTRACT Much have been talked about. Many steps have been taken through different plans for the disadvantaged children. Still inequality exists in the classroom performance. Some come out with excellent results, others with good. There is also a class of low achievers. Socio-cultural factors contribute to their poor performance. To eradicate these barriers strategies have been suggested by the educationists. Among them enriched curriculum engaging students in the authentic work, creating Network of Supports, Co-curricular, Extra-curricular Activities etc. are highlighted in this paper. Honest attempts have been made towards affirmative action to dissolve the causes contributing to performance inequality between the children of General Castes and Scheduled Castes at foundation level.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, general caste students have a head-start over the scheduled caste students in terms of awareness, academic orientation and drive for academic fulfillment. Unequal schooling has limited the educational opportunities of disadvantaged scheduled caste children in India. In addition, these children sometimes have problems outside schools that interfere with their learning. The problem of these students may include drug abuse, delinquent gang membership, dysfunctional families, and family violence. Such students are also likely to live in neighborhoods characterized by poor social control, delinquent gangs, high rates of personal and property crimes, and widespread distribution and consumption of drugs. They also must confront a less tangible threat - the devaluation of their talents and potential. The scheduled caste children are labeled 'problem children' or the 'specific needs population', implying they are somehow intrinsically less intelligent, more needy. Social marginalization becomes a problem only when we fail to tackle this problem honestly and fairly.

Perhaps more than at any other time in history, schools are being asked to recognize and address the needs of disadvantaged children who suffer from various problems, abuse and neglect. Schools are also increasingly aware that low social status may depress scheduled caste students performances regardless of family income. Academic mediocrity may place all scheduled caste students of being unable to compete in global markets.

In order to give justice to scheduled caste students, this is high time when schools must engage themselves in contextually sensitive organizational development, which includes maintaining standard procedures, fostering staff development, improving communication, providing high quality teaching, and establishing monitoring procedures.

Many students are more motivated to work hard if they view classroom learning tasks to be useful in the adult world of work. Plans must be made to introduce vocational education that will provide students with a combination of essential academic skills and rigorous vocational training. Asserting that 'learning to know and learning to do are linked', schools must encourage students to use academic materials to perform 'real-life' tasks or address 'real-life' problems in order to increasing students' motivation for learning.

Alternative forms of assessment and reward structures must be proposed and developed. These alternative assessment strategies should be designed to have students demonstrate what they have learned rather than how well they take a test, and to motivate rather than discourage students who start out well below average. Although such approaches are not widely used at this time, there is growing interest in them.

'Alternative' or 'authentic' assessments have become catchwords of the current educational reform in India. Forms of evaluation that test how much students know at a single point in time are being challenged by those arguing for assessment procedures that demonstrate how well students think and how well they articulate

their ideas in a variety of media. Examples of potentially better assessment methods include oral interviews, sincere experiments, portfolios of students work over an extended period, public exhibitions where students defend their projects, performances of skills in simulated situations, etc. Such alternative forms of assessment may offer new opportunities for success to scheduled caste students for several reasons.

In addition to restricting the ways in which students demonstrate what they have learned, traditional assessment methods can be insensitive to the actual achievement or progress of individual students, particularly scheduled caste students. As traditional evaluation systems often do not adequately recognize the progress that educationally disadvantaged students make, because even dramatic progress may still leave them near the bottom of the class in comparative terms or far from the 'percent standard' needed for a good grade. Individualized incentive and reward structures that value students' incremental improvements can motivate students to try harder, foster an intrinsic interest in the subject matter, and improve performance.

Overview of Literature

Though barriers are many in the field of education, particularly these do not escape from the hawk's eye of the educationalist. They do suggest strategies for overcoming barriers to repair and reconstruct the system of education for the disadvantaged children. A good deal of research has already been done on the effectiveness of various school components. Mallenkipf and Mallville (1956: 40) opine that school facility measures to be significantly related to pupils achievement. These are (a) number of special staff in the school. (b) ideal class size and (c) ideal pupils teacher ratio and instructional expenditures for the pupils. Martin Katzma (1968: 40) Govindra (1992: 17-35) Das and Dave (1974: 81) and Dave (1988) have examined the relationship between the school service and students' achievement and found relations to be positively co-related.

In the present context the system of education is primarily on interaction activity between the teacher and the students. The class room teachings are based on prescribed curricula and students are to ascertain that the students perceive in proper context through the method of drilling.

Siberman (1970: 40) observes monotonous curricula works as a source of failure to disadvantaged students. The same fact is reflected in a study conducted by Joshi (1997: 24-25). Cestaneda (1974) points out that the students who confuse with the curriculum develop inferiority and insecurity within themselves.

Objective

The study suggests various strategies for overcoming the barriers to educational development of the scheduled caste students.

METHODOLOGY

Though 29 schools are situated in the study area which is coming under Cuttack Municipal Corporation, only 5 M.E. and 5 High Schools are selected on the basis of high concentration of scheduled caste students. Students from these schools were selected as sample respondents. All elderly scheduled caste students (above 10 years of age) who were reading in class – VI and above were consulted for data collection. However, 250 scheduled caste students interviewed for data collection. Accordingly 250 general caste students from the same educational grades with the same gender break-up were selected on a random basis for comparative analysis. Parents of both caste categories and teachers of the sample schools are also consulted for data collection.

Strategies for Overcoming the Barriers

In recent time a number of innovative strategies have been undertaken to bring in improvement in the educational performance of the school going scheduled caste children. These approaches typically have focused on strong parent involvement, on high expectations for students, on providing challenging learning activities, and on delivering integrated human services at or near school to address families' need on a comprehensive basis. An attempt has been made here to suggest some strategies for the better educational performance of school going children in general and scheduled caste students in particular.

Enriched Curriculum

First, schools must find ways to introduce an

accelerated and enriched curriculum that will provide the scheduled caste students with the learning experiences that will enable them to reach higher standards. A challenging curriculum engages those students in schooling by drawing clear connections between learning and the world beyond school. Often schools make these connections explicit through school-to-work or career and college awareness programmes. In addition, schools must find ways to make challenging and high-quality teaching and curriculum available to all students, including scheduled caste students. Schools must find ways to create a network of support that ensures each student's success. This network might include peer tutoring and mentoring programmes, improved partnerships with families, and comprehensive support systems that include health and other social services. Finally, organizational arrangements ensure that all students, including low achievers (scheduled caste students), have access to high quality, academically rigorous subject matter.

Engaging Students in Authentic Work

Students are more likely to be engaged in learning when they perceive that their school work significant, valuable, and worthy of their efforts. When students are truly engaged in academic work, they apply the concentration, effort, and thoughtfulness needed to master knowledge and skills in the major disciplines. Students who are engaged in schoolwork invest themselves in learning to improve their competence, not just for the sake of completing assignments or earning good grades.

Successful schools emphasize authenticity in learning activities. Students have the opportunity to ask questions and study topics they think are important, and they are allowed to influence the pace and direction of their own learning. Teachers frame tasks to have some connection to the world beyond the classroom, making them more than academic exercises.

Creating Networks of Support

Networks of support that address students' academic and personal needs can enable at-risk scheduled caste students to persist and succeed in school. Strong support can foster students' sense of belonging, thus encouraging them to

adopt the mission of the school. For at-risk students in particular, successful schools take an active role in responding to personal, emotional, and basic survival needs that frequently go unmet in traditional school environments.

Co-curricular and Extra-curricular Activities

Schools are more than just place where academic learning occurs. Depending on many factors, they are also complex social environments that can be inviting or alienating. Successful programmes for at-risk students attempt to create an environment that helps students develop a sense of commitment to the school community.

Students who do not identify, participate, and succeed in school activities become increasingly at risk of academic failure and dropout. In order to improve student achievement and persistence, it is suggested that the school climate must foster "investment" behaviour – schools must encourage students involvement in academic and extracurricular activities by stimulating their interest, increasing their personal resources (e.g. remediating skill deficiencies), and rewarding their efforts. Co-curricular activities such as academic or special interest group, theater and music groups, and sports teams have traditionally enhanced students' sense of school membership by providing them with a special "niche" in the school community. Students involved in these kinds of co-curricular activities find opportunities to shine and are less likely to become disengaged from school. Many studies have indicated an association between extra-curricular activities in general and positive academic outcomes. For example, one survey showed that high school social participation is positively correlated with high school and post-high school educational achievements. Another study of reading skills development showed that the higher students' level of involvement in organized extracurricular activities, the higher their reading achievement.

Recognizing the Value of Student Contributions

For many scheduled caste students, especially those at risk of dropping out of school, developing a sense of school membership depends on how they perceive teachers to be treating them. Students expect and want fair and

decent treatment from teachers; how the school administers discipline sends important messages about respect to students. When the school's disciplinary policies seem capricious and unfair, students are alienated and the school's mission wanes. When the school's rule enforcement is consistent and teacher and student role are clearly defined, students identify more closely with the school.

In a school setting, harmonious interaction between students and teachers requires substantial agreement about the expected norms of behavior. For schools to enforce the rules accordingly, all students must know what their obligations are and how to meet them. Some schools achieve this end by reviewing their rules in a formal meeting of the entire school community one or two times a year. In addition, disciplined schools respect and support appropriate behavior. They adopt rules for behavior that cover both formal and informal interactions, teach students how to observe those rules competently, and monitor compliance persistently. One way to ensure students' acceptance of the school's norms of behavior is to give them a voice in creating the school community's rule:

If a school's atmosphere is one of hostility and insensitivity in which students are continually subjected to criticism and failure, serious disciplinary problems and criminal behaviors are likely to erupt. Some teachers' and administrators' preoccupation with punitive methods of controlling student behavior contributes to an atmosphere of conflict. Safe schools are those where supervisory expectations, faculty competence, and staffing arrangements protect children from adult incivility.

Changing Role of a Teachers and Effective Teachings

Teachers seek to influence students' social and personal development, as well as their intellectual growth. To sustain a pervasive "ethic of caring," teachers must maintain continuous and sustained contact with students, responding to the students as whole persons rather than just as clients in need of a particular service. Expanding their traditional role as transmitters of knowledge, teachers help create networks of support that foster students' sense of belonging and support students to succeed in the school. Teachers should develop a new approach that

involves students as producers of knowledge, rather than as passive recipients. For their part, teachers in the school need to (1) promote positive and respectful relations between them and students; (2) help students with personal problems; (3) cultivate students' ability to meet school standards; and (4) support students' efforts to find a place in society by forging appropriate links between personal goals and interests, school opportunities, and future plans. In exchange for this active commitment from the school, students behave positively and respectfully toward teachers and commit their mental and physical effort in school tasks to a level making their own achievement likely.

Through effective teaching, students learn and practice self-management skills in substantively rewarding activities. Effective teaching also creates learning environments where each participant's contribution is valued, and anyone's absence is duly noticed. Appointed students to organize and direct academic activities and community events facilitate their development as participants in an orderly institution. The procedures used in schools constitute a 'hidden curriculum' that either fosters students' engagement and general seriousness of purpose or, alternatively, undermines their confidence and sense of responsibility.

Involving Parents

Programmes should be designed to develop two-way communication between school and home, and to involve parents in decision-making, planning, assessment, and curriculum development. By creating a climate in which parents and families are regarded as partners in learning, schools can make parent and family involvement a reality.

Creating Partnerships with Families

One of the most powerful contributions that families can make toward their children's success in school is to foster after-school learning. Scheduled caste families may foster home learning for school students by encouraging them with their schoolwork and assisting children with decisions that affect their future. Family members can also exert a powerful influence not only on their children's course selection but also on their career options once they come out from high school.

Higher achievement occurs in part because students whose families are more involved in their education do more homework. Parents monitoring student's attendance, homework, and use of leisure time are especially important at the secondary level, as students become more active outside the home.

Assess Parents' Needs and Interests

Schools can bridge the distance between families and schools by surveying parents to find out their concerns and opinions about school. Schools should begin planning parent involvement activities by asking parents of students what they need (e.g., information, training, decision-making opportunities) to support their children's academic achievement.

Encourage Family Learning

Traditional homework assignments can become more interactive ones by involving family members. For example, students might collect oral histories from family members for history classes.

Create a Mechanism for Personalized Communication

With parents, especially with those unable to come "in" to school, for example, a school might appoint a home-school coordinator, provide more flexible time for teachers to visit homes, or expand opportunities for contact by providing parents with more flexible schedules with which to meet school staff. For example, schools can set up resource centers for parents; institute home visits hold evening or weekend meetings out in the community, etc. Personal contact is important in encouraging families to participate.

Give Parents a Voice in School Decisions

Schools can include parents and other family members in decision-making bodies, school improvement teams, or steering committees that direct school restructuring efforts. By providing regular information and making seminars and workshops available to family members, school staff often facilitate the participatory decision-making process. Once family members are informed and involved, the school must listen and respond to their contributions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

After 60 years of independence, time has come to take stock of our goal fulfillment, turns missed and time wasted. It can be unequivocally asserted that scheduled caste parents have been unable to reap commensurate benefit from the government policy of universal education and the extended facilities of constitutional benefits. Of course, forces of modernization to a considerable extent have dissolved the socio-cultural of the scheduled caste, which have greatly contributed for their inward looking mindset.

In the sweep of globalization, the world is fast shrinking to a global village. Given the fact that the exploitative social system which has been readjusting with the changing dictates of time by reinventing and redefining itself in different forms of social inequality, it will be presumptuous to foresee a total turn-around in the social paradigm within a specific time frame. However, it may be expected that juggernaut of globalization would go a long way to bulldoze the socio-economic and socio-cultural barriers confronting the scheduled caste population, to produce a level playing field for all.

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