

Teachers as Interpreters of Early Childhood Environment

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Every body of each country wants to prevail peace all over the world. In the same theme, we all remember to Buddha as a symbol of peace. Naturally, question arises why are we not being able to get another Buddha even after awaiting for a long time of more than 2.5 thousand years? Why the other great personalities like; Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Einstein, Newton etc. could not come across in that level. It's so doughty that whether the great personalities have got that supreme potentiality and strength from the nature or god or they are made up of special hormones, chemicals and biological composition. A chain of queries and curiosity may arise but how is the role of early care and education (ECE) in this matter? But, ECE was not a set up of their era. If it were so, could they be more supermen? It has been researched that more than 70% brain gets developed in early age, which laid the foundation of life and keeps meaning for whole life. So, the emphasize has been given to provide optimum care and education for their holistic development in proper environment. It is true that a set up goal seeks likely the suitable environment e.g. in ancient period; the great warriors were born in *Gurukul* (schooling of princes and periphery ones in natural set up of great teachers' residence with particular norms and values). It means there is a great role of environment as per needed for the goal. As present, the goal of world is to provide the good care and education to kids, it definitely requires compatible environment. So, it needs proper management and running of Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers.

There is no long history of ECD program in Nepal. It was formally, as a government program started at few years back of launching the program "EFA (2015)" in our country. It has an aim of establishing more than 74 thousand ECD centers in Nepal (our total population is 28 million-in 147 thousand Sq. km area app.). The government enforces to local bodies to establish ECD centers with support of total USD \$300 app. which is delivered in three installments. But, the deprived and poor people have neither

idea nor resources for it. The government pays only USD \$20 per month for only one facilitator in the ECD center. The required qualification of facilitator has been made just eighth grade. The provision of training for the facilitator is of two weeks then never. In this heart broken situation, one can easily imagine about its adverse impact? So, nothing else except putting the children into one classroom and standing the teacher in door with stick in hand. Even the parents/grand parents send them to ECD centers then they get more leisure for playing cards, smoking more, getting poor health and poverty.

In the mean time, government brings attractive slogan every year to bring the children to enroll in grade I rather than in ECD centers. For example, they distribute kerosene for those parents who bring their children to school in spite of giving them the opportunity cost. In the lack of infrastructure of school, the children can be seen under of tree until getting Kerosene for a month app. They bring the kerosene and plan to use it only when their special guest come to their home but they send their children for pastoral care of animals. Due to which there is high drop out rate of the children. As a result only 12% get through SLC (School Leaving Certificate-tenth grade) in a cohort.

The children are supposed to be the half human so just 50%, another half gone for girls then comes down to 25%, for *Janajati* (subaltern) and backward children another half gone so the percentage comes to be 12.5% and for *dalits* (untouchable caste), just its half so the final percentage is 6.25%. So far as it is concerned to ECD facilitators, we compelled to again make it half so we are providing the ECD service to only 3.13% children.

Moreover, ECD has become a quite private business, ECD-children carry bags of more than 4-5 kg, but if they cannot do so, then their senior brother/sister/parents serves it. The English language has got the fashion in the urban areas. If young child becomes able to say his/her name, home address etc. in English medium their parents feel so good and be ready to spend more money. It's so funny that they also sit for formal exam whereas they are even unable to write their name. The teachers formally, teach for 4T (Teach To The Test) not for their holistic development with child rights. In this situation, what would be printed in their plane minds? Even the teachers/facilitators don't know more than 70%

brain gets develop in this crucial period. So, the scenario seeks and talks more about the importance of interpreting role of teachers for ECD environment.

It's true that the teaching occupation is supposed to be a last resort, specially, in the context of under developed country because there is no chance of making corruption. But, the thing is unnoticeably so serious that the unhappiness of teaching profession has seemed to be reflected into mind corruption of children who are pretty much innocent. It is so worse that the teachers may be spoiling the children's naive minds, which is more dangerous than giving and taking bribe.

My experience also knows what shorts of qualities should be in honest teachers. Fantastically, one may pick up each alphabet of "TEACHER" and make the amazing words like; T-Trustworthy +Talent, E – Efficient + Enthusiastic, A – Aware + Active, C – Cooperative + Cleaver, H – Honest + Helpful, E – Educated + Empirical and R – 3R (Responsible, Reasoning and Respecting to children). All of these things look like a wonderful garland of words so; any body can rote and any tongue can spell out easily. In our Nepalese culture, its saying that teacher should have the sleeping like that of dog, sense as of crow, concentration as of owl and a good fasting nature so that s/he could be attainable every time.

Despite of this flag-knowledge, indeed, the teacher should be a great and honest friend of every child. S/he should be a roll model of every dream of a child. They should be artist, singer, doctor, engineer, planner, gardener, musician, producer, mason, driver, boatman, pilot, layer, farmer etc. S/he should be able to carry out any role where and when they need. Whatever and whoever, it keeps meaning when they act as a catalyst for the interpretation of rote learning to self esteem, memorization to joyful, unstimulating to stimulating, teacher-centric to child-centric and, dull learning to creative and meaningful learning in the child-friendly environment. But to make it happen, the teacher is the main accountable and responsible person though s/he needs the help and support of many more agents.

In this horrible situation, as a remedial tool and social maker, yes, there is NCLR the National Center for Learning Resources under the umbrella of ICRI-Nepal. It has been working with 17 organizations (4 public + 5 private schools having ECD centers, 5 NCPD homes' ECD centers, 1 national and 2 multinational organizations). It uses little financial investment but more technical supports to establish the ECD centers with the objective of replicable models. It switches the private resources to public ECD centers through Alliance for Corporate Social Responsibility (ACSR) program. It has an unique working modality comprised of Hardware and Software systems for the creation of child-friendly environment. For, the one and half dozen successive steps of our working model are as follows:

1. Mapping and benchmarking ECD centers in the coordination of District Ed. Office, Government of Nepal.
2. Conducting SWOT Analysis of the centers in the involvement of E/SMC, teachers and head teacher,
3. Preparing detail profiles of the ECD-centers, schools/organizations with ECD centers;
4. Organization of visioning-workshops to visualize the role and responsibility of each and every sector to develop ECD center into a roll model (in the participation of children, students, teachers, parents/guardians, E/SMC, PTA, CBOs etc.)
5. Organization of restructuring/reorganizing workshops to transform so called ECD classrooms into child friendly environment,
6. Organization and conduction of ECD-Teacher Training Program (TTP) (in cut-piece basis i.e. not for a long time at a time),
7. Implementation of restructuring/reorganizing works in action in ECD centers,
8. Training to organizations' heads and administrative personnel,
9. ECD center follow ups with trainers,
10. Organization of monthly meetings (experience sharing with problems, remedies and successes)
11. Organization of field trips (to visit the best ECD centers) to the ECD facilitators,

12. Organization of regular advisory board meetings,
13. Organization of additional TTP,
14. Decentralization of materials development workshops from our resource center to ECD centers,
15. Conduction of action researches on the topical issues of ECD,
16. Developing ECD centers in replicable model and then transforming them into model-resource centers, and handover to local community,
17. Work in advocacy, presentation, lobbying and dissemination programs focusing to child issues and ECD-working model,
18. Scale up and spread out the program,

Besides the listed programs, we go beyond with other attractive and productive programs like: organization of professionalism programs for teachers/facilitators; identification and planning the programs to address the gaps in the service delivery mechanism; ownership building programs to all on each and every positive changes in the centers; mobilization of volunteers, parents and senior students to ECD activities; developing effective mechanism of communication, coordination and cooperation among the all stakeholders of ECD centers, educational organizations and community; making the resource center available even in off hours to parents/guardians, teachers and children; providing consultancy services of ECD; extending the services to those ECD centers which have been established by Network for Children, Prisoners and Dependents; orientation and training programs (e.g. health, hygiene, sanitation, care taking of newly born babies, preservation of nutrients, preparation of balance diet, child psychology, childhoodness, holistic development, importance of ECD etc.) to those mothers who work in big national and multinational companies etc.

In addition, to make the pedagogical part also child-friendly, our trained facilitators have been using global to localized-learning technologies through different activities and methods like; play way, story telling, use of rhymes, singing, use of puppets, dolls, mobile materials, organization of culturally appropriate activities, develop and use of local curriculum, use of welcome and farewell songs, use of portfolio method and record

keeping for evaluation and so, now, no homework, no heavy bags, no paper pencil tests, etc.

As a result of great affords applied by our ECD facilitators to develop ECD child friendly, the positive changes have been appeared like, no further 3D (Dirty, Dark and Dangerous) rooms constructed nearby of toilets, under of ladders, no ventilation etc. In these days, the blackboards/whiteboards are under of use of children as well, old furniture have been replaced by age-friendly movable furniture, the rooms have been colored by the colors of kids' choice, there is a sense of ownership of all in every positive change and development, the involvement of parents and local community has been increased significantly, the children's creations have been displayed in three categories/levels (ornamental, educational and instructional), there is a creative use of walls and ceiling of the rooms, there are zones of activities, daily routines, use of job description of facilitators. There is use of learning as a fun pedagogy so that the kids talk together, play together, share together, learn and grow together with self confident and self-awareness etc. The motto "Every body can learn, no body is wrong", is being in progress and full use of reason, respect and response to the kids. The facilitators and local women have been empowered with their active participation, and they can organize the workshops and meetings themselves. The parents/guardians have also started to send their children in time with caring of tidiness, neat and clean.

Now, the kids seem intellectually curious, well in physical development, emotionally matured, properly socialized and optimum use of basic phenomenon of child rights (child survival, protection, development and participation). In this way, our teachers who are the interpreters of Early Childhood Environment have been working fighting fit and came across in national level visibility under the direction and management of our project National Center for Learning Resources.

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