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Role of Soft Skills in Teacher Education

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Abstract

Soft Skills are the Synonyms for “People Skills”. The term describes those personal attributes that indicate a high level of emotional intelligence. Soft Skills can be a combination of People Skills, Social Skills and Communication skills. Soft skills also include interpersonal skills which show the character of a person and his/her interpersonal relationship with others. Having soft skills is a most valuable tool in the 21st century to get success. Teacher plays a vital role in our society and also a role model for school going students. Teacher education has a rippling effect on school education. A quality Teacher Education programme leads to quality school education. Teacher Education is not only responsible for the improvement of school education, but also for preparing competent, Committed and professionally well qualified teachers who can meet the emerging needs of the system and the society.

Kate Lorenz, an editor of CareerBuilder.com says that Soft Skills “refer to a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that make someone a good employee who is compatible to work with”.

Key words: Soft Skills, Teacher Education

Introduction:

The world is moving very fast and our society and culture are also changing in this fast moving world. The economic, political, social, cultural, and technological changes, had an impact on various countries around the world, consequently all the countries including the developing countries had to opt for educational reforms inevitably. Now things seem to be very systematic and human nature is very pragmatic & prone to changes. If we compare today’s world with 1970’s, then we will find how many changes have taken place gradually in our social life style. These changes are not only talked about, but we can feel them in our behavior too. 20 years back when technology was not so developed as compared to present times people were not bothered about soft skills, but now each and every thing is measurable and everybody has his/her own accountability and responsibility for potential sustained growth. To achieve their personal as well as professional goals in life people are struggling a lot. Soft skills have become an integral part of human life. It is an important tool to get success. Teachers are the catalytic agents of changes and focus in any society should be to provide quality teacher education. Quality teacher education will subsequently lead to quality School Education. The Studies reveal that soft skills and Accountability are associated to each other. Teachers are the back bone of any country and teachers also play an important role to develop the nation economically and socially.

What are soft skills?

The soft skills are termed for skills needed in different aspects of life including our career. For example If two co-workers are working in a team then they need to have good communication skills, team-building skills, collaborative problem – solving skills etc. along with academic knowledge.

According to World Health Organization (WHO) “Soft Skills are nothing but Psychological Skills, which insists upon accepting the behavior of others along with their culture”

Teaching Soft Skills:

It can be observed that education is an essential tool for achieving Sustainability. We all realize that the current economic development trends are not sustainable and that public awareness, education and training are the key elements to move our society towards sustainability. Only a quality future human capital can envision development of its nation to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, the inculcation of soft skills among the students will be essential for two reasons one to produce quality human capital and second to develop their knowledge, understanding, values and skills as well Institutions have a major role to play in ensuring that pupils are socialized into a culture of self-reliance, resourcefulness and peace-oriented values. Teachers are one of the main pillars of a sound and progressive society. They bear the weight and responsibility of teaching and apart from parents, are the main sources of knowledge and values. The question of knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills that teachers should possess is the subject of much debate in many countries.

For teachers, the ability to use effective soft skills can make or break a career. While it may seem obvious that such skills would matter importantly in a classroom, soft skills are also of paramount importance when working with parents, administration and other teachers. Such skills can improve teacher effectiveness

On any average day teachers work with a variety of people. Soft Skills translate into the ability to successfully navigate the needs of those individuals. A teacher must use his/her oral and written communication skills every day to effectively pass on information to his/her students. A teacher uses teamwork and collaboration in any schools-wide function, including faculty meetings. Without critical thinking and problem solving skills, the teacher cannot effectively manage classroom behavior or student progress.

Need of Soft Skills for a Teacher

1. A teacher has so many different reasons to have soft skills because children are spending so much time in schools and it is the class room from where a child is best ready to pick up learning skills and knowledge. So we come to believe that it is the teacher who can play an active role in helping their students learn and nurture such skills. Soft skills cannot be read out from books. So it is very essential that the teachers themselves display the skills both among themselves and while dealing with the students. They can demonstrate these skills by embedding empathy, active listening, fueling up team-work through positive feedback, encouragement and so on.
2. Teacher need to have soft skills to be able to give instructions to their students that are suitable for the students' learning styles. They also need to maintain strong communication channels with their students so that they can implement their tools found through research and at the same time receive feedback from the students. In the present era teachers act as researchers. Teachers need to be life-long learners. They need to keep their eyes open for the students' development like what would fit their learning style and what would fit their learning needs. It is therefore necessary that they have proper soft skills to do all these.
3. If teachers wish to have a powerful impact on their students and make their classes lively and memorable it is vital that teachers have soft skills. Without proper soft skills, they will be unable to have proper classes and deliver their lectures in a proper manner. As we all know, students have a very low attention span and their attention needs to be attracted by the use of innovative techniques. A teacher who has soft skills will be able to modulate his/her voice and even make charts according to the need of the moment so that students are able to grasp the maximum amount of knowledge.
If skills are the concepts which cannot be taught via a book or by a long lecture, students need to improve soft skills by observing their teachers. If teachers present exemplary examples for their students then the students grow up becoming exemplary individuals who are able to make a success in their lives and also contribute very positively to the society in which they live. It is vital that all teachers who are hired/appointed by the board for schools are able and skilled individuals who know the important roles which they have to play in the students' lives. It is for this reason why recruitment methods have to be absolutely strict and top notch.
4. Students are young individuals who are very impressionable and it is for this reason, that the teachers who are entrusted to take care of them and teaching skills should be very able and abounding. It is important for teachers to have soft skills, because if they do not have soft skills, then they will never be able to give the students lessons and lectures according to their respective ages and cognitive ability. Their lectures will either be too high-flown, where it will go straight above the students' heads or it will be of an inferior quality consisting of things which students already know at that level.
5. Teachers need to be good leaders and command respect so that their students listen to what is said to them and obey instructions which are given. If a teacher is frivolous and unable to have a serious and stern manner then students are going to end up becoming rather undisciplined. Having soft skills is vital for teachers so that they can be good leaders who are able to lead the students from the front and in turn encourage the students to become good leaders themselves. Lessons taught in school do remain with children long after their schooling has been completed and that is why the teachers must be chosen with uttermost care.

6. There is a fine line which ought to be maintained between the teachers and students. This means that both should maintain a respectable distance between each other. This having been stated it does not imply that the students should shy away from sharing any issue or problem with their teachers. Teachers should function as advisors and a guide for their students and it is only if they have soft skills that they will be able to guide the students along the right path and give them useful advice. Teachers should not be so aloof that the students feel afraid to approach them when going through a problem of any kind.
7. It is very important that teachers have soft skills, because if they are lacking in soft skills, they will not be sensitive to the needs of their students. There are often silent students who need to be encouraged so that they come out of their shells and in addition to that there are other students who need to be given extra attention. It is only a sensitive teacher who has high emotional intelligence that he/she will be able to look below the surface and differentiate one child from the next. No two children are alike and teachers should understand that.

Fundamental Soft Skills as suggested by WHO are:

- ❖ Self –Awareness
- ❖ Self Esteem
- ❖ Critical Thinking Skills
- ❖ Decision making skills
- ❖ Problem Solving Skills
- ❖ Interpersonal Skills
- ❖ Communication Skills
- ❖ Empathy
- ❖ Coping with Emotions
- ❖ Handling Peer Pressure
- ❖ Negotiation Skills



Some Important soft Skills for a teacher:

The US Department of labor suggested below mentioned examples of Soft Skills which are applicable for teachers as well.

i. Communicative skills:

A teacher should have excellent communication skills. Being a teacher he/she should be a good speaker as well as listener. A teacher interacts directly with students on daily basis. So effective communication is must for a teacher. He/she should be a good speaker so that students listen to him attentively and understand what he is trying to teach. Along with speaking he/she should be a good listener too because until he listens students' issues and problems he cannot solve them properly.

ii. Thinking and problem solving skills:

A Teacher should be a good thinker and must be equipped with problem solving skills. Our social structure is moving very fast which may lead to changes in the way we live. Students often get attracted to some changes which may not be good for our society and may have negative impact on them. If not

guided properly, students tend to internalize undesirable behavior and values. A good teacher knows how to prevent his/her students from these impacts and how to solve such issues and problems.

iii. **Teamwork:** A good teacher must have ability to perform in a team. He/she should maintain good interpersonal relations with the team members. The teacher should have a fellow feeling and should cooperate with his counterparts. He/she should be compatible to work with.

iv. **Learning and information management:**

It seems teaching soft skills has never been as important as it is right now. Good teacher should have life-long learning ability and must be master of his/her subject. A good teacher must update his/her knowledge with latest developments and emerging trends so that he/she gives proper knowledge to the students and build their strong base.

v. **Ethics and professionalism:**

Ethical behavior is must for a good teacher and he/she should be full of professionalism.

A good teacher should always be full of motivation and determination. He/she should maintain good professional relations with all his/her colleagues.

vi. **Leadership skills:**

These soft skills are transferable skills. So they can be used in many different types of Jobs. A good teacher has ability to perform any job related task and give inspiration to others. He/she should be more confident to perform his/her own academic/extra curricular duties diligently and set an example for the students. The teacher should act as a friend, guide and leader for his/her students.

How to Improve Soft skills

Improvement in teaching soft skills is a prime responsibility of a teacher. There are so many ways to improve teaching of soft skills in classroom like; an appropriate system of curriculum, Power Point Presentation, Study Guides, lesson plans and other curricular activities. Some of the ways to improve soft skills are listed below:

Build self-awareness – We should understand why we react to certain situations and people in a certain way, why we become stressed, angry, shy, irritated, etc.... In order to develop any self-management skills, we first have to understand ourselves. Change starts at the point of awareness.

Understand other people's motivations – When we are having any interaction with people, what we are dealing with is our motivation / insecurity and theirs. Any action that may cause conflict in motivation or trigger ours or another person's insecurity will create a difficult or unexpected situation. By proactively trying to put ourselves in their shoes before any interaction, we could communicate better and can better manage our reaction to unexpected situations.

Do not try too much in one step - It can be easily explained by a famous Chinese proverb “Don't try to eat a cow in one bite” basically it means don't try to achieve too much in one step. Otherwise, we will set ourselves up for failure and end up feeling defeated. we cannot improve all our soft skills overnight, so we must identify one soft skill we want to start with. Once we make progress on one soft skill, it will give us the confidence to improve more skills. It will be better to take a step at a time.

Changing ourselves not others – Some people may think that improving soft skills can help us manipulate/change others' actions. It's not true. Improving soft skills is all about changing ourselves, our perception, our approach to situations. When we change, people's reaction to us will also change.

Practice makes a man perfect – It is a common proverb. This proverb is very suitable for Soft skills because Soft Skills are not something we can just study in a book to get better, improvement takes practice over time. Improving soft skills is fundamentally about changing our behavior and thought patterns towards our self and others. So every next interaction we have with people at work is an opportunity to practice soft skills.



Conclusion:

It has been aptly stated that “teaching soft skills has never been as important as it is right now”. Some decades ago, nobody bothered about these things but now people are very sophisticated and concerned towards soft skills. Soft skills are very important not only in teaching profession, but in other professions too. One must have an excellent grip on soft skills to get success in life. Soft skills are a show case of our attitude and nature. Possessing effective soft skills is a key to success not only in teaching profession, but in all professions which require human interaction.

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