

RTE should cover higher secondary education - Sibal

New Delhi : Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal while addressing the inaugural session of the 58th meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) on June 07, 2011 suggested that the Right to Education (RTE) be extended to the higher secondary level, which will provide more avenues for children emerging from elementary education.

The RTE law makes it mandatory for governments to provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to 14 years in neighbourhood school till the completion of elementary education. He also stated that the critical challenges the nation faces are to develop, recognize and enhance skills in youth to be productive members of society and the economy.

India to set up five PIO universities for its Diaspora

The Government of India plans to set-up five PIO (Persons of Indian Origin) Universities which will exclusively cater to the diaspora students of Indian origin. This was announced at the mini Pravasi Bharatiya Divas by Didar Singh, secretary at the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs.

The PIO University, as per plans, will be established by a private organization under the Innovation Universities Act (once it is approved), where the support to the said University would come in the form of research support and student scholarships. The Innovation Universities Bill has been forwarded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). The proposed structure of the 'Universities of Innovation' would have the advantage of a world class institution coming up through the private sector where PIO students could then gain admission through the scholarship scheme of our Ministry and such an arrangement would be accommodated within the reservation policy of Government of India.

IGNOU launches programme on sustainability science

New Delhi: The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has launched an online post-graduate diploma programme on sustainability science to cater to those who are curious about the environment and the Earth.

According to the university, graduates from social and natural sciences streams, policy makers, administrators, scientists, educators and the general public are eligible to pursue the programme, which has a minimum duration of one year and a maximum of four years.

With the launch, IGNOU has become one of the very few universities in the world and the first in the country to start sustainability science as a new discipline.

EDITORIAL

Dear friends

Greetings.

We have the pleasure to present the June, 2011 issue of the HEF bi-monthly news bulletin.

Apart from the important news during the two months, this issue contains two of our regular features:

- 1. Views on education by a great Indian. This issue contains the views of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*
- 2. In lieu of one article this issue contains two articles of generic interest. One article is on importance of soft skills and the other on the issues and problems facing educational system in India. Both these articles have been authored by very senior members of HEF and we are sure you would enjoy reading them.*

*In my last editorial I mentioned about need for a National Policy on Higher Education. And the next agenda before the HEF is to drive home some of the points in this regard. Therefore, as mentioned in the group communication, we are starting a **monthly policy corner** which will focus on small, varied but important issues related to policy framework. We strongly believe that in case we do not conceptualize, devise means and take action in the right direction towards policy reforms, there will be every possibility of slipping and slipping badly from the global standards. Convergence in diversity, healthy debate leading to actionable issues and commitment of purpose are some of the steps we need to take and take urgently. As rightly told by one of our friends in the group communication that though the problems faced by the Indian education may be global in nature, the solutions have to be home grown. And therefore, a forum like HEF has an enormous role to play.*

As usual I take this opportunity to thank and congratulate Richard Lasrado, the young dynamic member and his team for bringing out this bulletin!

Regards

AK Sen Gupta

Founder and Convener

Higher Education Forum

Soft Skills – Too Important to be Ignored!!

Recently Shiv Khera, the renowned corporate trainer, made a very significant statement. He said, "We are hired for our technical skills, but fired for the lack of soft skills". In the corporate world, HR departments rate soft skills, as valuable skills while selecting new employees, conversely they also agree that employees with well-developed soft skills are hard to find. Clearly, there's a huge gap between the soft skills that organizations need, and that the fresh employees possess. Companies have offered soft-skills training to employees for years. But as every experienced trainer would acknowledge, these programs are typically the first to go when budgets are cut. Given a choice between funding a course on computer skills or a course on active listening, the corporate heads more willingly sign off on the computer course. Why? Because until recently, there had been no hard evidence that soft skills make a difference.

What are soft skills? This basic question is not easy to answer, because the perception of what is a soft skill differs from context to context. A subject may be considered a soft skill in one particular area, and may be considered a hard skill in another. Moreover, the understanding of what should be recognized as a soft skill varies widely. Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job. Generally, soft skills are defined as "skills, abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than to formal or technical knowledge," and it commonly includes at least two distinct clusters of behaviors: interaction (including friendliness, teamwork, ability to fit in, appropriate grooming, and the like) and motivation (including such components as enthusiasm, positive work attitude, dependability, and willingness to learn). The term often also includes some communication behaviors.

Technical or hard skills are domain specific and cannot be transferred, but soft skills are transferable skills and are necessary for every domain. An individual's 'employability assets' comprise their knowledge (i.e. what they know), skills (what they do with what they know) and attitudes (how they do it). There are a number of detailed categorizations in the literature which, for instance, distinguish between:

- k **Baseline assets'** such as basic skills and essential personal attributes (such as reliability and integrity)
- k **Intermediate assets'** such as occupational specific skills (at all levels), generic or key skills (such as communication and problem solving) and key personal attributes (such as motivation and initiative), and
- k **High level assets'** involving skills which help contribute to organizational performance (such as team working, self management, commercial awareness etc.).

Top Engineering students to be offered chance to study at IITs

New Delhi: Students who perform well initially at their engineering colleges may soon be offered an automatic opportunity by the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) to complete their undergraduate engineering programme at one of the prestigious institutes and also earn a the coveted Ph.D from the IITs.

The panel that had been set up by the Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry under former energy commission chairman Anil Kakodkar to create reforms for IITs came up with this suggestion to allow the IITs to pick 2500 brilliant third year students at other engineering colleges and allow them an opportunity to study at the institutes.

According to the blueprint of the proposal, the students will be allowed to complete their B.Tech at the IITs and then also pursue a Ph.D. at the prestigious engineering institutes.

contd..... Soft Skills – Too Important to be Ignored!!

Merely being in possession of employer-relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes is not enough for an individual to either 'move self-sufficiently' in the modern labor market or 'realize their potential'. They need the capability to exploit their assets, to market them and sell them. The real key to the efficacy of professionals is their soft skills. They help transfer their domain knowledge into purposeful practice.

The mandate for our institutes of higher learning and professional courses is to provide the industry with employable candidates, who could be productive from day one. To achieve this end, they should invest more time and resources in training their students in the soft skills domain. Would it make business sense for our academic institutes to invest in soft skills labs and training? It's imperative to elucidate a few reasons stating why it's a sound investment.

Training in soft skills would give the students an edge towards effectiveness in:

- m **Leading people:** Leading and motivating self, leading a team, conflict management, interviewing and selecting new members, delegation, coaching, networking, and developing others,
- m **Managing information:** Decision making, problem solving, meeting management, persuasion, and presentation skills,
- m **Managing activities:** Product quality, workplace safety, customer care, and fund raising,
- m **Managing resources:** People and finances.

As the global employment environment becomes challenging, potential recruiters seek personal attributes like attitude, values, and communication skills apart from the core competencies for any job. Developing soft skills are important in facilitating and empowering committed individuals to ensure a smooth transition from aspiring students to young successful managers and practitioners in the business world.

Concluding, soft skills are like the salt in our food. No matter how simple or complex your recipe is, it will not taste good until there is a dash of salt in the right amount.

Authored by Dr. Farida Virani, Faculty & Consultant – HR and Education
Email: dr.faridavirani@gmail.com

EDITOR'S BLOG

Dear Readers,

Hope you are enjoying the HEF bulletin.

I would like to inform you about MyEducationalGuide-Empowering Youth (MEG) newspaper and its services offered to Indian colleges. For HEF, MEG is coordinating with foreign universities in arranging foreign collaboration to conduct Doctoral program for HEF faculty members.

MEG is a bimonthly career oriented FREE newspaper circulated to more than 1000 schools and colleges in India and around 300 foreign universities. MEG is a platform to facilitate collaboration of Indian institutes with foreign institutes for following purpose:

1. Joint venture programme development with foreign colleges and universities for example a 2 + 1 degree progression for undergraduate level, or 1+1 Masters Degree progression.
2. Student study tour, Faculty study tour, Faculty research tour, etc.
3. Arranging foreign university visit to Indian institute's campus for student recruitment and for commercial agreement.
4. Counseling of Indian students for all countries, all levels and all programs
5. Arranging foreign students visit to Indian campus for a week or two weeks workshops on Yoga, Vedic science, Culture, Religion, etc.
6. International internship and training of 6/12/18 months for Indian students
7. Bringing foreign awarding bodies like ABE, ABP, CTH, IAB, IFA, IFRS, etc to local Indian campus. (Students completing these awarding foreign certificates are directly eligible for credits in UK universities or can pursue entire Bachelors program in the local Indian campus through our exclusive arrangement.)
8. Arranging ASIC foreign accreditation to local Indian colleges for global degree recognition.

Interested HEF institutes in the above services should email me at richard@myeducationabroad.com for more details.

In the words of Ralph Ellison, "Education is all a matter of building bridges".

Happy Monsoon & keep reading HEF Bulletin!

Thank you,
Sincerely yours
Richard Lasrado

Indian Educational System – Competitive or Desolate?

The Indian educational system in was terribly rigid, far more rigid than our own (*i.e. the British*), on which it was modelled. The system rewarded the nebulous ideal of 'well-roundedness': it was designed to chum out the bureaucrats and technicians who would oversee the Indian empire (under our supervision of course). What it was not designed to do was to recognize genius – its obsessiveness and its blindness, its refusal to be anything other than what it is.

The various deficiencies in our present educational system can plainly be described as non-reformable, as the doctoring around on certain symptoms clearly shows. Failures everywhere, compartmentalization, bureaucratic overkill, exploitation of resources, and horribly outdated curricula: this is the abysmal picture we are facing.

Every new government, every new education Minister, be it in a State, be it at the Centre, tries to "*do something*", and invariably, this "something", or sometimes even "somethings" only lead to ephemeral ripples on the surface of the big ocean named education, but beneath there is the same old, inefficient, unjust, and hopelessly antiquated system, like an impenetrable swamp where all sorts of profit-oriented creatures play their games, and these games are not in favour of what could be called education and enlightenment.

India has not been able to outgrow its colonial dependencies in many fields, but to our opinion, the inability, or is it unwillingness (?) to adjust our educational system to the framework of a modern, secular democracy, bears the biggest dangers for any developmental sustainability. Outside India, people somehow are in awe of the so called IT supremacy of 'Indians', but they are not aware of the fact that the IT hubs (Bangalore, Hyderabad, etc.) mainly consist of BPOs which we consider as another form of subjugation to external (and internal, for that matter) exploitation. How many highly qualified but perhaps not useful in practical terms, as we see later on, are working in BPOs, where they can hardly put in their acquired knowledge.

We have to put the finger into the wounds and state clearly that there cannot be sustainable improvement in the present system.

Here, we focus on three of the main evils of the present-day educational system in India:

1. **Teacher's training:**
 - a. outdated, authoritarian teaching methods
 - b. deficient quality in teacher's training
 - c. lack of motivation
2. **Pressures students are subjected to:**
 - a. obsession with 'discipline'
 - b. killing of creativity
 - c. punishing questioning students
 - d. wrong appreciation: parrotizing is approved, creativity punished
3. **Reservation in higher education:**
 - a. prevents appreciation after merits
 - b. de-motivates brilliant would-be students
 - c. harms our economy as a whole

Concerning point 1, we have to mention the fact that the average Indian teacher chose his/her profession not out of genuine motivation to communicate and work with children and youth, and to educate them for life, but for the very trivial reason that a teacher in India has a comparatively convenient, comfortable and well-paid profession, and that quality assessment, accountability, and reliability concerning attendance and attention to students doesn't play a role at all. Job security is the mantra, and thus, the average Indian teacher is happy to draw his/her salary, irrespective if he/she delivers what should be expected. Child and youth psychology is 'taught' through abstract knowledge from books, but never experienced through practice. This applies to all subjects, not only within the teacher's training, but also to the way learning is transferred right from the primary school upwards.

Point 2. refers to the usual teaching methods which are mainly authoritarian and based on learning by rote which, as we all should know, has nothing to do with acquiring knowledge for furthering understanding and independent thinking. Thus, we produce parrots instead of creative, curious youth who venture out to discover the fields of learning. As a teacher told us: "We are not teachers, we are noise managers."

Our teachers don't know how to instil curiosity in children and youth, they don't know how to create the joy of learning and, at the same time, they hardly enjoy their profession. This is the vicious circle of our educational system.

Even so called modern schools, like, for example, 'Montessori' schools, hardly deliver what they promise. To compensate these shortcomings, they are highly priced which conveys the message that they have highly qualified teaching methods. We have to state the fact that their teachers come from the same training institutions as all the others – how can we expect a difference? They are bluff-, or sham packages, deceptively disguised in stylish buildings, conveying the message of splendid student's care.

Our teachers are not happy, but they feel insecure. At the latest from the times of good old Sigmund Freud, we should know that children and youth have a high sensitivity for weaknesses in adults, and that their weaknesses are usually compensated by authoritarian patterns of behaviour. Unhappy teachers produce unhappy children who, step by step, lose their natural curiosity and eagerness to learn and to know as much as possible. Consequently, some compensate their frustration through 'indiscipline' (and risk punishment), some just submit to the pressure and 'behave'. The latter makes the majority of students, as they are sandwiched between the expectations of their parents – hands-in-glove with the school authorities – and the teacher's demands. They learn well enough how to please, but they suffer.

A teacher told us: "Parents expect me to discipline their children, even to beat them. If I am lenient from their point of view, they complain with the headmaster, and I get into difficulties."

Point 3. strikes a very sensitive issue, especially in times of societal hush-up and 'political correctness'. Our reservation system, well-intended after the country became independent, has become an evil in almost all spheres of society and we can safely say that it has to be abolished altogether. It has come out as a complete failure measured from the aims & objectives with which it was inducted into our Constitution. Let us take all the efforts, the bureaucracy and the huge amount of money which is going down the drain with it, and build up an efficient system where all children and youth will have the enabling environment to develop their potential. Besides, the reservation system is tragically enhancing the gaps between castes and communities instead of bridging gaps, it is more and more tearing our society apart. Essentially, the reservation system means nothing else than substituting one injustice with another – should we allow this?

There is not motivational impetus in quotas, but the contrary. Our best potential is withering away undetected, undeveloped, while the average and the under-average performers are put into positions where they invariably cannot deliver. It is not their fault. As a German proverb says: "You cannot transform an oxen into a racehorse." Consequently, the proverbial oxen would be very unhappy to be forced into racing, while apt horses will spend their life pulling the plough.

Nelson Mandela put the aim of 'equal chances for all – according to their abilities' in the following words:

"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another."

Where do we go from here?

Logically, the consequences for all of us and for our decision makers in education can only be:

- k Overhauling the existing educational system as it cannot be reformed, starting from nursery schools upwards (one cannot build a stable house on flimsy ground)
- k Create efficient infrastructure towards **holistic education** which would include practise-orientation, social responsibility and 'happiness'
- k Overhaul the present system of teacher's training and create up-to-date 'teacher-entrepreneurs' who enjoy their profession and are happy
- k Abolish reservation altogether by substituting it with an environment where all children and youth have the opportunity to develop their potential

Much more could be said, but we are looking forward to a lively discussion from all dedicated friends & foes.

Authored by Irmel V. Marla, Sociologist/Anthropologist & Economist and

Dr. Kamal Taori IAS (rtd.). Ms Irmel is the Chairperson and Dr Taori is the Advisor of International Institute for Holistic Research and Voluntary Action (India-Germany) in cooperation with Rural Business Hub Foundation India.

IEWS ON EDUCATION

Dr. SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN AND EDUCATION

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) was the first Vice President and second President of India. He was also a Philosopher and great Educationist who introduced the thinking of western idealist philosophers into Indian thought. He was a devoted teacher and the country celebrates 5th September as teacher's day. In 1918, he was selected as Professor of Philosophy by the University of Mysore. In 1921, Radhakrishnan was nominated as Professor of Philosophy at the Calcutta University, 1921. In 1923, his book "Indian Philosophy" was published. The book was hailed as a "philosophical classic and a literary masterpiece."

Foreign recognition of his genius came to him in the form of invitations and lecturing in the universities of England and America without any note to assist him would keep his learned audience enthralled with words of wisdom packed with thoughts and studded with reference flowing out with spontaneous and unpremeditated ease.

Dr. Radhakrishnan's contribution to education has been unique and irreplaceable. He had firsthand experience of educational institutions and their multi-farious problems which he happened to study from different angles and various places. This was one of the best periods of his life. Dr. Radhakrishnan was asked to designate the happiest year of his life. He would-in all probability regard the period of his professorship in the presidency College in madras and his work in the Mysore and Calcutta Universities and his Vice Chancellorship of the Banaras Hindu University as the most significant in his personal career, because it was then that he perfected his intellectual perceptions and was able not only to render great service to the cause of educations in the league of nations and in the UNESCO but was able to make his mark as one of the most prominent authorities on Indian philosophy, way of life and religion.

The philosopher in him would help the educationist to see beyond the limits of things as they are into the realm of ideas and values, where education holds a meaning to life. He believed that education must encompass a wide frontier where the human spirit may roam and wonder ask questions have great dreams search for the deeper values of his life and realize the spiritual reality. As an Educationist, administrator, renowned professor, philosopher, diplomat statesman and president the commanded an excellent vantage point from where he could see that the whole human business was moving towards a fatal destiny and only education of the right sort could save it from a tragic finale.

He believed, there are three types of existence-the natural, the social and the spiritual and these are inter-related. The content of teaching may accordingly be classified under three groups. Science and Technology, both are concerned with our relation to natures. Social sciences concerned with our relation to society and philosophy. Arts and literature concerned with our relation to values or the world of spirit. The different studies should be treated as parts of a whole. The house of knowledge cannot be divided against itself and, therefore, it is idle to think that science gives us this, art gives us that, and literature gives us a third. It is one indivisible whole with a particular spiritual direction.

Education is a great instrument of social emancipation. It strengthens democracy to establish, preserve and protect the spirit of equal freedom and equal rights among men, regardless of race, religion, sex, occupation or economics status. Equal opportunity however, does not mean identical opportunity. It means the equal-availability of education for every person to the extent he can profit from it and of a kind best designed to assure his maximum development recognizing differences of ability, aptitude and interests.

According to him, the greatest stress is to be laid on the quality of education which is imparted. Education should not only be broad but it should be deep. Quality and depth must not be lacking, education cannot be interpreted as a compilation of disconnected information or a collection of distracting scraps. From such an erroneous an ordered intellectual vision or a harmony of patterns will not result. Only factual information or patchwork of knowledge will not bring wisdom which is the supreme need of the time. On women education he said, "women are the missionaries of civilization with their immense capacity for self sacrifice they are the unquestioned leaders in ahimsa" It would be wrong to differentiate between men and women in regard to opportunities for intellectual and spiritual development. The education of women should be considered on a humanistic plan rather than on a psychological basis. He believed the position of women in any society is a true index of its cultural and spiritual level.

Dr. Radhakrishnan symbolizes India, ancient and modern secular and spiritual. He epitomizes the quintessence of all cultures and contributes to the building of a bridge of understanding between the east and the west.