

Towards an Educated India : Challenges for Vocational Courses

EVEN about a decade back, vocational education in our country was looked down upon and those who pursued this stream of studies were considered weak students who otherwise would not have got admission into any other discipline. This is because cognitive skills were given precedence over practical employment skills. Our views on education were stereotyped: only those who performed well in examinations particularly in science stream were endowed with professional skills and aptitude. There was also a highly nuanced but forced distinction between the concepts of professional and vocational education. Hence, those who were good at so-called manual work like carpentry, electrical repair, masonry were the ones who could only pursue vocational education! This was a highly prejudiced and unholistic view of education with a distinct class prejudice.

Thanks to the National Skills Commission Report

(2008), there is a paradigm shift in our thinking that has led to demystifying of the above postulates. The mindset of not encouraging adult and continuing education is also undergoing change. Further, with the popularity of distance and open education, the mystique surrounding of 'What' of education is gradually getting subverted. This brings us to the 'Why' of education. It is not only the mental skills but also physical skills that are equally important for learning and doing. Skill competencies are linked to the market and manpower is needed to fill in the void regarding competencies whether manual, labor, various petty trades and the like. The fact is that we need people for repair of refrigerators, electrical wiring, and also masons and carpenters.

The emphasis has, therefore, in on vocational education and skill develop-

It is time for the vocational education in the country to grow and prosper



ment, learning and earning, and this is a marked departure from the tautology of success of conventional classroom learning for general streams. There is a fair amount of discussion nowadays about the skill gap between demand & supply in trades. The policy makers today through the recommendations of the

processes and rationale of education today. The challenges are, therefore, to integrate such thinking in our educational processes, link education with the market & industry, encourage self-employment, and finally focus on the aura of pride in the person endowed with one's own gifted skills.

Finally there is also the need

to recognize that the person who has say, been doing Welding for the last twenty years is, as qualified as the Bachelor of Engineering Degree holder. India Gandhi National Open University has been advocating the concept of prior knowledge / learning that envisages that a person having say, skills in carpentry, masonry or plumbing may be certified for these skills after an assessment. This is an innovative concept based on what a person does for living through his / her long-term usage of com-

petencies & skills. This can be further extended to other forms of indigenous artisanship such as weaving or handicrafts. This postulate of prior learning recognition is based on the National Skills Commission Report. Vocational education and skill-development are now largely synonymous. However, vocational education and training must also be comprehended at various levels. In addition to trades, there can also be aesthetic vocational skills such as theatre, performance and music. Further, attuning vocational education to various target groups is a must. They include poor people, women, tribal people, domestic workers, people living in interior areas, and the differently abled people. In other words, chalking out such target groups & designing suitable vocational education is a big challenge and only then, the policy makers will be able to tackle the issues holistically with an inclusive perspective. Further integrating ICT appli-

cations with vocational training is a big challenge. The Government of India's portal, Sakshat can be an effective repository for using technology like the moodle for teaching and learning and in all areas of skill development. Further, the common services centers in the country can be focal points of integrating computer literacy and vocational education. Open and free source websites can also be used for this purpose.

In conclusion, vocational education and training is an all encompassing form of technical vocational education, such as engineering and construction skills to aesthetic skills

and indigenous artisanship. Sustaining and creating skills is the ultimate challenge; reviving and retaining them, and finally blending them with the latest trends in technology are some of the challenges of vocational education and training. Hopefully policy makers are aware of the contextual challenges ahead in a developing but economically divided country!

(This article has been authored by A S Guha, Officer on Special Duty, IGNOU Institute for Vocational Education and Training, Shillong, Meghalaya. He may be contacted at asguharsd@gmail.com)

EXPERT SPEAK: HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM

National Skills Commission Report are trying to treat Vocational Education as main line education and this indeed is a radical paradigm shift.

This is because there are young people who on finishing their school (+2) have come to realize that conventional studies are not what they are meant for; their aptitude lies more; in the pragmatic, the so-called mundane world of materials. This is what is changing the very thought

processes and rationale of education today. The challenges are, therefore, to integrate such thinking in our educational processes, link education with the market & industry, encourage self-employment, and finally focus on the aura of pride in the person endowed with one's own gifted skills.

Meet the Mentor!

BY KAVERI RAY

MENTORSHIP refers to a personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. The word itself was inspired by the character of Mentor in Homer's Odyssey. The legend behind mentoring is as old as history itself; from Socrates who was the mentor of Plato, and Plato who then mentored Aristotle.

It is often said that to make it the top, one needs to have a mentor who helps show him/her the roadmap to success. The discovery of one's career - some say - begins with finding a mentor in the first place. Realizing the importance of this concept, a trio of ex-IIT graduates and young professionals have founded Mentorpolis.com, an online and

The Concept

Ex-IITians Avijit Sharma along with his friends Anshul Agarwal and Pratik Agarwal started the online venture that provides professional advice to students, from accomplished mentors of top-notch institutes and has notched over 600 registered mentees in a span of a year. "The traditional sense of mentoring has been of coaching but our perspective is different. Mentorship today is more about the providing information guidance by someone who has been in your shoes not too long ago, keeping the traditional value intact," explains Sharma.

"We had our seniors as your mentors who probably guided us through everything related to our career and even relationships and life in general! However, we realized not everybody has such kind of resource at his or her disposal. And this is where we felt the need to provide a unified network for all to find authentic advice on their career goals from people who have done what the mentee aspires to do," adds Sharma, co-founder of Mentorpolis.com on the

birth of the website that provided a mentor-mentee nexus online.

The Connect

Mentoring is now being looked at as a notch above counseling, more as a one-stop solution from people who have been through the same phase in their lives. The mentees in distress can seek solutions from mentors who can best understand the mentee's situation and who are from different verticals of higher education. The current list of mentors boasts alumina of IIT, IIM, Stanford, Harvard who dish up the much needed worldly advice to the mentee on verticals ranging mostly between engineering and MBA. "We have kept the verticals concen-

TRENDS



trate on the major higher educational concerns so far. But we are soon going to expand into law, finance, medical and even the unconventional careers," adds Sharma.

A mentee calls to put forth his/her questions, which are soon followed by a two-sided exchange of customized advice. "We enquire

A bunch of young professionals have started a new venture which underlines the importance of Mentoring

on the kind of background and the query of the mentee and find them a mentor from our pool who has the expertise on the same field for a better connect and equipped enough to provide the advice being looked for," explains Sharma. Once the connect is made they could provide the service through web, telephonic consultation and even in-person.

The Business model

There is a per session fee of Rs 500 for the facility, which helps the mentoring reach beyond the obvious boundaries, so that more and more people may benefit from it. The venture is modeled to provide authentic information on niche topics, with a reach that can be available for the tier two cities, as well. "Mentoring has to step beyond the confines of management schools because it is based on the fact that it would help one find their chosen area of interest and not just a career to look for." Sharma signed off with the popular "Three Idiots" sentiment echoing strongly. Something that is the absolute need of the hour in the current stress-laden world of the young ones.

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