

PROBLEM DEALING STRATEGIES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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This study probes problem-dealing strategies employed by secondary school teachers in specific situations. A sample of 150 secondary school teachers from five districts of Kerala was drawn using stratified random technique. A standardised Tacit Knowledge Scale for teachers containing 18 problematic situations in dealing with students, peers, administrators, and parents was prepared. The responses were categorised under seven problem-dealing strategies viz., avoid, confer, consult, comply, delegate, legislate and retaliate. In majority of situations, teachers preferred to 'comply', 'confer' and 'consult' than using the other strategies. Majority of teachers were not willing to 'avoid' and 'retaliate' in any of the situations. Level of tacit knowledge makes significant difference in the preference for strategies to deal with the problematic situations. Findings implied the need for improvement of practical intelligence of teachers through a process of sharing tacit knowledge right from pre-service through in-service teacher development.

INTRODUCTION

”Every teacher and educationist of experience knows that even the best curriculum and the most perfect syllabus remain dead unless quickened into life by the right methods of teaching and the right kind of teacher” (Mudaliar 1953, p.84) . Raising graduation requirements is of little use where there are not enough qualified teachers or expert teachers. Within the context of teaching, practical skills are especially important. Teachers require expertise to make judgments about what is likely to work in a given context in response to students' needs. In the midst of

unprecedented quantitative expansion in the teaching community, society fails to ensure that every teacher has this capability. Many a teachers get easily perplexed when they have to face problematic situations in their profession. Often they lack the ability to practically deal with problematic situations, and implement right and timely solutions. Teachers as the engineers of the future society ought to be able to apply knowledge into practice at the right time and in the right situation.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Sternberg's third sub theory of intelligence, called contextual or practical, deals with 'the mental activity involved in attaining fit to context' (Sternberg 1985, p. 45). Processes of adaptation, shaping and selection create an ideal fit between individual and the environment. One aspect of practical intelligence is tacit knowledge, the knowledge gained from everyday experience. Tacit knowledge involves the practical ability to learn from experience and apply the resulting understanding in pursuit of personally valued goals. Tacit knowledge helps the individual to successfully adapt to, select, or shape real life environments. It is insight into factors underlying the successful performance of real life tasks and job domains, including teaching.

Teaching being a social activity, among the three components of practical skills viz., a) dealing with self; b) dealing with others and c) dealing with tasks (Sternberg, Forsythe, Hedlund, Horvath, Wagner, Williams, Snook & Grigorenko 2000, pp.170-171). It chiefly depend on "dealing with others". 'Dealings with others' has four subcategories viz., i) dealing with students ii) dealing with other teachers iii) dealing with administrators and iv) dealing with parents.

Stemler, Elliott, Grigorenko & Sternberg (2006, p.108) concentrating on 'dealing with others' empirically derived seven teacher strategies for dealing with social situations. They are: i) avoiding, ii) complying, iii) conferring, iv) consulting, v) delegating, vi) legislating, and, vii) retaliating. Teachers who are avoiders ignore the problem or do not attend to the situation. Avoiding the situation can take the form of simply ignoring the problem or disengaging oneself from the scenario altogether. Depending on the situation, avoidance could take the form of denial or procrastination. Compliers act in accordance with whatever is asked of them. This approach to social problem solving suggests that the person should not make waves, or simply comply in order to make life easier in the short term. Those who confer prefer to discuss the issue within the context of a more intimate and private sphere. Some problems are best solved at the private, one-on-one level, without the social pressures and potential embarrassment associated with discussing an issue within the public sphere. Consulting is appealing to a third party for advice and asking that individual or group to work together to solve the problem rather than asking the third party to solve the problem for the decision maker. Delegators entrust the responsibility for taking action into someone else. That is "passing the buck" to another party and absolves him or herself of the responsibility because the teacher does not have the time or energy to deal with the problem or the teacher may not believe him or her capable of solving the problem. Legislating is solving the problem according to some acceptable law and order. To retaliate is to take the form of passive-aggressive action, such as physical or psychological abuse having an element of punishment involved in it. The goal of the teacher may be to shame or belittle the antagonist.

Each of these seven strategies has advantages and disadvantages within any given interpersonal reaction in teaching and no single strategy is uniformly the best in all situations. Teachers are likely to find themselves in situations where they confront complex social circumstances. Professional effectiveness of teachers is determined among other things by how they deal with problem situations. Skilled interpersonal relations are crucial for effective teaching and learning and the experience is related to the capacity of teachers to identify various strategies (Elliott, Stemler, Grigorenko, Sternberg.& Hoffman 2011, p.83). Hence, it is relevant to know what are the various problem-dealing strategies preferred by secondary school teachers in dealing challenging situations arising in their career life. This would help in developing practical skills in in-service and pre-service teachers by providing the opportunity to deal with the problems in real and simulated contexts. With this intent, this study raises the question, what are the various problem dealing strategies preferred by secondary school teachers in dealing challenging situations arising in their career.

OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the preferred Problem Dealing Strategies among secondary school teachers in dealing challenging situations with students, peers, administrators, and parents
2. To examine whether the preferred Problem Dealing Strategies among secondary school teachers with high tacit knowledge differ from those with low, in resolving problems with students, peers, administrators, and parents.

HYPOTHESIS

Preferred Problem Dealing Strategies among secondary school teachers with high tacit knowledge significantly differ from those

with low, in resolving specific problems with i) students, ii) peers, iii) administrators, and iv) parents.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study was conducted on a sample of 150 secondary school teachers from five revenue districts of Kerala viz., Thrissur, Palakkad, Ernakulam, Malappuram and Kozhikode drawn by stratified random sampling technique. Due representation was ensured to the various strata viz., gender, locale of the school and type of school management.

Tool used for data collection

Tacit Knowledge Scale for Teachers (Mumthas & Blessytha 2009) is used for measuring the extent of Tacit Knowledge of secondary school teachers. It presents 18 problematic situations categorized under four types of dealings viz., i) dealing with students (10 situations) ii) dealing with peers (3 situations) iii) dealing with administrators (3 situations) and iv) dealing with parents (2 situations). The response options to the problematic situations represents the seven-problem dealing strategies viz. avoid, confer, consult, comply, delegate, legislate and retaliate. Authors used the procedure recommended by Sternberg (2000) to validate the response choices to each situation. For this, agreement (i.e., standard deviation of rating $d < 1$) among 50 expert teachers, identified by nomination from heads of the institution, on strategy they would prefer to deal with a particular situation was identified. The scale had test-retest reliability with coefficient 0.73 (N=30).

Statistical techniques used

Percentage analysis and χ^2 test of independence were used.

RESULTS

Preferred Problem Dealing Strategies among Secondary School Teachers

The preferred Problem Dealing Strategies of secondary school teachers, while 'Dealing with students' were 'confer' (84.30%), 'consult' (82.84%), 'comply' (80.00%), 'legislate' (69.39%). While 'Dealing with students', in all the 10 given situations, low preference was constantly with 'avoid' (8.72%), 'retaliate' (15.96%) and delegate (17.89%). Thus, teachers liked to 'confer', 'consult', 'comply', and 'legislate' more than using 'avoid', 'retaliate' and 'delegate' strategies to deal with students. The Problem Dealing Strategies of secondary schoolteachers while 'Dealing with peers' were likely to be consult (78%), confer (73.67%) and delegate (52.34%) than retaliate (12.17%) and avoid (8.00%). None of the teachers preferred to comply and legislate with their colleagues to settle problems amongst them. In 'Dealing with administrators' even more of the teachers liked to consult (92.34%), confer (89.11%) and delegate (65.67%) and lesser proportion of them tended to retaliate (2.67%) and avoid (5.33%). Unlike with their colleagues, a sizeable section of teachers tended to comply (10.00%) and legislate (31.33%) with their administrators. When the teachers were 'Dealing with Parents' most of the teachers preferred the strategy comply (87.33%) and confer (51.67%) and some of them avoid (4.00%) and retaliate (11.00%); but none of the teachers consult, delegate and legislate with parents to settle problems between them. Irrespective of whom they deal with - students, peers, administrators or parents - 'confer' strategy was employed by majority of teachers, and equally, they differed with the use of 'avoid' strategy. A noteworthy proportion of teachers used the strategy 'retaliate' for dealing the entire four

categories, though to a lesser extent with administrators. While dealing with students, peers, and administrators teachers preferred to 'consult' and 'delegate' as well. However, none of the teachers 'consult', 'delegate' and 'legislate' when dealing with parents. Likewise, teachers while dealing with peers did not use 'comply' and 'legislate'; though in dealing the students and parents, majority of them used 'comply' strategy. In dealing with students, majority of teachers preferred 'Legislative' strategy.

Difference in preference for Problem Dealing Strategies between High Tacit Knowledge (HTK group) and Low Tacit Knowledge (LTK group) teachers

In Dealing with Students

In dealing 'Stealing tendency of students', majority of teachers 'confer', 'delegate' and 'legislate'. HTK group teachers preferred these strategies little more than those in LTK group do ($p > .05$). Teachers in dealing this situation preferred no other strategies. For dealing 'Drug mishap', majority of teachers prefer to 'consult' and 'confer' with students and disagreed to 'legislate' and 'retaliate'. 'Consult' strategy was higher among LTK group than HTK group ($p < .01$); whereas objection to 'legislate' and 'retaliate' strategies were higher among HTK group than LTK group ($p > .05$). Majority of teachers preferred 'comply', 'confer', 'delegate' and 'legislate' for managing misunderstanding of relation with student. HTK group preferred 'confer' ($p < .01$) and 'legislate' ($p > .05$) more than LTK group. Preference for 'comply' and 'delegate' strategies differed little between HTK and LTK groups ($p > .05$). Generally, teachers disagreed with 'avoid' and 'retaliate' here, but, disagreement was higher for HTK group ($p < .05$).

In dealing with 'Inattentive student', majority of the teachers preferred 'consult', confer', 'legislate' and 'delegate' irrespective of the groups ($P > .05$). Here, though majority of the teachers disagreed to 'avoid'; HTK group disagreed more ($p < .05$). While 'dealing students' fight', commonly teachers preferred 'consult', 'confer' and 'delegate'; and disagreed with the use of 'avoid' and 'legislate' strategies. 'Delegate' strategy was more among LTK group ($p < .05$) while disagreement with 'avoid' and 'legislate' strategies was higher for HTK group ($p < .01$). 'Confer' and 'legislate' strategies for dealing 'insult from students' was high among teachers irrespective of the groups ($p > .05$). Here, teachers normally disagree with 'consult' and 'retaliate' strategies; but HTK group disagreed more than LTK group ($p < .05$). While handling 'mocking habit of intelligent student' majority of the teachers preferred 'comply', 'confer', and 'legislate', irrespective of groups ($p > .05$) and an equal share of both the groups agreed with the strategy 'retaliate' ($p > .05$). Here, HTK group disagreed in using 'avoid' and 'delegate' strategies than LTK group ($p < .05$).

In dealing with 'Pornographic magazines with student': a vast majority of HTK group teachers agreed with the strategy 'confer' than LTK group ($p < .05$); HTK group disagreed with 'retaliate' strategy more than LTK group ($p > .05$). For dealing 'malpractice at examination hall': 'confer' strategy was preferred by most of the teachers regardless of the groups ($p > .05$); teachers disagree to 'retaliate' regardless of the groups ($p > .05$) and majority of teachers disagreed with the strategies 'avoid' and 'retaliate', disagreement with former being higher for HTK than LTK group ($p < .05$).

In Dealing with Peers

In dealing 'problem related with supervision of student teacher', majority of teachers disagreed with 'avoid' and 'retaliate' strategies. HTK group teachers disagreed with these strategies more than LTK group ($P < .01$). In dealing 'interfering in colleague's decision', disagreement with 'avoid', 'delegate' and 'retaliate' was higher for HTK group than LTK group ($p > .05$). Here, most of the teachers preferred to 'confer' and its preference was higher for LTK group ($p > .05$). Majority of the teachers preferred 'consult', 'confer' and 'delegate' for handling 'complaint from colleague'. 'Consult' and 'delegate' strategies were preferred by most of the teachers regardless of the groups ($p > .05$) whereas the preference to 'confer' was higher for LTK group ($p < .01$).

In Dealing with Administrators

For dealing 'Principal's grudge towards teacher', majority of teachers disagreed to 'avoid' and 'retaliate' strategies; but, disagreement was higher for HTK group teachers ($P < .05$). Here, most of the teachers preferred to 'confer' and 'delegate' strategies. The preference for 'confer' was higher for HTK group ($p > .05$) whereas the preference for 'delegate' was higher for LTK group ($p > .05$). Majority of teachers preferred to 'consult' and 'confer', but disagreed to 'comply' for dealing 'division fall problem'. Preference to 'consult' was only slightly higher for HTK group than LTK group ($p > .05$). However, preference to 'confer' was higher for LTK group than HTK group ($p < .05$) and objection to 'comply' was higher for HTK group than LTK group ($p < .05$). 'Consult', 'confer' and 'delegate' strategies for dealing 'dissatisfaction with authority's order' was high among teachers irrespective of the groups ($p > .05$). Here, disagreement with the strategy 'legislate' was higher for HTK group ($p < .05$).

In Dealing with Parents

In dealing 'PTA Meeting Conflicts', majority of teachers disagreed to 'confer', 'avoid' and 'retaliate' strategies. HTK group teachers disagreed with these strategies more than LTK group teachers do ($P < .05$). Disagreement with the strategy 'comply' for dealing 'PTA Meeting Conflicts' was low among teachers; but, HTK group disagreed with this strategy more than LTK group ($P < .05$). To deal with 'Parent demanding high grade' teachers mostly used 'confer' strategy and majority of teachers disagreed to 'avoid' and 'retaliate' strategies. HTK group disagreed with 'retaliate' strategy more than LTK group ($P < .05$).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study can be concluded that in majority of situations from among the seven strategies teachers prefer to 'comply', 'confer' and 'consult' more than the other strategies. At the same time it is quite explicit that majority of the teachers are not willing to 'avoid' and 'retaliate' in any of these situations. However, the level of Tacit Knowledge makes significant difference in the preference of various Problem Dealing Strategies.

This study has ample theoretical and practical implications for the improvement of the social conditions of teachings. Findings provide guidelines to teachers and teacher educators for the possible way of solving the problems and the worth of adopting different Problem Dealing Strategies in different situations. The effective use of strategies can be reflected upon and practiced by teachers for easy, timely and tactful solutions of challenging professional situations.

The findings of the study imply that avoiding and retaliating cannot be acceptable strategies while dealing with social side of teaching. This further implies that while teachers have to interact with others - students, peers, administrators and parents - it is better to discuss the issue within the context of more intimate and private sphere, to do what is ordered and requested instead of agitating and to appeal to a third party if it is needed. There is relevance for legislating too. Tacit knowledge makes significant difference in the preference of various problem dealing strategies. Practically intelligent teachers tend to reject the strategies 'avoid' and 'retaliate' than the practically less-intelligent teachers.

Having an association between level of tacit knowledge and problem dealing strategies necessitates the improvement of practical intelligence of teachers through the process of sharing tacit knowledge right from the teacher training institutions. Teacher preparation institutions have to focus social side of teaching further, with implicit and explicit instruction on practical skills for dealing with day-to-day problems that occur in teaching career.

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