

Recasting teaching as collaborative profession

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THE world pauses to mark World Teachers' Day every October 5. Bangladesh joins the global community in honouring educators, reflecting on their evolving role in society, and recognising their enduring contribution to shaping the minds of future generations. The theme for 2025, 'Recasting teaching as a collaborative profession,' underscores the urgent need to rethink how the profession is structured, valued and supported. It reminds us that teaching must not be understood as an isolated act, carried out in silos, but as a collective endeavour that flourishes on collaboration, peer learning and shared responsibility. The theme is particularly resonant for Bangladesh as the country strives to meet the Sustainable Development Goals and address long-standing challenges in its education system. The call to embrace collaboration is therefore both timely and essential.

For too long, teaching has been cast as a lonely pursuit, with educators expected to shoulder the burdens of large class sizes, scarce resources, rigid curricula and high expectations almost entirely on their own. This isolation has not only limited the professional growth of teachers but has also

constrained the quality of learning offered to students. Recasting teaching as a collaborative profession offers a way forward: it enables teachers to support one another, innovate together and collectively raise educational outcomes.

Beyond myth of solitary teacher

THE image of the selfless teacher who works tirelessly for pupils is deeply embedded in the national imagination. Yet, while such narratives celebrate devotion, they obscure a harsher truth: many teachers work in isolation, with few opportunities for professional exchange. At secondary level, where classes often exceed 60 pupils, preparation and management can be overwhelming. Primary teachers, likewise, juggle heavy administrative demands alongside instruction. However, collaboration remains limited, with little time allocated for shared lesson planning or peer observation.

The consequences of this lack of collegiality are tangible. Teachers miss the chance to refine their methods, learn from peers and build resilience in the face of daily challenges. Younger teachers are deprived of mentorship that could otherwise guide them through the fragile early stages of their careers. Dismantling the myth of the solitary teacher requires re-imagining schools as communities of practice rather than sites of individual struggle.

Professional development has traditionally depended on short, top-down training programmes. While these provide exposure to new methods, they rarely translate into sustained classroom practice. Teachers often return from training only to find little institutional support for applying fresh ideas.

By contrast, collaborative professional learning provides a more durable model. Peer mentoring, school-based learning communities and shared lesson planning enable teachers to become continuous learners. Pilot initiatives show promise: in some government primary schools, cluster meetings allow educators to exchange strategies, discuss challenges and devise solutions collectively. Non-governmental organisations, too, have facilitated peer-learning circles that encourage innovation in literacy and numeracy instruction.

These initiatives demonstrate that, when teachers are granted the structures and time to collaborate, professional growth becomes embedded in school culture. Teachers cease to be passive recipients of training and instead evolve into co-creators of knowledge.

Safeguard for well-being

TEACHING is not only intellectually demanding but emotionally taxing. Heavy workloads, oversized classrooms, community pressures and inadequate recognition often leave teachers drained, and in some cases, drive them out of the profession.

Collaboration can act as a safeguard. By working together, teachers share the burdens of lesson planning, assessment and classroom challenges. Crucially, they form networks of emotional support that help maintain morale. A teacher who can co-design lessons or seek advice from a peer is far less likely to feel overwhelmed or isolated.

Moreover, collaboration strengthens the collective voice of educators. Teacher associations have long fought for better pay and working conditions, but collaboration within schools also reinforces professional identity and agency. Well-being and empowerment thus become interconnected outcomes of a collaborative culture.

Recasting teaching as a collaborative profession requires schools to be redesigned as ecosystems of shared practice. Rather than seeing teachers as individual performers delivering prescribed curricula, schools must nurture cultures where teaching is a joint responsibility.

Collaboration may take the form of joint planning, peer observation, team teaching, or group problem-solving. School leaders, headteachers and principals, play a decisive role by modelling openness, valuing professional expertise and embedding collaboration in school routines. Encouragingly, some Bangladeshi schools already demonstrate what is possible. In certain urban contexts, weekly planning meetings allow teachers to co-design materials and discuss strategies for student engagement. In

rural areas, collaboration has enabled teachers to pool scarce resources, organise extracurricular activities and tackle attendance issues collectively. Scaling up such practices will demand both strong leadership and institutional backing.

Enabling collaboration

POLICY frameworks ultimately determine whether collaboration thrives or falters. In Bangladesh, teachers' schedules are often overloaded with administrative work and exam pressures, leaving little room for dialogue. Without structural reform, calls for collaboration will remain rhetorical.

The education ministry and the primary and mass education ministry must, therefore, weave collaboration into teacher standards. This could mean allocating dedicated time in timetables for joint planning, incentivising collaborative innovation, and embedding peer learning into appraisal systems. Teacher education programmes should also prepare new entrants for collaborative practice, using group projects, peer feedback and co-teaching simulations as models. Crucially, collaboration must not be imposed from above; it should be co-created with the profession itself, ensuring alignment with teachers' realities.

The education system continues to wrestle with inequities. Children in haor and char regions or in urban slums often face barriers to both access and quality. No individual teacher can solve these systemic challenges alone, but collaborative approaches can mitigate them. Teachers can exchange strategies for multi-grade teaching in rural settings or develop urban strategies for integrating technology. Shared practice enables collective identification of learning gaps, ensuring fewer students are left behind.

Collaboration also fuels innovation. With the system experimenting with blended learning, digital classrooms and competency-based curricula, teachers must learn from one another to adapt new approaches effectively. Innovations are seldom born in isolation, they thrive in networks of exchange.

As Bangladesh marks World Teachers' Day, the theme of recasting teaching as a collaborative profession offers both inspiration and urgency. It calls on us to move beyond entrenched practices that leave teachers isolated, overstretched and undervalued, and to instead foster a culture of shared responsibility.

With a large youth population, ambitions for middle-income status, and international commitments to equitable education, the nation's future rests on the strength of its teaching profession. Yet teachers

cannot be expected to bear this weight alone.

Collaboration must therefore become the cornerstone of teaching, deeply embedded in policy, sustained by school leadership and embraced by society. Teaching, like learning, reaches its fullest potential when shared. In embracing collaboration, Bangladesh has an opportunity not only to improve education quality but to reaffirm teaching as a noble, fulfilling and sustainable profession

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