PROMOTING POSITIVE PARENTING AND FOSTERING HEALTHY PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED LEARNING AND MOOCS

Amiteshwar Ratra

Asstt. Professor,

Staff Training and Research Institute in Distance Education,

Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi, India

Abstract

Strengthening positive parenting skills and optimal parent-child relationship in the contemporary dynamic world dominated by westernization and individuation has become important. Parenting in the Indian context in the earlier times tended to be described as a mix of pampering during young age and strictness from middle childhood years onwards; of indulgence and warmth by the mother and abstention from display of affection and disciplinarianism of the father; and further characterized by multiple caregivers in the family performing the parenting role! With the change of time and need of the society, there have been massive influences on the parent and the parenting process due to migration, industrialization, westernization, breakdown of the joint family system, decline of the power of the authority figure in the family system, and other such factors, resulting in a state of flux. Given the fluidity of the scenario, it is hardly surprising to find that in the contemporary era, the present-day parents tend to be on unsure grounds vis-à-vis good parenting! The dynamic scenario of the society is irreversible, but something has to be done to ensure that the lacunae are plugged and the support systems are available. Taking cognizance of this need, promoting positive parenting and holistic parent-child relationship through distance education and technology mediated learning is envisioned, targeted particularly at the parents and family members. In

this proposed programme, the course content, faculty support, delivery mechanism, knowledge acquisition and examination pattern should be such that accredits and supports the learner. Even though a lot of content and jargon is available on the internet and to some extent even through the print medium, but this information tends to be sporadic; is generally westernized; and may not be relevant to our socio-cultural milieu. The presence of fallacies is also highly likely.

It is vital that the course content take into account the needs of the learning community, considering their socio-cultural realities and contingencies. Education through distance mode and technology mediated learning about positive parenting would help the broad canvas of interested learners and prove to be a blessing for the vast myriad of parents and other family members. Distance education and technology mediated learning provides immense flexibility to the learners, and a well-designed programme of study aiming to foster positive parenting and holistic parent-child relationship offered through this mode is required as a much-awaited response to a strong felt need. Developing MOOCs in this educational area and in the Indian context is the social felt need of the society.

Keywords: positive parenting, holistic development, parent-child relationships, distance education, technology mediated learning, MOOCs.

Introduction

Lifelong learning pertains not just to career options and vocational upgradation, but also to improving the quality of life and fostering well-being; both of self and those in the milieu. Nothing could be closer to the heart for a parent or family member than being a good parent and caregiver to the child. Very often, however, the catch is not knowing just how to provide positive parenting and foster a nurturing and holistic parent-child relationship! Strengthening positive parenting skills and optimal parent-child relationship in the contemporary dynamic world dominated by westernization and individuation has become important. As things stand, there is a significant difference between the Anglo-Saxoner view and the Indian view on

outcomes of socialization regarding aspects such as aggression, dependency, and child's compliance to adult communication (Khalakdina, 2011). Even within the Indian context, there are temporal changes. Parenting in the Indian context in the earlier times tended to be described as a mix of pampering during young age and strictness from middle childhood years onwards; of indulgence and warmth by the mother and abstention from display of affection and disciplinarianism of the father; and further characterized by multiple caregivers in the family performing the parenting role! With the change of time and need of the society, there have been massive influences on the parent and the parenting process due to migration, industrialization, westernization, breakdown of the joint family system, decline of the power of the authority figure in the family system, and other such factors, resulting in a state of flux. As pointed out by Khalakdina (2008, p. 3), "The Indian, like many Far Eastern nationalities, is in juxtaposition between traditionality and being scientifically oriented towards developmental progress". The sentiment has been echoed in the context of other countries as well. For instance, Chen and Chen (2010) have documented significant changes in parental socialization beliefs and attitudes that have accompanied China's transition to a market-oriented economy, with important implications for characteristics and educational skills that are valued and nurtured in children. Globalization and concomitant influences are a part of the political, economic, socio-cultural and psychological reality today in most parts of the world. Further, these influences are impacting not just the society, community, family and parents, but also the children and their worldview (Thompson, 2012). Given the fluidity of the scenario, it is hardly surprising to find that in the contemporary era, the present-day parents tend to be on unsure grounds vis-à-vis good parenting! The dynamic scenario of the society is irreversible, but something has to be done to ensure that the lacunae are plugged and the support systems are available. Taking cognizance of this need, promoting positive parenting and holistic parent-child relationship through distance education and technology mediated

learning is envisioned, targeted particularly at the parents and family members.

Scope and Potential of Distance Education, Technology Mediated Learning and MOOCs

In the context of distance education, it is vital to make conscious efforts to reduce learner isolation, personalize the content and its delivery, and extend opportunities for feedback; from tutors/academic counsellors and peer group alike. This aspect is all the more important for a programme; such as the one envisioned, that focuses on enhancing the quality of parenting and parent-child relationship in its totality, and thus is fairly subjective and individual-centric in this respect even while being holistic in its overall approach. And, this is where emerging technologies come into the picture, as they potentially offer myriad opportunities to support variety in programme delivery and enhance interactivity in the learning environment.

There is exponentially growing acknowledgement of the scope and potential of technology in education including distance education. Technology mediated learning has a role not only in quantitative terms for improving global access to education and reaching the unreached, but also at the qualitative level. Its facilitative features include rendering the delivery of content flexible, dynamic, personalized, interactive, and individually-paced. Emergence of Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) and its promotion by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India in the recent past shows significant importance of technology mediated learning for learners coming from vast geographic diversities and having varied demographic profile. Web technologies such as wikis, blogs and social networking sites have been found to possess tremendous potential in fostering learner collaboration and interaction in the context of a constructivist approach to learning (Beldarrain, 2006). It is a common and pertinent observation that adults learn what they perceive as relevant to their needs; be it professional or personal, and this is what needs to be tapped by the open and distance learning system. In doing so, it is important to make judicious use of information and communication technologies.

An eclectic approach needs to be adopted. Integrated e-learning and a blended learning experience that provides a mix of both online and face-to-face experiences is useful (Jochems, van Merrienboer, & Koper, 2004). E-learning includes information technology, online resources, online communicating and active learning (Ginns & Ellis, 2009). While there is some evidence indicating that online discussions provide deeper learning experiences for the students and that web-based courses are more student centered (Lei & Gupta, 2010), including the facilitative features that permit students to proceed at their own pace (Kirtman, 2009), and to work their education into their busy schedules and family responsibilities (Brown, 2012), the absence of face-to-face contact poses distinct limitations (Brown, 2012). For optimal delivery of a programme of study therefore, e-learning should be supplemented and complemented with print material, audio and video programmes (delivered through broadcast and telecast modes as well), face-to-face academic counseling sessions at the learner support centres, as well as satellite-based two-way audio and at least one-way video teleconferencing sessions facilitating live, real time simultaneous interaction between experts and learners scattered across the geographical spread. The same has been observed to be particularly useful and effective in the context of the programmes of study in Child Development and allied areas, that the authors have been involved in, with respect to development and delivery. Mobile technologies are also asserting their worth, permitting immediate access regardless of the location of the learner.

The Proposed Programme on Promoting Positive Parenting and Fostering Healthy Parent-Child Relationships

In view of the aforesaid, the proposed programme with the objectives of promoting positive parenting and holistic parent-child relationship should be offered through distance education, following the principles of open and distance learning. Further, it should be based on the premise of technology mediated learning. In other words, a judicious eclectic multi-technology based delivery approach should be adopted.

Further, the course content, faculty support, delivery mechanism, knowledge acquisition and examination pattern in this proposed programme should be such that accredits and supports the learner. This programme need to be offered through MOOCs. The programme should be offered in as many Indian languages possible to increase the intake of the number of learners.

As we are aware that the migration rate from the villages to towns and cities is all-time increasing. Moreover, young couples separate out from the joint/extended families leading to more nuclear set-ups. Where a need is seen among the young population to remain attached to their roots but at the same time due to felt needs have to remain away from their family. The new parents of today's age look forward to support from internet and other friends regarding child-care. The content for this programme should be drawn from traditional knowledge systems as well as contemporary sources, including state of the art scientific research. Even though a lot of content and jargon is available on the internet and to some extent even through the print medium, but this information tends to be sporadic; is generally westernized; and may not be relevant to our socio-cultural milieu. The presence of fallacies is also highly likely. It is vital that the course content provide the correct information and perspective, as well as take into account the needs of the learning community, considering their socio-cultural realities and contingencies. Education through distance mode and technology mediated learning about positive parenting would help the broad canvas of interested learners and prove to be a blessing for the vast myriad of parents and other family members. Distance education with technology mediated learning through Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs) provides immense flexibility to the learners, and a well-designed programme of study aiming to foster positive parenting and holistic parent-child relationship offered through this mode is required as a much-awaited response to a strong felt need. The envisioned programme would thus fill the lacuna and plug the knowledge gap with respect to contextualized and culturally-sensitive knowledge and understanding.

Conclusion

Optimally parenting the child/adolescent is an immense activity. Successful dissemination, assimilation and application of the knowledge and understanding would help build a well nurtured and caring society for our youngsters to grow up in, enabling them to do their best for the society when they become adults.

The envisioned programme would provide life-long continuing education and extend the benefits of culturally grounded as well as contemporary knowledge to the parents and others, supplementing and complementing the information and guidance provided by the elders in the family and other sources. The non-availability of optimal strategies to guide child-rearing leaves a big gap between the potential and its realization; between the desired and the actual. This gap can be bridged and the potential can be optimized by facilitating the parents and others in the family to adapt to the new- learning paradigm of distance education to enhance their learning in parenting skills and applications. Pedagogy of open and distance education with the right technology mix and addressable of content areas can be an important endeavour in this direction. Distance education and technology mediated learning through Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs) provides a process of learning to learn better. A programme of study to strengthen positive parenting and holistic parent-child relationship, offered through this mode, would help learners, across borders, to develop culturally sensitive and comprehensive knowledge, understanding, attitudes, and skill-set, so that the family, as the microcosm of the society, is the optimal nurturant milieu for the child to grow in.

References

Beldarrain, Y. (2006). Distance education trends: Integrating new technologies to foster student interaction and collaboration. *Distance Education,27*(2), 139-153.

Brown, J.L.M. (2012). Online learning: A comparison of web-based and land-based courses. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education,13*(1), 39-42.

Chen, X., & Chen, H. (2010). Children's socioemotional functioning and adjustment in the changing Chinese society. In R.K. Silbereisen & X. Chen (Eds.), *Social change and human development* (pp. 209-226). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ginns, P., & Ellis, R.A. (2009). Evaluating the quality of e-learning at the degree level in the student experience of blended learning, *British Journal of Educational Technology, 40* (4), 652-663.

Jochems, W., van Merrienboer, J., & Koper, R. (2004). An introduction to integrated e-learning. In W. Jochems, J. van Merrienboer, & R. Koper (Eds.), *Integrated e-learning: Implications for pedagogy, technology and organisation* (pp. 1-12). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Khalakdina, M. (2011). *Human development in the Indian context: A socio-cultural focus (Vol. 2).* New Delhi: Sage.

Khalakdina, M. (2008). *Human development in the Indian context: A socio-cultural focus (Vol. 1).* New Delhi: Sage.

Kirtman, L. (2009). Online versus in-class courses: An examination of differences in learning outcomes. *Issues in Teacher Education, 18*(2), 103-116.

Lei, S.A., & Gupta,R.K. (2010). College distance education courses: Evaluating benefits and costs from institutional, faculty and students' perspectives. *Education, 130*(4), 616-631.

Thompson, R.A. (2012). Changing societies, changing childhood: Studying the impact of globalization on child development. *Child Development Perspectives, 6*(2), 187-192.