

Strengthening Field Work Practicum in Social Work Education

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ABSTRACT

Field work provides an opportunity to Social Work students to apply their Social Work skills and knowledge into practice while dealing with multifaceted problems of our society. It is a process of applying Social Work theories and knowledge into practice. Field work is regarded as the heart of Social Work profession and this paper focuses on some of the ways to strengthen the base of field work practicum.

INTRODUCTION

Field work in Social Work Education refers to training and education. The training is repetitive and skill-oriented and education is imparted with broad perspectives. It is a dynamic process of observing, amassing and implementing creative and innovative ideas. Field work is considered to be learning through doing. Field work programme provides an opportunity to students to apply their theoretical knowledge taught in the classroom appropriately in different practical situations. It is a way to transform knowledge through certain skills and techniques into action.

Annette Garrette writes, “an extension well planned fieldwork programme is inevitable.” It is evident that field work varies in quality and quantity. It is imparted under supervision and guidance of trained and experienced person(s) in Social Work. It can be said that theory without practice is empty and practice without theory is meaningless.

The field work programme of Schools of Social Work education is the most important and integral part of Social Work Education. Although field work is the most important element in Social Work Education but some Schools of Social Work have failed to develop field work programmes well.

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While classroom teaching has developed well, we have unconsciously created a greater gulf between theory and field work instruction, by failing to develop the latter also to a corresponding level. So many questions may arise in the mind of the learners such as: What is field work training? Who is a field worker? What are its objectives and contents? What is the place of field work training in Social Work Education? What is the role of the supervisor, agency and the school concerned in the organization of fieldwork? All these questions are to be answered in an appropriate manner if we are to integrate and strengthen the field work programmes in Schools of Social Work at all levels.

OBJECTIVES OF FIELDWORK

Social Work, like other human services profession, is a practice profession. It may be research- practice based. The profession aims at helping students to acquire a deep knowledge of theory and techniques, of achieving Social Work objectives and goals.

The Social Review Committee (1975) on Social Work Education in India has evolved specific objectives of field work training in Social Work education. The major objectives of field work are as under:

- To develop professional skills through practical learning, apply acquired knowledge for the study of relevant facts, analysis of the problem and selection of appropriate means of solution towards the problems.
- To develop the skills for solving the problems in work at the micro level(individual), family, groups and communities and the change at macro level in social institutions and processes(types of skills vary with the level of training).
- To develop the skills required for professional practice at a particular level of training.
- To provide concurrent opportunity for the integration of classroom learning in-field practice and vice-versa (feed-back mechanism for both field and class).

The formulation of field work objectives is the first and most important task that has to be done by the Schools of Social Work. But some schools of Social Work in India have failed in formulating the objectives of field work.

The 2nd Review Committee of the University Grand Commission (1980) has prescribed a faculty- students ratio by giving central place to

field work in the undergraduate and post-graduate curricula. The report of the committee mentions that there should be a simultaneous emphasis on class and field learning (field practicum) followed by feedback for discussion and problem-solving in the class-room. The field practicum in Social Work education (concurrent and block field work).

It was also found that field work training has been neglected by many Schools of Social Work is the content of fieldwork training programme. Quite a few schools have worked out the contents of field work training in somewhat detailed manner, though they have followed somewhat different approaches. For example, few schools have covered the basic Social Work methods in the content of field work in the M.S.W course, whereas some other schools have covered the different areas of social welfare in their content. It was also found that in the new pattern of semester system, case work which is the main method in Social Work practice has not included in the first semester.

FIELD PRACTICUM IN THE CURRICULUM OF SOCIAL WORK

The curriculum structure and the number of courses offered at an institution of Social Work may be quite impressive but hardly there is a standard of document on field work practicum which links theory to practice. According to Prof. R.R. Singh, a practice is assumed to occur by “applying theory” (Key-Note Addressed in National Seminar on Field Work Practicum: Challenges and Opportunities, February 17-19, 2012, Dept. of Social Work, Jain Vishva Bharati University, Ladnun, Rajasthan). In reflection, it hardly seen in the weekly fieldwork report which are submitted by the students. It is very much difficult for an external evaluator to give proper comment on report after reading. Prof. R.R. Singh again expressed his views in same key note addressed at national seminar that,

“As an evaluator, once I came across field work reports of an institution which were only initialled without any comment at all! The number of such supervisors was more than those who had taken the trouble of making helpful comments. In the same institution, a faculty was reported to have in an informal group meeting that ‘field work should be taken out of Social Work programme’.”

He interprets the above quotation that even though such a remark may be causal, it does show a mindset or a split identity. If field work is taken out of Social Work, it has serious implications in that such a Department

then will become a Department of Social Studies. And therefore some staff and faculty appointed as per approved UGC norms (which included field work) may either be retrenched or leave the institution or moral and professional ground.

Similarly, placement of students in the various agencies or open community/ slum in rural and urban settings is the very first step in concurrent field work training programme. In most of the schools this has been done by the fieldwork Director/ Coordinator in the schools. In the discussion with many students, most of the student respondents were of the opinion that they were not placed in the agency or field of their preference.

Here, the author likes to lighten some lines which were concluded by Prof. Ratna verma, Prof. (Rtd.), & former Director (field work), Delhi School of Social Work, Delhi University in a formal meeting by the author on issue on 'Cucurrent Field Work'. She expresses her views that,

"Field Practicum is the heart of Social Work. Social Work is an allied discipline which is fully based field practice. Without field practice Social Work will not live any more. I approached to inter-disciplinary field work with the help of other allied departments such as Social Work and Psychology, Social Work and Management, Social Work and Law, Social Work and Medical Education, Social Work and Psychiatric Education etc. Because of, our Social Work students deal and work with psychosocial problems, Social Work psychiatric setting, medical Social Work setting, police administration/ correctional setting, labour welfare, industrial relations, human resource management, and hospital settings etc. during their course work as well as after passed out. When I was appointing a field agency to provide field work education to the students, firstly, I invited agencies and discussed about their scope of area (work/ project/ programme) and our field work guideline to know and judge the capability of the agencies whether the agencies are eligible to provide good environment to practice field practicum or not. Secondly, I thoroughly read the curriculum viate of the students one by one, organized group discussion with them to know about their interest of area, hubby etc. and send them for concurrent field practicum according to their interest of area. Rural Camps were also helpful for a supervisor to clearly know about the interest of the student. So that, it helped us to send them (students) agencies during final year MSW (3rd and 4th semester). But now-a-days, nobody is not bothering to appoint a field work coordinator/director/ supervisor. Mostly, rural camp concept has finished because staff and faculties are not liking to take much more interest and escape themselves

on the name of risk factor which is one of the component of Social Work Practicum included in the UGC Model Curriculum Guidelines, 2001.”

It interprets that placement sessions may help to place students in appropriate agencies. The placement should be based on the interest, ability and the efficiency of the students and the opportunities and needs in the social agencies, and the specific policies and objectives of the school concerned.

THE HISTORY OF FIELDWORK IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

The history of fieldwork in Social Work institutions shows level of dissatisfaction. Most of the institutions have no concurrent fieldwork module but their students are practicing fieldwork and many are not following concurrent fieldwork is a component of Social Work education and such institutions are practicing only class room teaching-learning (theory). This is totally violation of UGC report (1980) and UGC Model Curriculum Guideline 2001. The evaluation of fieldwork is just for the sake of degree. Prof. R.R. Singh quoted the history of evaluation of fieldwork in Social Work institutions a graduation from the “satisfactory performance certificate requirement” of the forties and fifties to “graded” performance of subsequent years ranging from 200 marks for fieldwork to 400 or above in two years. But whether the increased weightage has improved the quality of fieldwork is quite uncertain. Another study could be based on the active profile of the faculty with special reference to the time devoted for fieldwork along with content and quality. It is generally claimed that the time spent on class and field in open community/ slum/ NGOs/ VOs/ Developmental Organizations/Welfare Institutions etc. comes to 50:50 or fifteen hours (15) per week or sixteen (16) weeks per semester.

Since a minimum number of theory subjects from different domains are to be included in Social Work education curriculum, the hours of fieldwork, days of field work, weekly and yearly is vary from institution to institution. Neither institutions/universities nor faculties are bothering about the standardization of Social Work education curricula. It observed that many institutions have been combined within units or finished the essential theory papers such as social case work, social group work and Social Work research etc. within a short duration or in one semester only which is not possible to understand clearly by a student on Social Work methods and other theory papers.

PROBLEMS IN FIELD WORK

In the field work practice, Schools of Social Work in India face many problems relating to placement of students and end with the evaluation of their performance.

- School-specific
- Agency-specific
- Student-specific

The concurrent field work continues throughout the academic year, which enables students to learn a great deal on every field work day. Though students maintain diaries and journals accordingly, most of them are not aware of the basic purpose of maintaining them.

- Casework Diary
- Group Work Diary
- Procedure for submission of Diary

Agency based field work utterly lacks in “holistic, development, critical and reflective perspective.” Community based field work with commitment and proper perspective has to be promoted by Department/Schools of Social Work in India. Partnership between voluntary organizations and Departments/Schools of Social Work in India has been thoroughly inadequate. Well co-ordinate team work with inter-departmental cooperation based on integrated approach has also been miserably lacking in fieldwork. Every Department/ School must adopt a slum area/village for its integrated development.

Social Work educators in Department/Schools of School Work in India are required to maintain close links with politicians and bureaucrats by establishing contacts with them, inviting them to the Departments/schools on special occasions, convincing them about the utility of Social Work profession by highlighting the specific roles and functions which Social Workers can perform with greater competence as compared to other social scientists and clarify the specific areas of Social Work intervention. This should never mean that Social Work educators should be politically affiliated, instead, they ought to maintain neutrality in dealing with politicians, irrespective of their personal ideological commitments.

FIELD WORK EVALUATION

Lack of seriousness about field work evaluation on the part of teachers is another area of neglect. In some of the Schools of Social Work this

is considered just a formality at the concluding part of the field work programme, where the marks are allotted to the students. Some of the faculty opined that evaluation of field work performance of the students was mostly done at the end of the academic year.

The major problems confronting the school today may be clubbed as those:

- Related to students
- Related to teachers
- Related to the Parents
- Related to the curriculum, administration and system

RELATED TO STUDENTS

Assignment should be given to the students at the time when they do not have classes at all or have classes of the subjects they understand well. Students at times use the reason for meeting the Social Worker as an excuse to bunk classes. This will only create more difficulty to the student in the future classes of the subject. Group sessions may be taken up after the class hours too.

The problems related to the students sometimes occurred in the relation between students, the relationship with teachers, the relationship with family members, the curriculum, socio-economic situation of the student and the peer pressure. It cannot be said, there is one and only cause for the occurrence of the problem. Sometimes teachers are not properly trained to handle them. Also the workloads and the relationship of a 'student and teacher' developed between them act as hindrance in the helping process. Another major problem is poor evaluation of students performance makes de-motivate and creates hinders for their success in future.

PROBLEMS IN EVALUATION

- In the evaluation process field work marks decided by their concerned supervisor but not given this number with the presence of overall discussion of all faculty members. Sometimes it creates partiality or biasness towards students and it discourages the motivation of some students.
- External/Experts observation in the viva also very important role to evaluate the students' performance in field work practice. But sometimes it was found that number given to students is decided by

faculty members.

- Misunderstanding, non-cooperation and bad attitude among teachers creates problems in the performance of students and it affects their career.
- Sometimes evaluation has not done to see the overall performance sincerity, punctuality, dressing sense, regularity in class and field work, timely attend group conference, individual conference, creative ideas and work, interest, behavior, attitudes, way of talking, presentation, report writing.

RELATED TO TEACHERS

It was seen that problematic teachers as well as strained relationship between teachers and students adversely affect the development of the student. Ego conflicts among teachers, frustration, not able to understand the demarcation between personal life and professional life, problems in their personal life, emotional problems, and lack of skills in teaching, defective disciplinary techniques are some of the causes to the problems that arise due to teachers in the school.

Related to Curriculum Administration and Systems

It is a fact that the curriculum, the style of administration and the system of education create problems for the students. Wrong policy decisions, outdated or overloaded curriculum and inconsistent administration are some of the reasons that generate problems. According to Prof R.R.Singh, in a key notes addressed in a national seminar on Social Work Field Practicum: Challenges and Opportunities, he described that The field work manual will thus be an illustrative document which will cover priorities of need, programmes, process of intervention, people's participation and outcome. If there are ten villages selected for field work, one may think ten chapters with an executive summary in the manual. The faculty will need to demonstrate how the helping, problem-solving or growth enhancing process was conceived, planned undertaken and led to positive outcome or resulted in failure and what should be done next.

SOCIAL WORK TRAINING

Social Work profession faces problems in training that turns out professionally qualified Social Workers. Today, during Social Work

training, Social Work students learn about the agencies and develop their skills, etc, but according to Social Work, training means that some creative or constructive work should be done to solve problems which already exist. Regrettably there are schools without practical work or field work.

In order to equip students with practice realities, real life stories and appreciation of the creative arts should be incorporated into both the coursework and the fieldwork of Social Work education. (Ming Sum Tsui & Raymond K.H.Chan, 1999).

SUPERVISED FIELD WORK

In a field-oriented profession like Social Work, supervised concurrent field work is no less essential and important than the classroom instruction. The objectives of fieldwork are co-terminus with those set for the curriculum. The specific objectives of field work relate to applicability of knowledge, especially in the ability to select it for use in on-going practice situations; the development of skills at the level of professional job expectation; the ability to manage and utilize professional relationships in relation to the client, system, professional colleagues, and in the inter-disciplinary team; and to develop appropriate and expected attitudes and values (UGC, 1980; 96).

FIELD WORK AND RESEARCH

As far as research dissertation is concerned, the research supervisors and supervisees both are mostly apathetic and non-serious about it. They take it, in most cases, as unnecessary extra-burden, as they are not been able to properly appreciate the importance and need of the complete knowledge of research methodology and its applicable for successful Social Work practice.

SELECTION OF FIELD WORK AGENCIES

It is the biggest handicap of most of the Social Work colleges and departments that they are not able to explore adequate and appropriate learning opportunities and to exploit them for the benefit Social Work students in rural area. Hence they are deprived of varied field work experiences.

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS

- There are some departments and colleges of Social Work education where only 2 to 3 faculty members, most of them from sociology or other social sciences.
- Few schools or the departments are headed by non-professionals. Due to lack of their academic background and knowledge in field work, they are not properly involved in policy and planning process.

There are other loopholes are:

- Lack of clarity about the very concept of field work, its nature, content, its objectives, place of supervision in Social Work training and evaluation.
- An absence of clearly defined field work objectives and tasks.
- Inability to organize and administer the field work activities of their students and provide adequate and appropriate learning opportunities to the learners.
- An absence of interest in field work supervision by senior faculty members.
- There is paucity of literature on field work. So this need to encourage efforts for producing quality literature on field work practice.
- Lack of understanding of field-situation
- Poor establishment of rapport/development of skills
- Lack of experience of supervisors in helping and action process
- Lack of understanding of individual, group and area
- Lack of quality of record in use of supervision etc.

APPROACH TO STRENGTHENING SOCIAL WORK FIELD PRACTICUM

In history of Social Work profession and education, development of methods led to identification of individual, social needs and social problem which could be dealt with by their application. Methods of Social Work were group as primary and secondary. Social Case Work, Group Work and Community Organisation were introduced earlier as primary methods and Social Work Research, Social Welfare Administration and Social Action were latter. Now-a-days, in our contemporary society and globalization era such classification is problematic because the demand of situation is more and different than past. So that, we the Social Work educators and practioners should determine the application of methods as per the

demand of society and accordingly the institutions should be framed and developed the field work module and provided space/ place for fieldwork/ agency to students for concurrent and block field work practice.

In defining any area for practice, the following approaches deserves due consideration as per the demand of society. Both supervisor and students should keep in mind in the areas of conducting survey in field, mapping and listing the houses in the community/ village/ slum, conduct small scale qualitative and quantitative research studies, survey, case studies etc., receive knowledge and use of census, NSS, National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Annual Health Survey (AHS), District Level Household Survey (DLHS), Sample Registration System (SRS), media reports, public documents, reports etc. The students should be taught the new schemes of states and central government in social and economic sectors, five year plan/ Annual plan of the government of India, annual plan of state governments, provision in district level plans for approaching five year plan, Millenium Development Goals (MDG), Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Human Development Report (Center and states level), United Declaration on Child Rights, and other Declarations on global issues, local problems and issues etc. According to Prof. R.R.Singh during a national seminar on field work in Social Work Education: Challenges and Opportunities, February 17-19, 2012, in designing practice, it needs to be ensure that a particular intervention will cover a specific area, a group work, a service or programme, follow a method and procedure an outcome within a time frame. Participation of both the students and faculty as practioners will yield better result.

Similarly, other most significant aspects of field work training programme as follows:

Community Focus in Concurrent Field Practicum

Since community ties among the tribes are very strong and decisions on social matters are taken by the communities or councils, the practice of Social Work can be oriented to the **Panchseel of Tribal Affairs** (1994) which is given below:

1. People should develop the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
2. Tribal lands and forests should be respected.
3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development.

4. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions.
5. We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.

One of the important principles of Social Work is being where the community is which may incorporate these aspects wherever relevant. Services are therefore to be linked with the communities, neighborhoods, households, and individuals to facilitate the process of participatory social development, innovations, skill up-gradation, education and training, healthcare and expansion of new work opportunities etc.

EXPANDING SCOPE OF FIELD WORK

The scope of concurrent fieldwork practicum should be expanded in both rural and urban setting. A student not only visited house to house or preparing a profile of the selected villages/ slums, demographic profile only but also he/ she should practice through implementation of his/ her skills, principles of Social Group Work, Case Work, Community Organization and Social Action. The department may help them to prepare the profile of traditional and formal institutions, service provisions for different age group, functioning of service institutions, women's status, self-help group and their composition, nature of leadership, their goals, functions, outcomes, stagnation and decline in the communities and find out the social and economic problems in the communities. Similarly, the department may also helps to prepare a list of implemented schemes, programmes by state government and center for the benefit of the beneficiaries (people living in rural villages semi urban villages and slums) and teach to students to practice research methodology, skills and techniques through conduct small surveys like as; condition of persons with disabilities and special assistance or services to them, status of elderly, their vulnerability and special assistance to them, situation of BPL households, their vulnerability and coping pattern, functioning of Panchayati Raj Institution and Gram Sabha in each village or group of village, process of allocation of grants for development works under the different social and economic programmes, redistribution of resources among villages or Gram Sabha of a Panchayat and the nature of extent of their utilization, functioning of maternity centers and assistance to the promote institutional delivery to reduce maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate, functioning of

Anganwari/ Balwari and extent of malnutrition etc. The student should be taught about the indicators of gender justice and social justice, forms of exploitation, violence, and conflict resolution and should be discussed during Individual Conference (IC) and Group Conference (GC). The profile, empirical data (available through primary and secondary method, print and electronic media), list of schemes, programmes will need to be regularly updated by the department in order to prioritize of local needs and design specific intervention with the consultation with communities. This will make Social Work field practice transparent and accountable and it will also provide the opportunity for public education and participation.

Other part to make of Social Work field practicum transparent and accountable is the faculty supervisors and agency supervisors should take responsibility and prepare their own report of Social Work practice while guiding students in order to provide inputs.

SUPERVISION

Supervision is another most significant aspect of the field work training programme. It is closely supervised field work practice in the schools of Social Work programme that makes it different from any of the many courses in other social sciences, and which establishes the professional character of our training. It is through the continuing supervisory efforts of the supervision, in the many supervisory sessions, at the school and the agency that the field work training programme as a whole, plays such an effective and important role in the training of the student.

The agency supervisor, the school supervisor and the student are the three important persons, equally responsible for the effectiveness and success of the field work training programme. In the individual and group meetings of the supervisor with the student the field work programme gets strengthened. The tasks set by mutual cooperation and sharing between them is very important in the professional growth of the student and prevents any scope for indiscipline or neglect of duties by students.

The participation of the school supervisors in field work training is very important. Regular visits to the social agencies for field work supervision where the students are placed for field work. But visits by the teachers were not regular in some schools and in few cases some never visited the agencies.

A faculty supervisor should be well known that field work supervision is not an inspection, but a constant and continuous training process through

which both the student and the supervisor are learning together, much of it in the agency setting. In other words, it is a partnership process of learning, sharing and interaction in which the student, the supervisor and the agency benefit.

Field work supervision and methods

- Individual Conference
- Group Conference
- Field work seminar of students
- On the spot instruction of the faculty supervisor

Group Conference may be the preferred modality for the supervision of Social Workers involved in group work. Interactions in group supervision can be used for illustration and discussion of problems and approaches that might be employed in working with groups of clients.

For group workers, group supervision has the advantage that the context mirrors the modality in which they are primarily engaged. Participation in the group becomes the source of learning about group interaction, group process, group operations, and the supervisee's feelings about group membership.

The term group supervision is defined as the use of a group setting to implement the responsibilities of supervision. In group supervision, the supervisor has given educational, administrative and supportive responsibility for the activities of a specific number of workers-meets with the group to discharge these responsibilities. In group supervision, the agency mandate to the supervisor is implemented in the group and through the group; most simply, group supervision has been defined as supervision in a group format. Group supervision provides the opportunity for supervisees to share their experiences with similar problems encountered in the job and possible solution that each has formulated in response.

The supervisory conference group is a formed group. It is a structured group with a task and an agenda. Membership in the group is defined as consequence of being a supervisee of a particular group leader-supervisor.

The size of the group is determined by the number of supervisees for whom the supervisor has administrative responsibility (generally four or five). The supervision assigned to any single supervisor probably has some similarity in education and training and likely are concerned with similar problems and similar service. As result, the group is likely to be homogeneous with regard to significant factors that determine group interests and concerns.

Fieldwork evaluation has to be a continuous process which should at the very beginning of the field work training programme.

- It should be periodical.
- At every stage the students should be made aware of their performance, which would help them to change and develop from the earlier position.
- It should never be a sudden or surprise gift or curse to the students for which the student may totally be unprepared, particularly when the assessment is unfavorable or ends in failure.
- Periodical self-evaluation system, followed by teacher assessment gradually enables students to grow and develop, and is another method for strengthening the field work programme.
- It is the experience that many of the students did not get admission to this course of their choice but by option. Sometimes its they do not have other option or force of friends, parents take admission in this course. This is the major reason to weaken the field work programme indirectly.
- A student who is neither intelligent or interest will be burden of supervisor, department and this course.
- The admission of students should be quality oriented and give them chance to know their details background and interest.
- Due to fill the sanctioned seats or collection of more money from students, some private universities/institutions allows this type of students and it creates hurdles in Social Work practice.

EVALUATION OF STUDENT'S PERFORMANCE:

Students' performance should be done at four different levels based on the following contents:

- Summary records and other records;
- Personal qualities and professional skills
- Capability of relating theory to practice:
- Student self-evaluation

Specialization:

- A number of Schools of Social Work offer only two or three specialization of which Personal Management/Labour Welfare/HRM is most common, while rural development/welfare is rather rare. Med-

ical and Psychiatric, Family and Child Welfare, Ngo Management, Correctional Administration have also good scope for students' carrier but due to lack of knowledge of this specialization subject, they are limited in some sector but not take chance in another field.

- It has also seen that in specialization paper old syllabus are continuing. They are adding new issues or updated news relating to changing society.
- Most of the Act and also amended of state as well as center added but students are not aware about that because of our poor quality syllabus, poor quality class room teaching methodology and old syllabus.
- It also reflects that various courses taught at post-graduate level in the country shows that major part of the courses have either no relevance, or only little relevance, to the reality situation, and is not able to cater to the local needs of the country.

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes with the concluding remarks that every planned filed work action is both a challenge and opportunity for both students and supervisors. According to Prof. R.R. Singh, every success builds confidence, and strengthens commitment; failure leads to review of one's approach, renewal and re-orientation of strategy. A practitioner needs to own the field and be ready to be owned and even disowned by it. One may experience a "throw back" and "throw out" in the field. So that, the dynamics of field practice thus calls for introspection, retrospection and propection. A Manual for Social Work Field Practicum (Field Work in Social Work) should capture these processes in order to impart rich learning and meaningful experiences to students.

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