

## Pedagogy Talks, Session 1



The first Pedagogy Talks session was held on 2nd Feb at Jamia Millia Islamia. The participants included school and college teachers, and researchers from different disciplines, including education studies, elementary education, and english.

Here is a brief summary of the reflections and concerns that came up:

### **1. The practice of teaching**

What shapes the practice of teaching? What are its possibilities and contradictions?

Some participants mentioned how they were initiated into teaching through an inspiring teacher. A teacher who is often inviting, earnest, and creates a space for learning, dialogue and democratic practice. It was mentioned how teaching could be seen as a subversive act, as something that goes against industrial-capitalist logic or the logic of ownership. Teaching can be considered as silent accomplishments; it cannot be reduced to bullet points in a CV. Teaching can open up a different relation to learning and knowing: where the act of knowing is not just about gathering knowledge, but also an ethical inquiry.

At the same time, teaching as a practice is often not valued for what it is or can be. Teaching is hard work, and the labour of teaching—including different kinds of clerical/admin work within the institution—is not valued adequately.

It was mentioned how education studies often takes a prescriptive approach towards teaching, recommending how one should teach rather than developing a complex discourse on what teaching is. It is unfortunate that teachers often cannot analytically think of their own experience, space, and work. Systemic pressures sometimes alienate teachers from the act of teaching, from students. There are also other pressures—teachers self-censor and are not able to speak out on different issues. But at the same time, it was pointed out how an ideological commitment to teaching is essential—is there a guarantee that teachers will teach meaningfully if all the pressures were removed?



## **2. Being accessible as a teacher**

There was some conversation on how we think of the teacher being accessible. While it is important and can help initiate the student into the classroom/curriculum, there may be unequal burdens placed on teachers. Younger women teachers are often considered more accessible, and it may become difficult to create firm boundaries. The question of who is considered accessible changes with social and institutional contexts too, across schools and colleges.



### 3. Understanding Students

It was mentioned how students can feel rootless and displaced in school/college contexts, and this is something teachers often don't understand. Students have their own contexts of migration and may feel displaced from the institutional space, the curriculum. In this situation, students may have pent-up frustrations. For the teacher, there is another challenge: how to get students interested in content that students feel disconnected from? At the same time, being displaced can sometimes create the conditions for forging new communities, new solidarities.

It was also mentioned how students often receive or are impacted by the frustration of teachers. Students are made to feel that they don't own their bodies—that they are at the whims of institutional and disciplinary codes.

There was a little conversation on teachers being interrupted by students: is it pedagogically desirable? It could be useful—it helps the student stay engaged, keep responding. But at the same time, it could also be about students bullying teachers, especially teachers who are socially vulnerable.



#### **4. Teacher accountability**

The question of teacher accountability came up: how should it be thought about, evaluated? A couple of critical points came up: how (in certain institutional settings) teacher accountability gets reduced to a popularity contest—who has better feedback, more ratings. And how sometimes even fellow teachers become agents of institutional surveillance—as someone mentioned, teachers themselves become ‘CCTV cameras’.

#### **5. Teaching community**

There was some conversation on how teaching communities can be thought about. There are barriers to creating community: there are structural hierarchies between teachers, between departments. There is unequal, exploitative division of labour. There is job precarity. Some teachers may be seeking a community, but it becomes difficult to find such spaces—this also affects the motivation to teach.

But at the same time, there are moments of solidarity, of standing up for or supporting each other, especially those who are structurally vulnerable in the institutional hierarchy. It was mentioned how an essential principle for building a teaching or academic community could be the unconditional love for learning and unlearning.

