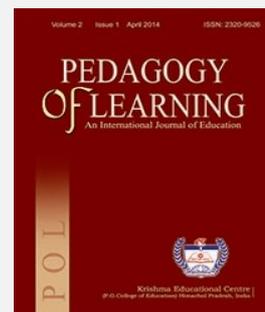


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Strategies to Boost Teacher Morale during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The COVID -19 pandemic has changed the learning scenario in the country. Since the outbreak of the pandemic many EdTech companies have mushroomed, yet all of them in some form or the other are relying on teachers. Real classroom teachers on the other hand are facing flak and often being demoralized for situations beyond their control. The paper uses the research of Evans (1997, 1998, and 2001) to discuss a model of teacher morale within the Indian context and the present strategies to boost teacher morale during and after the COVID- 19 pandemic.

Keywords: Teacher morale, Team building, Teams, Student performance, Collaboration, Good Practices, Praxis

INTRODUCTION

Like all pandemics, the COVID-19 has disrupted normal life. This is more in case of education where students and teachers were in the process of wrapping up the academic session, midway between promotional examinations and starting the new academic session. Unlike higher education where MOOCs or blended learning courses have helped students and teachers adapt and adopt to the learning environments and challenges associated with it, the school education sector in India is having its first taste of remote learning and online teaching. Teachers have had little time to plan and deliver classes via the internet and probably for the first-time parents sat through the entire class of their children – viewing and commenting on everything the teacher did. Mary (2020) uses the viral video of Anthony (2020) to discuss the woes that majority of teachers have faced during this pandemic. The newspaper article gives a glimpse of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the morale of the teachers as the job-related ideals and the professional culture/ policy of schools and the country have undergone a change.

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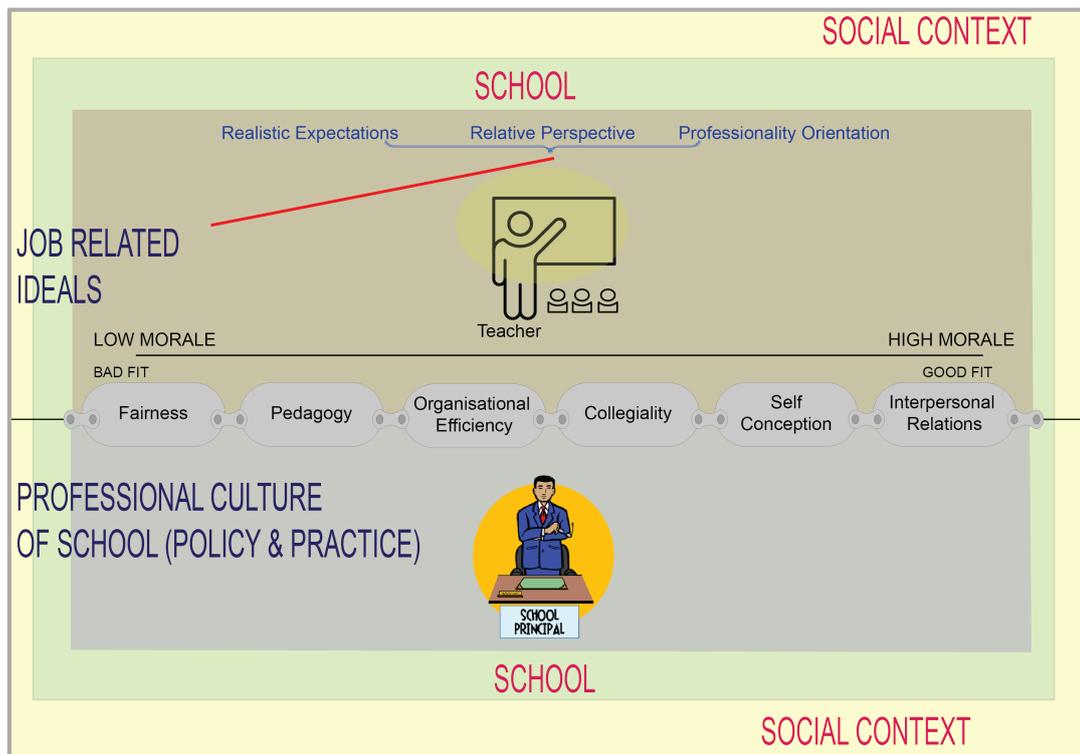
The paper uses the research of Evans (1997, 1998, and 2001) to discuss a model of teacher morale within the Indian context and the present's strategies to boost teacher morale during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Understanding Teaching Morale

The Merriam Webster Dictionary (2020) defines morale as - the mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty) of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand. Therefore, we understand that morale has three characteristics one it is a mental or emotional state, two it is related to an individual or a group & three it is dependent on the task at hand. Although this definition captures the essence of what we mean by morale, it falls short in explaining the complexities involved with the task or the competencies with regard to the task or the role of the environment where the task is being performed or the competencies and mental state of the individual or group that is performing the task. Hence, it would not be incorrect to say that morale can convey different ideas in different contexts.

The work of Evans, 1997; Hart, et al. 2000; Santoro, 2011, show there is a definitional debate as to what constitutes teacher morale. Concepts like Stress, Engagement, Motivation, Organizational Commitment, Job Involvement etc. have been used interchangeably to denote teacher morale. Research by Linda Evans (1997, 1998, and 2001) lays a strong foundation on explaining teacher morale and its dimensions. Evans (1997) defines teacher morale as a state of mind determined by the individual's anticipation of the extent of satisfaction of those needs whichs/he perceives as significantly affecting her/histotal work situation.

Evans (1997, 1998, and 2001) has established that morale not a group phenomenon rather an individual's phenomena and morale is a fit between the individual and the work situation in totality. Figure 1 is a rough adaptation of Evans (1997) teacher morale model.



(Figure 1: Evans (1997) Teacher Morale Model)

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According to the Teacher Morale Model of Evans (1997) there are two principle components that influence a teacher:

Job related Ideals

These ideals reflect teacher's expectations and needs. Evans (1997) clarifies that although teachers may not be aware of the existence of these ideals but there are three factors that influence these ideals:

- *Relative perspective*: a factor which leads the teacher to compare her work and its conditions with other comparable situations. This relative perspective could be due to one's past experience or interacting with colleagues from the same school or even different schools.
- *Realistic expectations*: this factor is related to the teachers expectations based on the present situation, like a new teacher may put in additional working hours to ensure students don't suffer or like during examinations teachers are willing to take extra classes to ensure help students in need.
- *Teacher's Professional Orientation*: relates to what the teacher opines about her profession. Evans (1997) provides a continuum of the teacher's professional orientation that could span from being a restricted professional to that of being an extended professional.

Professional Culture of School (Policy & Practice)

This is the second components that influence a teacher's morale. The professional culture of the school includes the policies and practices that are in place for the running of the school. Within this dimension there is the context of policy which not only includes the school policies but also the state and national policies that govern the working of the teachers. This component also considers the social context under which the school operates – from the socio-economic status to the location of the school. Evans (1997) also identifies the Principal as the focal point of the teacher's professional cultural experience while interacting with the social and political contexts.

Apart from these two components, Evans (1997) has identified **six** dimensions that she calls the *dimensions of fit*. These dimensions overlap between the two components and influence the professional culture of the school and the job-related ideals of the teacher. These dimensions are:

- *Fairness*: Relates to the teachers' individual perception regarding distribution of workload, salary and other benefits extended to colleagues, unmerited promotions. These instances influence the morale of the teacher.
- *Pedagogy*: Pedagogical choice, competence and interest also have an effect on the teacher's morale. Like for example, many teachers may wish to use diverse pedagogical and instructional options but the school leadership might not be able to provide the resources or even permission to conduct such classes.
- *Organizational Efficiency*: Organizational efficiency revolves around the effectiveness of the administration with regard to the school systems – like that of leave, promotion, professional development permission, reimbursement of expenses etc.
- *Interpersonal relationships*: Relationships between teachers and principal and also among teachers or among teachers and office staff or among teachers and support staff also effect the teacher morale. The presence or absence of respect, care and trust with stakeholders – parents, students, teachers, support staff, Principal, School Management affect the morale of the teachers.

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- *Collegiality*: The co-operation between colleagues who share responsibility is the hallmark of collegiality. Inger (1993) cites collegiality as a factor that leads to increased teacher satisfaction and adaptability. Little (1990) cites collegiality as a factor that helps novice teachers understand the school systems and settle in within the school working environment.
- *Self-conception*: The dimension of self-conception encompasses what the individual teacher believes about her role as a teacher. The personal motivation, job descriptions and role expectancy are the factors that influence the self-conception of a teacher.

It is important to understand teacher morale because

- It helps understand how the teacher's work-life balance exists.
- It helps curb attrition in the profession.
- It helps plan for appropriate professional development activities.
- It helps dictate policies that are not only student friendly or but one that helps teachers drive the learning within the classroom setup.
- It helps plan and implement 'corrective measures' to help teachers strengthen the classroom learning environment.

Strategies to boost teacher morale during and after the COVID 19 pandemic

The following are the strategies that can be used by stakeholders to help boost the teacher morale and improve the learning experience of students.

- *Developing Trust*: Trust is the foundation for all relations. Trust among stakeholders' help propel the institutional goals. Within the school environment, parents trust their children with the teachers and the school systems. Chicago, Bryk and Schneider (2003) have shown that where schools demonstrated high relational trust marked improvements in student learning was seen.
- In the of times COVID-19, trusting teachers to not only take their classes but also giving them time to prepare for their classes when they work from home is the first step that schools can take. Also, not penalizing or humiliating teachers for not being able to perform in the new teaching environment gives teachers time to develop their skillsets to take better classes via the remote mode.
- Not being judgmental of teachers and their home environment is a factor that helps teachers, adjusts to the new learning environment.
- *Build learning teams*: Often we assume that working together is the same as working in a team. Figure 2 summarizes the difference between work groups and team (Luecke, 2004, Katzenbach, 2005)

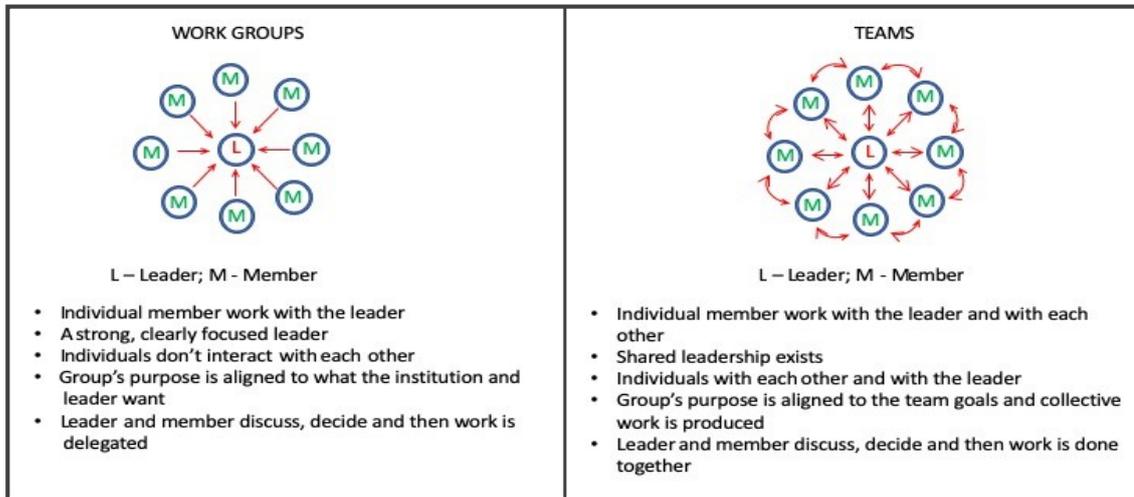
Learning teams are group of teachers who work together to improve the learning experience for students. In the times where learning has shifted to the remote mode, learning teams need not only be limited to teachers and the learning teams could include members who provide tech support or act as moderators. In the present scenario, learning teams could comprise of stakeholders who perform the following functions:

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1. *Tech support*: with many teachers figuring out how to effectively deliver via the online mode, tech support is needed to solve the minor problems that could lead to anxiety in teachers. The role of tech support could be taken by competent parents, school support staff, teacher's children or even older students. Effective delegation is extremely beneficial to create growth opportunities (Williams, 2002).



(Figure-2: Difference between Work Groups and Team, (Luecke, 2004, Katzenbach, 2005)

2. *Moderator*: Gopal (2020) discusses the benefits of having a moderator during online presentations. The moderator can either be a co-teacher or a student or even a parent. Using the moderator helps channelize the interaction in the class.
3. *Researcher*: The online teaching environment gives teachers the ability to show multimedia resources to students, but many teachers wouldn't have the time to search for appropriate resources that they could use for their classes. Having a researcher on the team.
4. *Provide psychological safety through teams*: Edmondson (1999) defined psychological safety as a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes. Having teams that provide a psychological safety for teachers will help teachers share their angst and anxiety. It helps teachers with their relative perspectives and realistic expectations (using Evans, 1997).
5. *Fostering Collaboration*: Hargreaves (1995) cites increased efficiency, improved effectiveness, reduced workload of teacher and administrators, ability to reflect on the teaching, identify opportunities of learning of students and continuous professional development of teachers as some of the benefits of fostering collaboration among teachers.
6. *Strengthen TPACK*: The TPACK framework discusses the dimensions of Technology, Pedagogy and Content Knowledge of teachers. Essentially the framework provides opportunities to identify areas that can be strengthened for teacher development and effective learning outcomes. Due to the very nature of the framework, all teachers are at different points in the continuum and therefore can take on the roles of either mentoring or supporting their colleagues.

Mishra and Koehler (2006) discuss the following components of the TPACK framework with regard to a teacher's knowledge.

- Content Knowledge pertains to the content being taught.

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- Pedagogy Knowledge pertains to the pedagogy or teaching methodology being used to teach the content.
 - Technology Knowledge pertains to the knowledge of the digital tools that are available to the teacher.
 - Technology-Pedagogy Knowledge pertains to the fusion of appropriate technology with appropriate pedagogy for teaching a content area.
 - Technology-Content Knowledge pertains to the fusion of appropriate technology to deliver the content effectively.
 - Pedagogy – *Content Knowledge* pertains to knowing about the best practice available to teach a specific content effectively.
7. *Use Instructional Coaches*: Instructional coaches are professionals who have adequate demonstrable competence in the theory and praxis of areas of teaching. They combine pedagogical expertise with content mastery and interpersonal skills that help teacher better their classroom learning experiences. Senior classroom teachers or Department Heads could take on the role of an instructional coach as long as follow the principles of coaching.

Table 1 discusses how an instructional coach can help strengthen the TPACK framework (Mishra and Koehler, 2006) and boost teacher morale.

TPACK Framework components.	How an instructional coach can strengthen the component area to boosts teacher morale?
Content Knowledge	Instructional coaches can direct a teacher towards resources or books that the teacher can use to strengthen the content knowledge and improve on the teacher preparedness for a class. Darling-Hammond et.al, (2005) discuss how teacher preparedness affects teacher effectiveness.
Pedagogical Knowledge	Instructional Coaches can direct the teachers to research that prove effectiveness of certain pedagogical strategies to teach specific content.
Technological Knowledge	With technology changing at a rapid speed, teachers need to be able to stay abreast with the latest tools that are available to strengthen their classroom delivery. An instructional coach is able to help a teacher with the necessary bells and whistles to ensure the teacher is able to map appropriate technologies to teach appropriate lessons via the online teaching mode.
Pedagogical Content Knowledge	There are various ways in which a content can be taught in a class. The physical classroom has constraints that hamper the adoption of technology within the classroom. The online environment is able to remove that barrier as many students are able to access the internet and related apps like YouTube etc. An instructional coach is able to give the teacher pedagogical tools to make the content interesting – like that of using problem-based learning or inquiry-based learning approaches. These approaches are interesting but demand resources that sadly schools are not able to provide, while in the pandemic environment using the available technological devices students can be exposed to these pedagogical options. Using these approaches will

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	keep the class interested in the lessons and help boost teacher morale.
Pedagogical Technological Knowledge	Knowledge of appropriate pedagogical tools is not sufficient. Using the appropriate technological support can help make the experience more effective. An example of how an instructional coach could help with the pedagogical technological knowledge could taken from a physics teacher's class who was teaching shadows. The content knowledge about shadows explains many concepts and using a demonstration pedagogy is also useful where students are able to see various shadows based on the position of the light. An effective pedagogical technological construct would be to use the camera of a mobile device and take pictures of various objects under similar conditions and compare their characteristics.
Technological Content Knowledge	A good example to show how technological instructional coach can help a geography teacher in strengthening the technological content knowledge is that of a teacher teaching geography using Google Maps in the satellite mode will help a teacher explain the physical geography in an interesting manner similarly giving students assignments to complete using concepts of Physical geography and Google Earth is another example of fusing technological knowhow with content knowledge.

8. *Creating a culture of appreciation:* Another very important way to boost teacher morale is to create a culture of appreciation. Appreciation that is communicated regularly with the teacher, in manner that is individualized and personalized and is authentic helps boost morale. This appreciation also acts as a motivation for other teachers.

CONCLUSION

Henry Ford has correctly said “*Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.*” The success of our children and their learning journeys lie in the success of our teachers; and teacher morale is one of the important factors that affect the teacher's effectiveness. In times like the pandemic it is imperative school authorities, administrators, Principals and parents understand and boost the morale of teachers to strengthen the next generation.

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