

Teacher Education Curriculum and Pedagogical Practices in Schools: Putting the Cart before the Horse?

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Curriculum is the totality of all experiences that learners receive inside and outside the classroom. These experiences are devised to achieve certain objectives. Teacher education curriculum is intended to equip teachers with necessary skills in view of the changing needs of the society in general and that of students in particular. What professional skills would strengthen the budding teachers to meet the challenges of the different aspects of curriculum? Development of curriculum operates at four levels - - ideological, societal, institutional and instructional. These dimensions in any curriculum development need ample consideration. There are two fundamental practices in any planning, that is, top-down planning and bottom-up planning. Although bottom-up planning is more scientific, the top-down planning is most popular when it comes to curriculum development. This paper deals with only the change necessitated due to the recent understanding about the teaching-learning processes. The new understanding about the teaching-learning processes such as cognitive and social constructivism necessitates a new approach in classroom transaction. However, there is a mismatch between pre-service training and requirements of present day classrooms. There seems to be two dimension to the mismatch - - (1) What is dealt in theory is not finding proper application in classrooms and (2) What is practiced in pre-service programme is different from what is required in regular classrooms. There are very strong observations about the inadequacy of teacher education curriculum in the Kerala Curriculum Framework (2007). However, curriculum development process may magnify and exaggerate certain features (elements) of curriculum and throw others out of focus.

Curriculum is the totality of all experiences that learners receive inside and outside the classroom. These experiences are devised to achieve certain objectives. Curriculum deals with teacher, student, what is taught and the milieu of teaching (Schwab, 1983). Teacher education curriculum is intended to equip teachers with necessary skills in view of the changing needs of the society in general and that of students in particular. What professional skills would strengthen the budding teachers to meet the changes in different aspects of life of the student is a question to be addressed.

Development of curriculum operates at four levels - - ideological, societal, institutional and instructional. At the ideological level, stake-holders make a decision after weighing competing educational philosophies, political philosophy of the nation and different principles of the educational psychology. At the national level, different bodies such as University Grants Commission (UGC), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and national level professional organizations involve in the decision-making process. At the societal level, the needs of the society is given due importance. The social norms, expectations, parental preferences, expectation of parents and values are all important. What are the expectations of the society about teachers? What are the demands on teachers? What are the societal preferences and expectation of parents about teachers? What are the values of the society?

At the institutional level, curriculum transaction is affected by the mission-coherence, infrastructure facilities, and the nature of the management of the institution. At the instructional level, curriculum is transacted and that is what reaches the students. This is influenced by competency of teachers, alignment of personal beliefs with regard to the prescriptions in the curriculum such as time allotted for each unit, evaluations procedures, inclusion/exclusion of a topic in the curriculum, sharing of responsibilities with respect to curricular and co-curricular activities and the like.

The above described four dimensions in any curriculum development need ample consideration. The point is that the decision-making is not linear and cannot be conceived as a simple process. The curriculum planned and transacted are not the same because it is at the instructional level that curriculum is translated into classrooms. Given the general nature of

curriculum development the nature of teacher education curriculum will be examined in the following section.

There are two fundamental practices in any planning, that is top-down planning and bottom-up planning. Although bottom-up planning is more scientific, the top-down planning is most popular when it comes to curriculum development. In the planning of teacher education curriculum, the fundamental question deals with some of the elements of curriculum (Dillon, 2009). The elements of curriculum relevant for teacher education programme are - - What? Where and When? Why? To what end? How? There are several elements in teacher education curriculum that are to be changed due to advancements in ICT, current understanding about the teaching-learning processes, the new concept of discipline, classroom management, evaluation procedures and global trends in teacher education.

The Chattopadhyaya Committee Report (MHRD, 1985) and the Yashpal Committee Report (MHRD,1993) have commented about the inadequacy of the teacher education programme. The Chattopadhyaya committee Report of the National Commission on Teachers observed that what is provided in the majority of our training colleges and training institutes is woefully inadequate. The Yashpal Committee Report (1993) on Learning without Burden noted “... inadequate programmes of teacher preparation lead to unsatisfactory quality of learning in schools” (p. 26).

There is a suggestion to extend the duration of Bachelor in Education programme to two-year (NCTE, 2009; NCF, 2005). The norms and standards regarding working days of B.Ed. programme prescribed by NCTE reads - - “(a) There shall be at least 180 working days exclusive of period of examination and admission etc., out of which at least 40 days shall be for practice teaching in about ten schools at upper primary/secondary/senior secondary level. (b) A working day shall be of a minimum of 6 hours in a six-day week, during which physical presence in the institution of teachers and student-teachers is necessary to ensure their availability for individual advice, guidance, dialogues and consultation as and when needed” (NCTE, 2010, Appendix -4). The teachers are expected - - (1) To perceive children not as passive receivers of knowledge, (2) not treat knowledge as a ‘given’ and (3) to organize learner-centred, activity-based, participatory learning experiences such as play, projects, discussion, dialogue, observation, visits and learn to reflect on their own practice (NCTE, 2009, p. 23).

The NCTE (2009) recommended establishment of Teacher Learning Centres (TLCs) as resource for teacher-trainees, teacher practitioners and teacher educators. TLCs should function as a forum for interacting and sharing among teacher educators. It should also provide a platform for classroom-based research and a space for self-directed activities.

The NCF (2005) has pointed out some areas of deficiency of teachers such as language proficiency. Learner has to be seen as an active participant rather than passive recipient in the process of learning. Learning should be participatory process that takes place in the shared social context of the learner's immediate peers as well as the wider social community. Teacher education programmes need to provide space for engagement with issues and concerns of contemporary Indian society such as gender, equity, poverty, etc.

There are very ruthless observations regarding the inadequacy of teacher education curriculum. "The present situation is that the reforms in teacher education lag behind school curriculum reform efforts. ... Teacher education centres should be dynamic. The role of SCERT should be ensured in developing the curriculum for teacher education in order to establish its relation with the school curriculum" (SCERT, 2007, p. 83). In any curriculum development process, one or the other actor dominate and the deliberations (if at all) do not take place in a democratic manner. For example, Rajan (1997) had narrated the dominance of scientists in the Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC), the curriculum project, which is evident in any curriculum project. There are interest groups and persons who have hidden agenda in any curriculum revision which is not to serve the system but to serve them.

This paper is addressing only the change necessitated due to the recent understanding about the teaching-learning processes. The new understanding about the teaching-learning processes such as cognitive and social constructivism necessitates a new approach in classroom transaction. Rajan (2010) has elaborated the various dimensions of constructivist classroom.

The document further suggests that to achieve this, the teacher education methodology should give emphasis to experimental activities. Also, teacher education programme is not democratic and that it intimidates teacher-trainees and suppress their creativity. It is also contended that the evaluation system in teacher education is not transparent and democratic.

There are serious insulates in the learning process. The process of learning must be child-centred and activity-based. Human beings are not passive recipients of knowledge; they are constructors of knowledge. Also, the significance of social constructivism in the process of learning is given emphasis. The concept of learner as a constructor of knowledge has not been assimilated in teacher education. The learning process should be based on ideas of social constructivism by assimilating the tenets of critical pedagogy.

There is a mismatch between pre-service training and requirements of present day classrooms. There seems to be two dimension to the mismatch - - (1) What is dealt in theory is not finding proper application in classrooms and (2) What is practiced in pre-service programme is different from what is required in regular classrooms.

(1) What is dealt in theory is not finding proper application in classrooms. The NCF (2005) has pointed out that the theory courses have no clear link with practical work and ground realities.

People will see curriculum development differently. Kliebard (1977) asserted that “curriculum is a lens through which we can view the problems we must face in curriculum development. If it is poor lens it will obscure more that it clarifies; or it may magnify and thereby exaggerate certain features of our problem and throw others out of focus. But if it is a good theory, it will disclose to us much more of what is vital to curriculum than is visible to naked eye” (p. 268).

Reflective journal writing during the internship is also a recommendation of the NCFTE (2009).

(2) What is practiced in pre-service programme is different from what is required in regular classrooms. “Pre-service and in-service education are stipulated to be inseparable and continuity between the two has to be maintained’ (NCERT, 2000, p. 110).

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