



Reforming Indian Teacher Education

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Abstract: Parents in India are more concerned about the type of school their child is going to instead of being concerned about the professional preparedness of individuals who will be teaching in that school. Instead of being professionally advanced and efficient the teacher education has rather been affected by the age old education policy which still governs the present education system both on the school front as well as on the front log of the teacher training institutes. We can discuss about many issues that need to be addressed by our teacher education in present time. The article primarily focuses on the three prime issues of the teacher education which deeply affect our present education system. These issues are teacher education curricula, learner-centered pedagogy, and inclusive education because these stand out as relatively more important. The article also discusses about the pedagogical task of teaching, an aspect though largely neglected is no less important.

1. INTRODUCTION

In India, teacher education is neither current nor realistic; parents should be concerned about the preparation of individuals who will teach their children. In India, however, this has not occurred. Middle-class parents are concerned about selecting a school for their children, but they are unconcerned about the professional preparedness of individuals who will be teaching in that school. This lack of interest on the part of parents, particularly middle-class parents, does not bode well for teacher education.

Historically, teacher education has long been plagued by "congenital malaise" (Goodlad, 1999); its sloppy knowledge-based and thinly grounded theoretical instruction, non-alignment of theory and practice, lack of a professional gradient, and unique constraint of being organized around multiple school subjects have turned it into what many see as sleepy backwaters of the academe.

The last two decades have seen India in the midst of a massive transformation. Information and communication technologies (ICTS) have made India leapfrog in its development. The nation is now heading for e-governance. ICTs are now driving engine of our economy and distance education. Information technology is now a part of our school education; even government schools

are now seen setting up computer labs to provide hands – on experience to their students. But teacher education institutions have hardly bothered to harness ICT to improve their programmes or their reach. The sleepy backwaters of yesteryears continue to be the sleepy backwaters of today.

Teacher education in India faces significant challenges in preparing teachers who can respond to the talents and the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse student population. Students of today and tomorrow must prepare for the thinking job worldwide and global economy built on information technology. "Is our teacher education responding to these challenges?" is a vital question that Indian teacher educators should ask them. Is it leading by example in school education or is it nearing the conclusion of this magnificent process"? The bottom line is that our teacher education must transform; modification or a little tweaking here and there will not enough. India will only be able to sustain its lead if teacher education institutes are able to develop competent, innovative, and compassionate teachers who demand the best from themselves and their pupils.

Teacher educators must become competent, creative, and caring in order to do this, and demand the best from themselves and their pupils. In short, teacher education must become more equitable and focused on excellence; otherwise, it would support widespread mediocrity in teacher education on the one hand, or the formation of an undemocratic elitism on the other. To the question 'what is excellence'? I would like to quote the following from 'A Nation at Risk' (1983):

"We define excellence to mean several things. At the level of the individual learner, it means performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits in school and in the workplace. Excellence characterizes a school or college that sets high expectations and goals for all learners and then tries every way possible to help students reach them."

I am of the firm view that teacher education in India should set its sight on excellence and pursue it. For this, teacher educators need to formulate appropriate responses to the following crucial questions:

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1. What should teachers know and be able to do?
2. Who should be selected for teacher education i.e. professional preparation?
3. What knowledge and skills should be taught to trainee teachers?
4. What values, attitudes, and convictions should they have?
5. How should a teacher education programme be organized? Should it be predominantly school-based or teacher education institution-based?
6. What pedagogy should be used?
7. What inputs should be provided to trainee teachers to enable them to work effectively with other professionals who work with their students?
8. How should teacher education programmes be designed, implemented, and evaluated?

The answers to these questions cannot be a one-off. This is because education (For that matter teacher education as well) has a social context to which it must respond. If the social context changes, so should education, and teacher education should take the lead and, if possible, act as a catalyst for change.

One can talk about many issues that need to be addressed by our teacher education. One has to be, of necessity, selective. I have therefore selected just three VIZ; teacher education curricula, learner-centered pedagogy, and inclusive education because these stand out as relatively more important. Besides these, I have briefly dealt with what Van Manen calls the pedagogical task of teaching, an aspect though largely neglected is no less important.

2. TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULA

Teacher education curricula in India are in some cases outdated by as many as fifty years. They are far from contemporary; it would be futile to expect them to be futuristic. There is a perception that the failure to appropriately adapt curricula over the years sends troubling signals about the capacity and vision of our country's teacher educator fraternity. The major consumers of teacher education courses are those who enroll in these programmes and the following sample of their comments about the programme should make us sit up:

1. The standards are low enough, one wonders if those who joined the programme did so because they had nothing better or nothing else to do. (A trainee teacher)
2. I find the courses utterly useless, I hardly practice what I was taught, and I feel teacher education courses and real classroom teaching in school do not belong to the same universe. (A school teacher)
3. Teacher education programmes are indeed queer. A poorly stocked library or no using library resources hardly makes any difference so far as the results are concerned, teacher

education blunts the edge that merit has; almost everyone gets first-class. (An above-average student after the declaration of result)

4. A student of a leading TEI (Teacher Education Institute) in the national capital had this to say: "I am a B.Com graduate. I did not study English as my subject for graduation. Nevertheless, I opted for the teaching of English as one of my school subjects and trust me I secured first-class marks in this paper as well" (A student of GGSIP University)

These remarks demonstrate (if proof were needed) that teacher education curricula are neither relevant nor sufficiently demanding. When it comes to curriculum building, it should never be used as an excuse to force one's main academic discipline through, since this happens all too often and sometimes against the grain of programme objectives. The main thrust of teacher education curricula should be on the development of core competencies that have contemporary flavor and knowledge that is at the cutting edge of school curricula.

Besides, the intended curriculum and the transaction curriculum should overlap as far as possible and the transaction strategies should be geared to the development of skills and competencies. Viewed in this perspective, lecture must be used sparingly rather than as the main or the only transaction strategy. Those who join teacher education programmes are adults with above 20 years of learning experience (after all one starts learning long before joining the school). Transaction strategies for teacher education curricula must be based on how adults learn, these should be interactive, group-based and these must gradually shift the onus of learning on trainee teachers. Besides, these transaction strategies should lay a firm foundation for self-directed learning, critical thinking, and professional development.

3. LEARNER-CENTERED PEDAGOGY

National Policy on Education (1986, revised in 1992) recommended the use of learner-centered pedagogy sixteen years ago but teacher education has neglected to promote it so far. The worst part is that most teacher educators believe that only using a few interactive approaches for curriculum transaction will suffice to develop learner-centered pedagogy. Of fact, the circumstance necessitates a shift in mindset. Promoting learner-centered pedagogy would imply that trainee teachers be enabled to develop mastery in effortless use of such techniques as would help young learners learn as best as they can in whole class and socially interactive settings through one's preferred style of learning.

According to **Keefe (1979)**, "Learning styles are characteristic cognitive, affective and psychological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment". Psychologists are of the opinion that sensory modalities are a major component of learning style. Even though every learner uses eyes, ears, and

hands to support one's learning, one may be predominantly a visual, an auditory, or a motor learner. Difficulties are bound to arise when a student who has a strong preference for one modality is expected or made to learn through another i.e. different modality. **Leaver (1997)** vividly brings out the differences related to these modalities through the below example of how three students with different sensory modalities may write about the first day of the spring:

- A blue jay appeared outside my window this morning. A glimpse of its broad, blue wings spread under the early rays of the sun caught my eye in the dim ether between sleep and wakefulness. It watched as it landed on the barren ground, its head cocked and its eyes seeking out anything that it might see in the grass for breakfast.
- The lilting song of a bird rang in my ears this morning, its melody waking me gently from a quiet sleep. I heard the slot folding of its wings, as it plopped onto the quiet earth, cocking its head, and listening for sounds in the grass- a potential breakfast.
- A bird swept past my window this morning. The flash of light that slid over its wings as it glided past the window grabbed my attention, jolting me to full wakefulness. I walked to the window, just as it alit on the ground, its eyes darting across the grass in search of the sudden movement the slithering away of a potential breakfast.

These three small essays admirably reflect learners' different sensory modalities. In view of learners' differences in terms of their preferred sensory modalities, it should be impressed upon every trainee teacher that

1. All students can learn.
2. Not all students can learn in the expected or prescribed way or in equal measure.
3. Non-motivated learners do not exist.
4. Students' success may be more a function of how students are taught than of their innate ability.

Constructivism is not a part of educational psychology in the syllabi of most universities and in the few where it is, its tenets remain mostly confined to theory textbooks and class lectures. They do not percolate down to classroom practice. According to **UNESCO**, "learner-centered education serves the individual learner and consequently the whole society. It can check stagnation as well as dropout two problems that have plagued Indian education for a number of years. Learner-centered education negates instruction based on a 'one size fits all' approach. It expects teachers to teach each learner according to one's interests, abilities, and preferred learning style. Learner-centered education at the secondary stage can lead to cooperative learning and help create a people-oriented society wherein differences are accepted and respected learner-centered education takes the learner as he/she respects him/her and is based on a concern for the learner's rights and welfare."

Learner-centered education becomes all the more important in the context of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. According to **Howard Gardner**, "human intelligence can be predominantly linguistic, musical, logico-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, or personal. The implications for the education of children of diverse intelligence are consequently different and far-reaching. Learner-Centered secondary education can provide customized learning experiences so that learners' "unique potentials" are developed optimally to serve society and enrich human life."

4. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The National Policy on Education (1986, revised in 1992) took a well-considered view that whenever feasible; the education of children with motor handicaps and other milder handicaps will be common with others. It recommended that teacher training programmes will be re-oriented, particularly for teachers of primary classes, to deal with the special differences of the handicapped. When one keeps in mind that this recommendation was made in 1986, one becomes skeptical about the sanctity of the recommendations in **NPS(1986)**.

It's important to remember that inclusion isn't only about schools; it's also about society. Why should mainstream school education do the same and be a contributor to educational apartheid if families with impaired children do not dump them?

UNESCO (1994) in the Salamanca Statement advocated, "Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote and nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized groups". The core of this statement was that children with special educational needs should be welcomed and accommodated in the mainstream educational system for the majority of students. It's easy to see how inclusive education and learner-centered education are mutually beneficial. According to **Mittler (2000)**, "Inclusion is a vision, a road to be traveled, but a road without ending and a road with all kinds of barriers and obstacles, some of them invisible and some of them in our own heads and hearts." It is indeed sad that teacher education in India has failed to respond properly to the challenge of inclusive education. We would do well to remember that both teachers, as well as students, come from society, when they come to school, they do not leave behind their values, beliefs, attitudes, biases, and prejudices. The task of developing curricula for inclusive education is no doubt important, more important perhaps is the challenge of developing a favorable mindset to inclusive education. Most Indian Universities have developed a course on "Special Education", or "Education of Learners with Special Needs," but have made the mistake of keeping it as an optional course.

Consequently, what was intended to be central has been downgraded as optional. As a result only a few may opt for this course while the majority may not. Even the NCTE in its "Curriculum Framework (1998)" made this mistake and failed to give the expected lead. To me, it is obvious that skills and competencies related to providing individualized learner-centered teaching in integrated settings must be made the core of every teacher's repertoire of professional competencies. Unless this is taken as a non-negotiable principle, inclusive education will continue to be neglected. The success of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan will remain a pipedream without the needed thrust on inclusive education by Indian teacher education.

5. PEDAGOGIC TASK OF TEACHING

In the context of the contemporary policy perspective of result-driven and career-dominated schooling, it is imperative to ask ourselves "What is the pedagogical task of teaching?"

Almost all teachers would respond to this question by saying, "Well, the pedagogical task of teaching is to teach. What else could it be? It is so obvious." Admittedly, teaching involves many tasks. The crucial question is 'Why and how is teaching a pedagogical task?' this question indeed merits close attention.

Like other professionals, teachers too have a routine. This routine too often focuses on the general than on the unique. "The teachers would do well to remind themselves that their ongoing concerns are less with the institutional problems than with personal problems, less with school productivity than with the success of their students, less with system infrastructure than with personal relational concerns, less with political educational issues than with emotional and moral issues. The focus of the teacher should be on what we here call the pedagogical task, i.e. the complexity of relational, personal, moral, emotional aspects of teacher are everyday acting with children or young people they teach." (Van Manen, 2002, 135)

When viewed from this point, teaching is quintessentially a caring profession; it involves helping, encouraging, admonishing, prodding, and worrying about the individual learner and his progress. Teaching is not and cannot be a depersonalized activity. How can it be so when teachers are keen to provide their students with positive experiences, make them feel safe and relaxed during learning activities and treat them as persons, each with a unique name and personality? This

is the pedagogical task teachers' work is concerned with. Teacher education programmes focus mostly on the formal, the ritualistic, and the general and in the process ignore the unique. Working with the unique and facilitating its development is what I consider the heart of teaching. Teacher educators have thus this sacred duty to perform, the duty of sensitizing each trainee teacher to the unique in each learner and fostering it. This surely is not an easy task but true teaching is not an easy job; it never has been easy and never ever will be. Teacher education programmes need to lay emphasis on developing a caring attitude towards each learner and empathy among trainee teachers. This will prepare them, as teachers, to do justice to the pedagogic task of teaching. It is for teacher educators to decide how best this can be achieved, through what inputs and which combination of strategies.

6. CONCLUSION

One may now ask, "What next"? Admittedly, these aspects of and issues in teacher education are important and while accommodating these and providing for these, teacher education will be transformed for the better. To the question, "How can the process of change in this direction be started and with whom should it start"? I would respond, "You", at the earliest and with oneself and with one's institution. I would like to conclude by highlighting the power of the teacher as described by Pat Conroy in his novel 'Beach Music'. In this novel Jack McCall, the hero thinks of his friend Ledare, who teaches Jack's young daughter, Leah. Observing Leah grow and develop under Ledare's tutelage, Jack remarks, "One can do anything, anything at all, if provided with a passionate and gifted teacher". How true. I am convinced that India would indeed become a top rung nation if our teacher education institutions could groom such passionate and gifted teachers who care for their students as unique individuals. Any takers?

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