

Examining the Role of Teacher Educators in the Changing Scenario

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ABSTRACT

The student-teachers enter into pre-service teacher education programme with certain pre-conceived notions about teaching and role of teacher in schools. The ways in which student-teachers understand nature of teaching and role of school teacher are important for teacher educators to be aware of and to comprehend. This has become even more important in the light of School Experience programme as a part of change in B.Ed. two-year curriculum. The assumption that there is a linear relationship between the curriculum change and role of teacher educator is questionable. The change in the structure of B.Ed. curriculum including the component of School Internship demands a particular kind of understanding and engagement of teacher educators in the light of School Internship Framework and Guidelines by NCTE in 2016. The preparedness of teacher educators becomes an important area of research in such a case to be able to exert maximum impact on the process of preparing student-teachers in this pre-service teacher education programme. The role of teacher educator in the changing scenario is the point of significance.

Keywords - B.Ed. curriculum; School Experience programme; Student-Teacher; Teacher educator; Teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

The NCTE framework and guidelines 2016 mention some of the roles and responsibilities of Teacher Education Institutions which can be interpreted as the role of teacher educators. This requires that teacher educators be well aware of their learners' level of understanding of teaching and various roles of teachers in school. This is because they are required to orient the mentor teachers and the Principals of the schools about their roles in guiding student teachers in their respective schools during school experience programme. The teacher educator in collaboration with the school Principal and mentor teacher is expected to monitor and assess the internship performance of student-teachers. Also the school internship framework requires teacher educators to prepare student-teachers for a longer and extensive period of interface with the school. Critical thinking of student-teachers is important to be

built upon so that they do not succumb to the pressures and expectations of a school system. So they need to prepare student teachers to be reflective practitioners. Thus it becomes essential for a teacher educator to reexamine and reflect upon their own preconceived notions about their student teachers' understanding about the role of school teacher in the light of two-year B.Ed curriculum framework. The need for teacher educators to be reflective practitioners themselves is a point of significance indeed. There is a need to examine the concept of teaching in order to understand the kind of preparedness needed on the part of teacher educators as well as student-teachers.

1.1 Concept of 'Teaching'

Teaching is an activity meant to bring about meaningful learning through a method that is morally and pedagogically acceptable. It involves a teacher, a learner, a content in form of knowledge, facts, information and a skill to be imparted, a deliberate intention on the part of the teacher to teach for learning and on the part of the learner to learn. Teaching is ultimately a method that respects the learner's cognitive integrity and freedom of choice. So in an educational context teaching cannot be imagined without a teacher, a learner, a content and without learning actually taking place. Moreso the content must not be imposed, otherwise the criterion of willingness and voluntariness on the part of the learner would be violated.

The concept 'teaching' is polymorphous as it takes many forms and accommodates a variety of individuals. Teaching may be thought of as falling into three broad areas of use as explained by Komisar(1968). The first one is occupational use that is what a person is typically engaged in as an occupation or a profession. Thus school administrators and counselors are also said to belong to the teaching profession, though they seldom teach. In the enterprise sense teaching means doing those things that teachers typically do when on the job, like distributing books and assignments, marking assignments, encouraging students to learn, etc. But even these tasks are not the central intellectual acts of teaching which lie at the heart of teaching, namely, those acts of explanation, of illustration, of demonstrating, justifying, contrasting and so on which treat the subject matter directly and make it available for learning by the student. Distinguishing these uses is only one way of approaching the teaching concept.

Another way of understanding ‘teaching’ would be that it can rightly be thought of in two senses: in the achievement sense and in the task sense. In the achievement sense, teaching implies learning. Those who insist that ‘unless the student has learnt, the teacher has not taught’ are using the terms in the achievement sense. The controversy over whether teaching implies learning can be settled in part by noting that there is a ‘task’ sense of teaching which is just as legitimate and perhaps used even more often. In the task sense teaching does not imply learning. An activity known as ‘teaching’ does not, according to this sense of ‘teaching’, result in successful learning⁽¹⁾.

The concept ‘teaching’ follows the rule of triadicity, or the rule of double accusatives. That simply means that ‘to teach’ typically carries both a direct and an indirect object. A typical case is one in which T (a teacher) intentionally does something (describe, display, indicate, etc.) with X (the subject matter) with the intention that S (the learner) learns X, that is, typically ‘T teaches X to S’. The rule of triadicity thus rules out the possibility of making any literal sense of such slogans as ‘We teach children, not subjects’ or its contrary. It is not possible to teach children without teaching them something and equally impossible to teach a subject to no one.

1.2 Context of ‘Teaching’

This section describes the context of teaching taking cue from Shulman’s concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). Central to the notion of PCK is the idea that instruction can only be effective if it is attuned to the ways in which students learn specific content. Obviously, teaching experience and subject matter knowledge are important, but contextual and personal factors apparently may lead to quite different processes of knowledge development. The development of PCK is perhaps best viewed as a complex interplay between knowledge of subject matter, teaching and learning, and context, and the way in which teachers combine and use this knowledge to remain in consonance with the aim and spirit of teacher education programme.

Shulman (1986) coined the term PCK among a set of other knowledge categories for teachers who “need to promote comprehension among students” (1987:9). His definition of PCK is “....that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers,

their own special form of professional understanding.... It represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organised, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction.”⁽²⁾ Taking cue from this concept which is actually located at school level, the produce of interaction between student teachers and teacher educators can be optimised if teacher educators lay emphasis on knowing their learners, that is, student teachers and design their internship supervision around that.

The way pre-service teachers understand nature of teaching in schools and role of school teacher is important for teacher educators to exert maximum impact. Teacher education program has remarkably little influence if it contradicts student teachers’ initial beliefs (Book, Byers, & Freeman, 1983; Clark, Smith, Newby, & Cook, 1985; Cmw, 1987; Kagan, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Some evidence suggests this may happen because teacher educators' ways of understanding about nature of teaching often differ from those of their student-teachers. This creates the need to re-examine the variation in the understanding of teacher educators and student-teachers about the nature of teaching and role of school teachers.⁽³⁾

An implication of this position is that teacher educators—both individually as course or field instructors and collectively as colleagues in a program—must decide how to think about and respond to student teachers' understanding about nature of teaching and role of teacher in schools in particular situations. They must move beyond generalisations that beliefs will interact or interfere with what they want to teach and, instead, focus on which beliefs will matter most and in what ways given the particular goals of a course or programme. Making this move requires that teacher educators become astute observers of their students' responses and reflective practitioners seeking ways of addressing the gaps and inconsistencies existing in teacher education programmes.

There is a growing body of research that focuses on pre-service student teachers’ beliefs, expectations and attitudinal changes that shape their perspectives on teaching and learning. There are research studies mainly focused on perceptions of student teachers before and after entering into pre-service teacher programme as well as of teacher educators in the

light of one-year B.Ed. programme. Only few studies have been found to be conducted in the light of changed scenario under School Internship model in 2-year B.Ed. programme.

The given NCTE 2016 guidelines call upon the student-teachers/intern-teachers to work as full-time teachers in negotiated schools during internship under the guidance and supervision of school principal and mentor teachers. These mentor teachers are some of the competent and willing teachers of the ‘internship schools’.⁽⁴⁾

The School Internship model according to NCTE framework and guidelines 2016 necessitates a continuous interaction and coordination of teacher education institution with Internship or Lab schools and Mentor teachers. In addition teacher educators involved should coordinate with mentor teachers to design a few need-based and locally-relevant activities, such as survey of historical monuments in the school neighbourhood, interview with local artists and artisans, meetings with retired award winning soldiers and teachers, visits to places of cultural importance, assessment of the mechanism of neighbourhood cleanliness, etc. This has direct implications on the role of teacher educators in preparing their student-teachers for school internship as per the given framework and guidelines of NCTE.

2. POLICY PERSPECTIVE: ROLE OF TEACHER EDUCATOR

The analysis of major Policies and Commissions in education in post-independent India reveals that though some of them mention about the need of teacher education the explicit emphasis on the role of teacher educator in preparing student-teachers during pre-service teacher education appears to be negligible. The preparedness of teacher educators becomes an important area of research in such a case to be able to exert maximum impact on the process of preparing student-teachers in the pre-service teacher education programme in the present context.

Following are some of the significant documents that lay overt emphasis on the functions of teacher educator in the context of teacher education in India. It is important to mention these as they indicate the role expectations from teacher educators and their corresponding preparedness for the same in the changing scenario.

2.1 National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, 2009

The profile and role of teacher educators are to be conceived primarily with reference to the philosophy and principles that govern the various aspects of school education – aims of education, curriculum, methods and materials and the socio-cultural context in which the school functions – and the role of the teacher in translating educational intents into practical action. Accordingly, a teacher as teacher is expected to be a particular kind of person, for example,

as mentioned in the NCF and cited as follows:

One who:

- Cares for children and loves to be with them, understands them within social, cultural and political contexts, treats all children equally;
- Does not treat knowledge as a ‘given’, embedded in the curriculum and accepted without question,
- perceives children not as passive receivers of knowledge, encourages their capacity to construct knowledge;
- Discourages rote learning, makes learning a joyful and participatory activity, organizes learner-centred, activity-based, participatory learning experiences – play, projects, discussion, dialogue, observation, visits, integrate academic learning with productive work;
- Critically examines curriculum and textbooks, contextualizes curriculum to suit local needs; and
- Promotes peace values - democratic way of life, equality, justice, liberty,fraternity, secularism and zeal for social reconstruction, reflects on her teaching experience;

NCFTE 2009 views that it follows from the above that the teacher educator (whose job is to contribute towards the preparation of such a teacher) should share the underlying educational philosophy and possess the needed understanding and professional competencies to develop such teachers. This would imply a corresponding change in the professional development of teacher educators who can⁽⁵⁾:

- Engage would-be teachers with the larger socio-political context in which education and learners are situated, engage them with children in real contexts than teach them about children through theories, focus on the developmental aspects of children with constant reference to their socio-economic and cultural contexts.

- Bring into the teacher education curriculum and discourse trainees' own assumptions about children and beliefs about knowledge and processes of learning
- Help teachers to reflect upon their own positions in society – gender, caste, class, poverty, linguistic and regional variation, community, equity and justice.
- Engage with theory along with field experiences to help trainees to view knowledge not as external to the learner but as something that is actively constructed during learning, integrate academic knowledge and professional learning into a meaningful whole.
- Provide opportunity for trainees for reflection and independent study without packing the training schedule with teacher directed activities; provide opportunities to the student teacher to critically examine curriculum, syllabi and textbooks.
- View knowledge not as an external reality embedded in textbooks but as constructed in the shared context of teaching-learning and personal experience, change perception of child as a receiver of knowledge and encourage its capacity to construct knowledge, view learning as a search for meaning out of personal experiences and knowledge generation as a continuously evolving process of reflective learning.

In other words, the locus of the functions of teacher educators lies in the role perceptions of teachers with regard to educational objectives, practices and processes of the school.

The most pivotal role that a teacher has to play in the life of a person can be ,at best, ensured by proper and intensive pre-service teacher education programme. Teacher education acquires an important place in the field of education. Thus a careful analysis of the present day teacher education programme and the preparedness and efficiency of teacher educators becomes a necessity.

2.2 Justice Verma Commission Report (2012)

According to this Report “The quality of teachers is also linked with the quality of those who have the responsibility to prepare them; in this context the role of a teacher educator, her/his competence, capability and scholarship becomes very significant. It became apparent during the deliberations of the Commission that preparation of teacher education has remained a weak link in ensuring the quality of pre-service teacher education; and ,therefore, the issue of

the profile of a teacher educator should receive due attention ,transcending the existing thinking on the subject.”

This report emphasises on ‘sound pedagogy’. It implies integrating knowledge about the learners and knowledge about the subject with the knowledge about the socio-cultural context and philosophical basis of education and learning. It is important for a teacher educator to know how student-teachers are understanding teaching and role of teacher to avoid using pedagogy merely as a technique. If there are gaps those need to be addressed.

2.3 School Internship: Framework And Guidelines by NCTE, 2016

Like all other professional programmes, field engagement is an essential component of any teacher education programme. In the case of teacher education programmes, field engagement involves engagement with the students and teachers in schools. The sustained engagement with the school over a period of time is known as ‘school internship’ which equips the prospective teacher to build a repertoire of professional understandings, competencies and skills, and positive attitude to schooling and teaching. In fact, it is this component of the teacher education curriculum which facilitates transformation of student-teachers from being learners in the art and science of teaching to adequately-equipped teachers to perform the responsibilities of a teacher in actual school settings.

The present day educational discourse centres around the concepts of self-learning, self-knowledge, and constructivist approach to teaching and learning which implies the students need to be facilitated to graduate from being mere recipients of knowledge to become assimilators and generators of knowledge. The internship programme provides an opportunity to the prospective teachers to link the educational theory and pedagogical concepts with their practice on the one hand, and on the other to test the validity of theoretical propositions in actual school settings.

The past few years have witnessed a paradigm shift in the concept of school internship courses in India. The earlier stipulation of practice-teaching involved teaching of a pre-specified number of lessons in the subjects offered by a student-teacher as teaching or methods subjects. The *NCTE Regulations, 2009* made an attempt to broaden the scope of

practice-teaching by emphasising the importance of providing experience of all activities and programmes of the school to the student-teachers. The NCTE Regulations, 2014 have stipulated further strengthening of the component of 'Field Engagement' by prescribing a longer duration of 20 weeks for it in the elementary and secondary teacher education programmes.

The 'Field Engagement' of 20 weeks has been further split into two parts consisting of 4 weeks and 16 weeks to be organised in the first and second year of the Two-Years programmes, and in the second, third and fourth year of the Four-Year programmes. The engagement of 16 weeks' duration is further split into 14 weeks of school internship and 2 weeks of engagement with the field other than the school (i.e. community engagement). Further, the total internship time is to be split between two types of schools at the rate of 80% and 20%.

It is expected that after the completion of 'Internship', the student-teacher will be ready to take up the responsibilities of a teacher independently. The enhanced duration of internship implies that tremendous amount of resources shall be required in terms of money, time and efforts and therefore these will have to be utilised in a planned and systematic manner to ensure successful implementation of internship.

The student-teachers/intern-teachers should be called upon to work as full-time teachers in negotiated schools during internship under the guidance and supervision of school Principal and mentor teachers. In other words, they should be required to undertake all such tasks as are performed by regular teachers of the school. In addition, they ought to be provided opportunities to observe, participate and contribute in all activities of the school both in curricular and co-curricular activities and out of school activities.

Some competent and willing teachers of the 'internship schools' could be designated as "Mentor Teachers". In an academic session, 3-4 student-teachers could be attached with a mentor-teacher keeping in view his /her subject specialisation. The identified mentor-teachers who could be treated as members of the extended teacher education faculty shall be provided intensive orientation to the responsibilities of a mentor-teacher to avoid wastage of resources. It would be desirable to ensure stability of the tenure of the mentor-teachers.

2.3.1 Student Teachers' Tasks during Internship

During Internship, the student-teachers are required to undertake a variety of activities relating to classroom teaching, classroom management and organisation of school-based and community-based activities other than teaching. However, for undertaking the activities, the student-teachers are required to develop a repertoire of understandings, competencies, and skills. They have to undertake some activities in the first part of the internship and some other in the second part. A few such activities are suggested below (which have been elaborated in detail in the Internship Handbook):

- a) Understanding the Internship School and the community around.
- b) Analysis of school syllabus and textbooks.
- c) Observing the classroom teaching of regular teachers.
- d) Observation of classroom teaching of peer student-teachers.
- e) Preparation of case study of the internship school and the innovative activities that the school undertakes.
- f) Preparation of Lesson Plans and Unit Plans.
- g) Teaching the units of the prescribed syllabus in two subjects currently being taught in the school.
- h) Teaching as a substitute teacher.
- i) Mobilisation and development of teaching-learning resources.
- j) Preparation of a question papers and other assessment tools.
- k) Preparation of a diagnostic tests and organisation of remedial teaching.
- l) Undertake case study of a child.
- m) Undertake action research project on at least one problem area of schooling.
- n) Community work, community survey etc.
- o) Maintenance of a reflective diary or journal to record day to day happenings and reflections thereon.
- p) Writing a term paper on a selected theme.

The TEIs and Internship Schools may devise additional activities on the basis of local specific needs. While selecting the units of the syllabus, the student-teachers shall follow the annual instructional plan drawn by the host school.

3. PEDAGOGICAL IMPERATIVES

The NCTE Framework and Guidelines, 2016 mention some of the roles and responsibilities of Teacher Education Institutions which can be interpreted as the role of teacher educators. This requires that teacher educators be well aware of their learners' level of understanding of teaching and various roles of teachers in school, as emphasised in the idea of PCK as given by Shulman. This is because they are required to orient the mentor teachers and school Principals about their respective roles in mentoring student teachers in the respective schools during school internship. The teacher educator in collaboration with the school Principal and mentor teacher is expected to monitor and assess the internship performance of student-teachers. Also the school Internship framework requires teacher educators to prepare student-teachers for a longer and extensive period of interface with the school. Critical thinking of student-teachers is important to be built upon so that they do not succumb to the pressures and expectations of a school system. So they need to prepare student teachers to be reflective practitioners. Thus it becomes essential for a teacher educator to reexamine and reflect upon their own preconceived notions about their student teachers' understanding about the role of school teacher in the light of two-year B.Ed curriculum framework. The need for teacher educators to be reflective practitioners is stressed in the perspectives of Schon, Giroux, Mezirow, John Dewey and Paulo Freire.

The NCTE Regulations, 2014 have prescribed a 20 week 'Field Engagement' component with 2 weeks in B.Ed. Ist Year and 18 weeks in B.Ed. IInd year. This has translated into 4 week Field Observation programme in B.Ed. Ist Year and 16-week internship-mode School Experience Programme (SEP) in B.Ed. IInd year. This requires teacher educators to prepare student-teachers in first year itself about the nature of teaching and various roles of school teacher through various course components and field experiences of B.Ed. curriculum. The concept of school teacher has to be developed as school teacher in a holistic manner rather than as a subject teacher. It is also important as under School internship model student teachers come to their TEIs for a small duration of time particularly in B.Ed. II year so a lot

of it should happen in the first year of B.Ed. This even necessitates that teacher educators know their learners well. This can be known through becoming aware of teacher educators' pre-conceived notions about their learners' understanding. An attempt is needed to map teacher educators' pre-conceived notions about student-teachers' understanding of role of school teachers. This mapping is important so that notions of ST can be reaffirmed and some can be deconstructed in order to ensure their effective school internship.

The NCFTE 2010 emphasised "It is obvious that the education and training of a prospective teacher will be effective to the extent that it has been delivered by teacher educators who are competent and professionally equipped for the job." The preparedness of teacher educators is determined upon the extent they understand their learners, student-teachers in this case. Shulman's concept of PCK provides the central idea. The concept of PCK is based on the idea that it is important to take into account the context of teaching and those whom a teacher is teaching. It represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organised, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction. Shulman has majorly used this concept with regard to school education. It is suggested that this concept of PCK should be extended to higher education, especially teacher education to understand the context of teaching.

4. CONCLUSION

The student teachers enter into pre-service teacher education programme with certain pre-conceived notions about teaching and role of teacher in schools based on their past educational experiences. The ways in which student-teachers understand nature of teaching and role of school teacher are important for teacher educators to be aware of and to comprehend. It has been found that there is a stark variation in the perceptions of student teachers and teacher educators regarding different roles of a school teacher and aspects of school teaching. It is important to examine closely the perceptions of student teachers and teacher educators about role of teachers in school and record the variations thereof.

Unless teacher educators are aware of their preconceived about their learners' understanding about role of school teacher they will not be able to know their learners well. It is important to know about their learners and their contexts as emphasised by Shulman, John Dewey and

others in order to ensure effective teaching-learning process. This is needed to prepare student teachers well for school internship. It indicates that the task of teacher educator is multi-phased and complex as it involves transforming a student-teacher into a school teacher. This requires transformative learning⁽⁶⁾, as Mezirow calls it.

It is suggested that teacher educators need to reflect critically over the notions of student-teachers about teaching and role of teachers in school in order to address the gaps between their own and student-teachers' perceptions about teaching. The School internship model in two-year B.Ed. programme necessitates this task to be completed in the first year to ensure effective school experience for student-teachers. For this certain institutional practices are suggested to be introduced by TEIs especially before student-teachers start practising teaching in schools. A comprehensive Field Observation guidelines and framework need to be framed and implemented. The co-curricular activities can be organised to bridge the gaps between school system and TEIs.

The concerned faculty in some of the TEIs need to develop a comprehensive module for student-teachers to conduct Field Observation in B.Ed. I year. This will help to form the basis of student-teachers' observations in Field Observation to understand the school system properly. Along with this TEIs need to make a provision of arranging discussion sessions with student-teachers in B.Ed. I year in which they share their field observations and reflections upon the same with the teacher educators. The successful implementation depends upon the awareness of corresponding roles of teacher educators in this regard in the light of NCTE 2016 guidelines on school internship.

These are some of the pedagogical imperatives for teacher educators under the school internship model. Taking cue from Shulman's concept of PCK which is actually located at school level, this it is suggested that the produce of interaction between student-teachers and teacher educators can be optimised if the teacher educators lay emphasis on knowing their learners, that is, student-teachers and design and monitor their internship supervision around that.

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