

Teacher Education – A National Responsibility

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Abstract:

The validity of any educational program depends upon how far it is in sync with the needs or the context of the times. India being at the brink of a global make over requires its citizens to possess skills and competences that would enable them to contribute to India as well as the world. Shaping up of future citizens takes place in the classrooms. Hence if we need young citizens with futuristic and global outlook, India would need to revisit its teacher formation programs. Teachers would themselves need to possess the skills that they wish to develop in their learners. Hence teacher education curriculum would need to make conscious endeavours to include programs and processes that are progressive and contemporary. It cannot afford to be complacent about its course content; rather it would need to look at its programs vis-à-vis the national and global skill requirements. This article presents the teacher education program with reference to national challenges and shows how the program is a responsibility and not just a duty.

Keywords: teacher education, national challenges, expectations.

I. INTRODUCTION

India is emerging as a knowledge society. Dr A P J Abdul Kalam in his presidential address at Kolkata in the year 2006 presented his vision for India in the following words; “The whole purpose of education in a country is to develop and enhance the potential of our human resource and progressively transform it into a knowledge society.” Dr. Kalam envisioned the knowledge society to be a society producing products and services that are rich in both explicit and tacit knowledge, thus creating value added products. The role of education in the transformation process had never been more emphasized. The key performers in the education system are teachers who have the responsibility of realizing this vision. The question that arises now is whether teachers are equipped adequately to meet this challenge. Do our teacher preparation courses make the kind of teachers that would be able to shoulder the enormous responsibility of creating a knowledge society, and global citizens? Teacher Education thus now has a National responsibility of creating the manpower that would take on the challenges faced by a nation on the brink of transformation and progression.

II. NATIONAL CHALLENGES

It is imperative to understand the challenges faced by the country in order to have a better perspective for Teacher education. Institutions of teacher education provide teachers to society. The nature and quality of teachers that enter education ought to meet the challenges of society, nation and the globe at that particular point of time. Therefore teacher education processes should take cognizance of the issues challenging the nation in order to make the course applicable to the times. Some of the challenges are as follows;

i) India vis-à-vis the Global Village

Education in India, as the world over, has been greatly influenced by Liberalization, Privatization and

Globalization. With the opening up of national borders to education, India needs to pay attention to the quality of its education and consequently the quality of its citizens to ensure that the country is equipped adequately to belong to the global village. India can no longer afford to be content with its educational practices, rather it would need to relook at the world preparedness quotient of these practices. The concerns that need to be looked at in this light are as follows;

Global skills - The dynamics of the world economy demands a sharing of expertise across nations and borders. The world seeks competence in its various sectors of economy, irrespective of nationality. There is demand for high level quality expertise, irrespective of from “where it comes”. In such a scenario, there is mobility of people from one country to the other to satisfy the demand for intellect and competence. The nature of workforce needed now and in the future is quite different from what was needed a few years ago. There’s a lot of cross border exchange of knowledge and personnel across the globe. The challenge therefore is to ensure quality in knowledge as well as personnel so that they are on par with international standards.

Pluralistic world- The cross border exchange of knowledge brings with it the confluence of people with diverse cultures and beliefs. Meanwhile within India too there is a multitude of cultures and communities. It is necessary to understand this pluralism in order to live and thrive together. India faces the challenge of equipping its people with the competences that are requisite to function meaningfully in a multicultural and pluralistic world. Schools would need to relook at its vision and check if they have widened their scope to include global pluralistic issues. Teachers would have to be individuals who not only understand the nature of national and global pluralism but also have the competence to develop in learners the attitude and skills to deal with the challenges of the pluralistic world. Teachers of the future, more than ever before, would need to be highly perspective conscious,

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that is have a realization that every individual is entitled to his/her own perspective, have tolerance towards one's own perspectives as well as others', and have an attitude of positivity towards multi-culturalism.

Consumer Society - The world is moving into a culture where education is considered a commodity. Therefore there is an emphasis on the quality and value of educational products. Consumers of education would put their money on education that is globally relevant. India cannot afford to be only locally oriented in their knowledge system. It has to work on the enhancement of content and skills that are embedded in the curriculum and ensure that it is of global significance if it wants takers.

ii) ICT Boom

Education in India and worldwide has been greatly revolutionized by Information and Communication Technology. Technology promises to make the process of education very stimulating and far reaching. It is essential for teachers to be able to harness technology for enhanced instruction. Technology facilitates networking in society and this is crucial for the development of knowledge society. Networking helps to create a knowledge intensive environment along with an enabling process to efficiently create, share, use and protect knowledge. Moreover the younger generation in India that is technologically gifted would require the motivation to harness technology for greater understanding of world issues.

iii) Knowledge explosion

Knowledge is increasing exponentially in every sphere leading to information overload. While it appears to be a positive development in terms of progress, there is a danger of losing oneself in the data smog. There is a lot of emphasis on research across the globe. This has led to unprecedented explosion of knowledge. Keeping abreast with this dynamism of the knowledge realm is a challenge by itself, but another responsibility that lies ahead is helping our young learners to meet this challenge. Schools would have to dwell on Knowledge management skills as part of their curriculum transaction process. For this it is imperative that teachers who enter the system possess these skills.

iv) Deteriorating Value System

Another challenge that the nation faces is the deterioration of values among the younger generation. The future generation that has the responsibility of upholding the culture and heritage of the nation is showing a decrease in resilience and an increase in the materialistic culture. Materialism has overcome their thinking leading to a narrow perspective of life and living. They lack coping strategies and are easily drawn to depression and suicide. Parents and teachers are at a loss to understand and groom the youngsters. Teachers would have to be equipped with skills to inculcate the values that would enable youngsters to lead a virtuous life guided by ethics and morality.

v) Quality of Courses

The input of students for teacher education comes from the undergraduate and post graduate courses offered by institutes of higher education in the country. However quality and

rigour in undergraduate, non-professional, arts and science education in India have not been impressive (Raman and Sokhi 2001, Rai Chowduri 2002). The learners who have 'successfully completed' those programmes and therefore 'graduated' often lack real life coping and human skills, such as the ability to communicate effectively and to meet challenges they will be facing in their future life, which will indeed be the reality. (Raman 2002).

III. EXPECTATIONS FROM TEACHER EDUCATION

A Vision oriented Curriculum

In order to analyze the role of teacher education in developing teachers, one ought to have an idea of the kind of teachers that are needed to meet the ever challenging needs of a learning society. Caine and Caine (1997, cited in Day C., 2003) identified four core qualities for teachers of the 21st Century as;

- A sense of self efficacy grounded in authenticity;
- The ability to build relationships that facilitate self-organization;
- The ability to see connections between subjects, discipline and life;
- The capacity to engage in self reflection, to grow and adapt.

The modern day teacher should be prepared to take on roles of not just knowledge disseminators but also knowledge creators, and knowledge managers. For this they ought to be equipped with skills besides communication skills namely, problem-solving, information retrieval, decision making, counseling, consultation and collaboration. Teacher education should prepare student teachers for the multifaceted roles they need to play. 'Changed circumstances and increasing expectations mean that teachers now need not only to be knowledge brokers but learning counselors in settings in which the distinction between student and teacher will become blurred' (Day C., 2003).

The National Curricular Framework (NCERT, 2005) expects teachers to 'play a more active role in relation to the process of knowledge construction in which children are engaged'. Teachers therefore ought to be trained in using their own individual learning curricula as a means of generating and regenerating the understandings, critical thinking skills, emotional intelligence, craft skills and intellectual flexibility to be committed to life long learning. Nagpal S. (2004) asserts that, the quality of teacher education needs to be maintained in terms of the product design (competencies to be developed in behavioural terms), preparation process (instructional strategies to train teachers), infrastructure facilities, skills of teacher educators and professionalism of faculty, objective testing procedures and adoption of quality control techniques.

The student input for teacher education comes largely from undergraduate and few from post graduate, non-professional education. The challenge to teacher education is to mould this lot of students into a generation of teachers who are replete with the skills and competence to brave all kinds of circumstances in their profession.

Progressive Teaching Learning Approaches

Traditional curriculum stresses on “subject matter without any relationship to practical life” (Rosin, Maria, Mary and Parvathavarthini, 2006). In the traditional model of teaching, learning is “just the acquisition of very specific skills and bits of knowledge, a process that is linear, incremental, measurable” (Kohn, 1999, cited in Rao R. and Ravishankar A., 2005). The traditional model is very much used in the higher education system of India too. As a result higher education has become “bookish and mechanical, stereotyped and rigidly uniform and is not catering to the needs of the students” (Rosin, Maria, Mary and Parvathavarthini, 2006). “The methods of teaching are so mechanical that it hardly triggers the young mind with the spirit of self enquiry and practical experimentation.” This model of teaching therefore produces youngsters that are incompetent human resources.

To achieve the goal of a nation with alert and ignited minds, it is essential to follow a progressive model of teaching. This model places emphasis on “the creation of space for thought in the classroom. Students here are encouraged to think and be creative. Classrooms are more learner-centered and students play a role in decision making” (Rao R. and Ravishankar A., 2005).

Didactic approaches have dominated the higher education scene at large and also teacher education. These approaches have widened the gap between theory and practice. This poses a great challenge to the whole relationship between teaching and learning. In an era that has been termed a consumer society, it is not surprising that the way that knowledge is delivered has become a focus of attention (Jarvis, 2002). “As education seeks to respond to the demands of the market, so teaching is forced to change to produce in the most efficient means, the learning packages that will be useful to the work situation or the socio cultural one, and so on.” (Jarvis, 2002) There seems little scope for the lecture as an appropriate teaching method in the learning society, with its apparent rejection of traditional forms of knowledge and authority and its focus upon active learner centered, self directed and experiential learning. (Griffin C., 2002)

Over the last three decades a growing body of theoretical literature and case studies of practice have sought to emphasize the importance of **critical reflection** to teachers’ development (Day C., 2003) The term ‘reflective practitioner’ (Schon, 1983 cited in Day C., 2003) is applicable for teachers who are committed to ‘good’ practice. According to Schon (1983, 1987) reflective practitioners reflect ‘in’ and ‘on’ action. Reflection-in-action refers to the process of decision making by teachers whilst actively engaged in teaching. Reflection-on-action occurs outside of the practice which is the subject of reflection. The focus is on but not bounded by the action, whereas reflection-in-action is necessarily context bound. Schon (1987) has thus emphasized the importance of the relationship between theory and practice in terms of knowledge as embedded in rather than existing outside the action. His work ‘legitimized teaching as a knowledge-based, intellectual activity in which teachers are not only capable of deconstructing but also reconstructing experience’ (Day C., 2003).

At the heart of teacher preparation therefore lies **training in**

reflective practice. Learning through reflection necessitates **critical thinking skills.** Brookfield, (1987, cited in Day C., 2003) identified four aspects of critical thinking as, identifying and challenging assumptions, challenging the importance of context, imagining and exploring alternatives and developing reflective skepticism. This would prepare teachers for the multiple roles that they would be needed to play. In real life, problems and issues are contextual and teachers would be enabled and empowered to tackle them only when equipped with reflective and critical thinking skills.

For the holistic development of teachers, the training in pedagogical skills is not enough. ‘The application of pedagogical skills needs to be a consequence of the exercise of **pedagogical judgment** which is informed by reflection in, on and about the purposes, contexts, processes and outcomes of teaching and learning’ (Day C., 2003). In this sense therefore there should be an emphasis on experiential and self directed learning. Teacher education should focus on learning ‘which combines knowledge with understanding’ and which requires encouraging aspiring teachers to work with ‘surface learning (knowledge components or facts) and deep learning (connections, relationships, holistic understanding).’ (Svingby, 1993, cited in Day C., 2003)

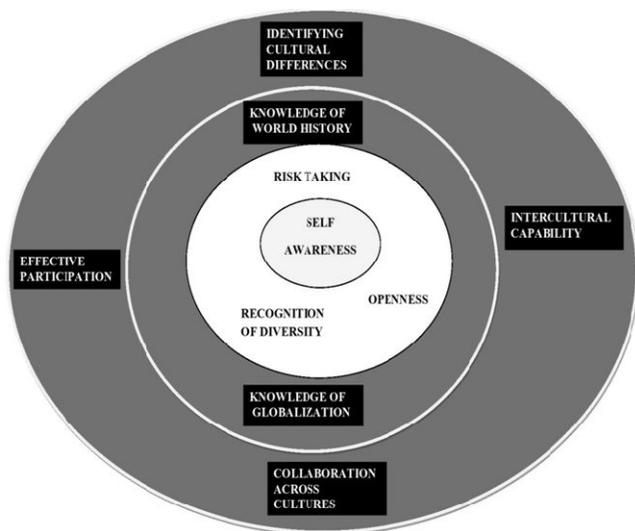
Teacher education should therefore follow approaches that fall in line with the principles of Andragogy that perceives the learner as independent and the teacher as a facilitator. Just as classrooms must be learning environments in which pupils receive, respond to and actively participate in generating knowledge, so professional development opportunities must provide a range of learning experiences which encourage teachers to reflect upon and inquire into their thinking and practice through interaction between their own and others’ experience, so that they are able to embrace the challenge of new teaching roles and see these as challenges rather than burdens to be borne. To this end teacher education should adopt strategies such as Problem Based Learning, Co-operative Learning, Apprentice Learning, Simulations etc.

Teacher preparation should also focus on developing skills in the use of **Information and Communication Technology** in Instructional transactions. Increasing levels of disinterest and disengagement is observed in the present day classrooms due to approaches that are not in keeping with the interests of the young children. Teacher education ought to consider the use of cyber space for greater interaction as well as networking. Teaching through Blogs and Mobile phones serves to create variety and interest in the learning process. Future teachers should be provided training in Information management skills in order to cope up with the Information smog that could engulf an individual.

Global outlook

Considering the phenomenon of a shrinking world, teacher education would need to shift focus to the development of global competences rather than simply academic excellence. For this teacher education would need to have a clear know-how of what constitutes global competences. Hunter (1994) proposed a model showing the external and internal competences that constitute global competences. The internal competences have at its core self-awareness

followed by the competences of risk taking, openness and recognition of diversity. The external competences include abilities in an individual to understand the world and the potential to take focused action to resolve the issues. The diagrammatic representation of the model is as shown in fig. 1. Teacher education would need to weave in course contents that would ensure the development of global consciousness and global competences. Teacher formation would need to equip the future teachers with global attitude and global understanding and empower them to transmit the same to the learners under their care. For this a conscious inclusion of curriculum that spans different nations at different points of time would need to be emphasized.



Assessment Approaches

Teacher Education is bound by the respective Universities to follow a particular format of assessment. However while the essential format is kept in mind, modifications can be done in the qualitative assessment of student teachers. Assessment needs to be understood as a measure to stimulate progress in a learner and not merely a means to quantify a learner’s abilities. This true essence of assessment should be understood by future teachers; hence teacher education should include in its curriculum progressive multi-dimensional processes for assessment of its future teachers rather than merely imparting theoretical inputs about them.

Drawing up Rubrics that highlight key performance indicators would make the qualitative assessment more focused and provide performance expectations. For every activity in teacher education, e.g. Practice teaching, Internship, Projects, Microteaching, etc. specific Rubrics would help to make feedback processes more precise and educative. Besides Rubrics, future teachers should be trained in the development of student portfolios. Student portfolios would help the learners trace their progress over the years and serve as guidelines for future course of action. It serves as a creative representation of an individual’s professional journey.

Mentoring is another process by which learners receive inputs to track their progress and obtain developmental feedback. Hence teacher education would need to emphasize on mentoring among the future teachers so that they use it as a

developmental assessment strategy. Mentoring practices in teacher education institutions would not only enlighten student teachers about themselves, but also empower them to use such processes in their future career.

Personal Benchmarking needs to be emphasized among young learners in order to allow them to set realistic goals for themselves and also form clear perspectives about themselves. It would help the young learners to evaluate and assess themselves and chart their own life. However it would be possible only if future teachers are well-versed in the same. Hence the onus is on teacher education to include such progressive and developmental assessment processes in its curriculum.

Climate in Teacher Education Institutes

Teacher education should work towards building a **climate of scientific inquiry, research and co-operative spirit** in the classrooms, where teacher educators and student teachers are both inquirers and knowledge constructors. ‘Each classroom is a laboratory, each teacher a member of the scientific community’ (Stenhouse, 1975 cited in Day C., 2003) and so it should be in teacher education too. Knowledge workers need an emotionally warm human resource development climate, which fosters creative innovations, performance and lasting relationships characterized by human touch of joy, care, trust, reward, team spirit and collaboration. This climate, which in most of the teacher education institutes was not found, (Nagpal, 2000) is essential not only for teacher educators but also for student teachers. An atmosphere of research and experimentation should pervade the Institution, so that future teachers also embark on research pursuits that would add to the professional content of teaching.

Instructional strategies that are based on co-operation, collaboration, knowledge management and problem solving, serve to provide this kind of an enriched learning experience and climate for student teachers. Collaborative strategies in teacher education enlighten the student teachers about the importance of a warm human resource development climate and they would in turn strive to establish this in their future work environments. Such a climate would essentially dissolve the barrier between the teacher and the taught and this would inspire the student teachers to carry forward this attitude to their future professional set-up.

Skills of Teacher educators

In order that future teachers possess the requisite skills to prepare citizens who are globally and locally competent, teacher education institutions would need to develop such a curriculum that would enable the same. What needs to be ensured also that teacher educators themselves possess the competence they expect from the future teachers. Theoretical knowledge would only guarantee information, but that alone would not suffice to develop the kind of teachers that are needed in the changing national and international scenario. Teacher educators would have to teach through their own example. They would first need to envisage the product design (the kind of teachers needed) and then plan the preparation process.

Teacher Education Institutes also should work towards **networking** in order to keep themselves updated on the needs

of the society (local and global). Networking with Schools and Professional Institutions would ensure focus in teacher education practices and make it more relevant to the specific needs of the different levels of education. Networking would also serve to broaden perspectives and help to keep a reality check on the processes of teacher education.

IV. CONCLUSION

The real capital of this knowledge society will be its knowledge components. Education in this respect has the most crucial role to play in the country's progression to a knowledge society. It is therefore necessary to create an entire generation of teachers who would practice and encourage the thinking and researching mode of teaching. Teacher Education should model the approaches to Instruction and assessment that they would want the future teachers to adopt. Teacher Education should recognize its national responsibility in fulfilling the vision of building a knowledge society. Our former president Dr A P J Abdul Kalam emphasized –“Our education system should realign itself at the earliest to meet the needs of the present day challenges and be fully geared to participate in the societal transformation through innovation, which is the key to competitiveness. It should also develop a global outlook.”

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