

Empowering Teacher Educators

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In this article I will share my experiences¹ of engaging with teacher educators working in the preservice elementary teacher education sector (that awards the Diploma in education, D.El.Ed). The context was the curriculum revision of the D.El.Ed programme taken up by SCERT, Karnataka in 2012-13. The article problematises the preparation and practice of teacher educators.

Teacher education is currently in a state of flux in our country. Expectations from teachers are rising across board while equity issues remain unresolved and exacerbated across a range of schools. Systemic changes in teacher education are being initiated in the light of National Curriculum Framework 2005, the RtE Act 2009 and the Justice Verma Committee Report 2012. Teacher education programmes across the country are being concomitantly revamped to ensure teachers can meet the cognitive demands of revised school curricula and develop the necessary depositions and skills to cater to inclusive classrooms that the new legislation mandates. Teacher educators form the key in implementing such programmes.

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009) provides the guidelines for curricular revisions of teacher education programmes, both in the preservice and inservice sectors. It stipulates reflective practice as the central tenet of teacher education. Reflective practice calls for a critical stance towards 'received' knowledge and to hold one's knowledge and practice as hypotheses to be constantly tested (Socket, 2008). Currently teacher educators are not equipped to do so. They tend to treat knowledge as 'given' and view practice as a static set of 'methods', delivered predominantly through lectures (Mythili, 2011). This is primarily because teacher educators are not prepared at the beginning of their career with the necessary knowledge, skills or dispositions to function as scholars capable of critiquing existing canons of knowledge. The NCFTE also points out that the "weakest aspect, perhaps, of teacher education is the absence of professional preparation of teacher educators" (NCTE, 2009; p. 15). The professional qualification mandated for teacher educators is

M.Ed. Hitherto the programme lacked vibrancy and has failed to equip teacher educators adequately to cater to the demands of their profession (NCTE, 2009). Opportunities for subsequent professional development for generating a robust knowledge base are also very limited for teacher educators (ibid). In a study² conducted in Karnataka a majority of teacher educators in elementary teacher education institutes reported not to have attended any in-service programme (Mythili, 2011).

So when the Government of Karnataka initiated curriculum revision of the D.Ed programme in 2012, the Department of State Education Research and Training (DSERT) initiated a slew of measures to empower teacher educators. Apart from consulting some of them on the curriculum revision process, curriculum support materials in the form of handbook and manuals were published to help transact the revised curriculum, along with a series of video recordings by concerned domain experts. Orientation programmes, both face to face and through teleconferences were conducted.

Observation of over a hundred classrooms of elementary teacher education institutes had indicated that lecture was the only mode of transaction used (Mythili, 2011). To help teacher educators move beyond the telling and to model the practices that an elementary school teacher is expected to adopt, a teacher educators' handbook was prepared by the members of the curriculum drafting committee³. For every course, a range of suggested cognitive tasks and learning experiences were mapped against each unit, along with possible resources and assessment strategies. Teacher educators were encouraged to use a range of suitable resources to overcome the dependence on a single 'textbook'. Both to ensure vibrancy in classroom transaction and enable assessment of processes, the revised curriculum allotted 40% to internal assessment. A range of tools, techniques and tasks for assessment were suggested in the handbook. A manual on assessment was subsequently prepared when teacher educators expressed apprehensions about maintaining quality in internal assessment across institutes.

A 10-day orientation programme in cascade mode was planned in two phases. Each DIET selected five teacher educators from the district as master resource persons. Nearly 150 of them attended the orientation programme. They in turn oriented the 4000 plus teacher educators across the state, in their respective districts. Since the teacher educators were not conversant with the current discourses and policies on education in the country, the first phase of five days was meant to give an overview of NCF 2005, NCFTE 2009 and RtE 2009. The second phase focussed on communicating the rationale and expectations of the D.Ed programme and the broad principles of each course in the revised curriculum. Compounding the transmission loss that is inherent in the cascade mode, there was loss of continuity as some of the participants especially the DIET faculty, could not attend both phases due to other work commitments. Also the large numbers precluded deeper engagement through discussions and dialogues. To offset this to some extent, a series of quarterly teleconferences between the curriculum drafting team and teacher educators across Karnataka were held in 2013-14, the first year when the revised curriculum was implemented.

While we are yet to make the transition from telling to modelling and guiding practice, even these are insufficient for teacher education. In order to be a truly reflective practice and ensure inclusion, teacher education must emerge as a site of inquiry to question, probe, critique and go beyond the technical (Loughran, 2014). Teacher educators must be able to develop 'adaptive expertise' among their student teachers if they are to emerge as dynamic teachers who can work under conditions of uncertainty and rapid changes, and most importantly develop capabilities for socially inclusive practices and narrow the increasing achievement gaps within and across a wide range of schools. For this to happen, teacher educators must take up the onus of engaging with current conceptions and practices in education in more nuanced and deeper ways. They must develop a vision for their own professional development and emerge as drivers of reforms rather than 'objects of reform', as Poonam Batra (2014) cautions in the case of teachers.

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Simultaneously the regulatory system has to be imaginative and far sighted in broad basing entry level stipulations, as suggested in the NCFTE 2009, so as to encourage interested people from diverse backgrounds to take up teacher education as a profession, to foster much needed vibrancy. For meaningful implementation of the revised M.Ed curriculum (NCTE, 2014) current University Departments and colleges of education offering the programme have to be adequately equipped with a range of resources and the faculty given intensive orientation. Robust structures and designs for the ongoing professional development of teacher educators need to be put in place, by the central and state governments.

Notes

1. My gratitude to officials at DSERT and to the team that drafted the curriculum and prepared the associated materials, particularly Prof. CG Venkatesha Murthy, RIE Mysore who headed the curriculum implementation team.
2. The study was commissioned to RVEC by the Karnataka Knowledge Commission in 2010. A stratified random sample of 108 TEIs (which comprised of 10% of the existing colleges at that time) across Karnataka was studied.
3. While co-opting with practitioners and domain experts, the conveners of most courses were involved in the entire process of writing position papers, drafting the respective course curriculum, preparing teacher educators' handbook and sourcebook for student teachers as well as in setting the first set of question papers for the final examination conducted by the KSEEB.

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