

## From Policy to Practice: A Story from Uttarakhand

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The discourse around the dwindling state of our Public Education System is endless and is heard everywhere irrespective of the depth of the analysis. The state of education affects everyone, consequently, everyone seems to have an opinion about it. Our judgements are often superficial and we miss taking into account the complexity of our Public Education System – right from the classroom to the educational policies.

At one end of the spectrum is the classroom, which is an astoundingly heterogenous space with each student bringing to it hers or his own diversity in the form of social and economic background, emotional and intellectual temperament, response to learning, and a variety of interests, abilities and limitations. If we consider the education system of the country, the complexity in terms of creating and administering a huge system of Secretariats, Directorates, Board of Examinations at the state and central levels, the constitution of the basic functional structures at the district and sub-district levels; and the ground-level engagement with local self-governments, parents, teacher communities and school management – is colossal. From the Parliament to the parent, everyone has a stake in the Public Education System at some level. The challenges of this vast system, with such complexity and scale, are often overlooked when we talk of educational reforms.

As a result of the overall negative narrative around our Public Education System, at a time when we have embraced Education for All (EFA), an international initiative to bring the benefits of education to ‘every citizen in every society’ and have invited millions of kids from communities which are entering the school premises for the first time in history, the adverse atmosphere is demotivating for teachers and other education functionaries. In our preoccupation with what is lacking, we fail to notice the extraordinary efforts and achievements of our educational system which has made all honest efforts to sustain policies like making education a fundamental right for all children in the age group of 6-14 years. At the time

this was adopted, the educational system was not completely prepared, but all efforts were made to sustain this initiative. This article attempts to counter the negative discussion on the state of education in our country by showcasing a significant effort that was undertaken in Uttarakhand during the years 2008-2010. It is worth remembering that this is just one such effort. There are many more in almost all parts of the country that have gone unnoticed and unrecognised.

### **The need for revamping teacher training**

This is an account of the efforts made by the state of Uttarakhand towards long-term improvement of school education through the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). To understand this, we need to understand the constitution of the Public Education System at the state level.

There is the SCERT at the helm, which carries out the R&D and provides academic resource support to the State Education Department in its efforts to improve the quality of school education. Then there are the Secretariat and the Directorate for policies and processes, respectively. In addition, there are some units and departments for projects that catalyse the efforts. It is imperative for all these entities to collaborate closely, but, more often than not, they seem to be working in isolation. Therefore, there is a fundamental need for commitment at the level of the polity and the bureaucracy to bring these together towards a synergised effort.

This kind of a desired scenario was achieved to a great extent in Uttarakhand in the years 2008-2010. Dr. Rakesh Kumar, the then Secretary of School Education, came up with strategies to revamp the system. He realised that the teacher plays the role of the harbinger of quality education in the formal school setup. In the Indian context, fingers have always been pointed at the inadequate and poor teacher education. The provisions for teacher education and in-service programs for continuing professional development of teachers lack effective execution that can come only from the bureaucracy,

because that is how our systems run. Dr Rakesh Kumar was able to identify this and realised that, if he fixes the issue of 'teacher preparation', he will move one step ahead to quality education in schools.

The state of Uttarakhand, which was formed in the year 2000, inherited the 'Pre-Service Teacher of Elementary Education' of Uttar Pradesh, which it had been a part of until then. There was a basic course of teacher preparation specifically for elementary school teachers in the country, which is now uniformly named as the Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.). The introduction of the National Curriculum Framework, (NCF) 2005 and the subsequent discourses to revamp teacher education to align with it, which later culminated in the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2009, was bound to make an impact on the Pre-Service Teacher Education of the state. At this juncture, Dr. Rakesh Kumar's efforts that attempted to revamp the Basic Training Certificate (BTC) course were initiated. The SCERT took on the leadership in this because it too could sense the importance of revamping the teacher-training curriculum. The Azim Premji Foundation (hereinafter, the Foundation) was given the mandate of facilitating this effort.

Since the NCFTE 2009 had not been enforced by then, the premise for change in the curriculum was based on the following:

A good teacher has:

- Knowledge and understanding of the subject
- Pedagogic (teaching) skills specific to the subject
- Ability to access/develop teaching-learning resources
- Sensitivity to and respect for learners
- Vision and understanding of the society, education and children

Changes that were deemed crucial were that

- New teachers enter the profession with vision, competence and motivation that is conducive to achieving the aims of education
- Practicing teachers find meaning in professional development programmes
- There is a paradigm shift in teacher preparation, development and support

### **A different approach to teacher training**

How these were brought into practice is a great story.

A core team of about 30 resource persons

was selected from the state for this task. The team consisted of resource persons with varied experience, from teachers to senior education functionaries. This group brainstormed on how to revamp and revitalise the teacher education course. There was openness to look for ideas around and the Foundation facilitated the orientation of the group by resource persons from premier organisations such as Eklavya, Digantar and Vidya Bhawan. The group also kept a close eye on the efforts being undertaken by the newly created state of Chhattisgarh in terms of revamping its D.El. Ed. curriculum.

The core group reviewed the earlier curriculum, suggested and made changes to align it with the NCF 2005. There were intense debates and discussions as some of the members found value in the erstwhile BTC curriculum of Uttar Pradesh and suggested amendment to it while there was one section of people who were for a complete revamping of the entire curriculum in alignment with the NCF 2005. The debates and discussions finally turned up in favour of the latter group. The reason for this could be the then leadership of the SCERT which was headed by the Additional Director, NNP Pandey, who was a person of academic rigour and had the vision required for a curriculum focused towards the desired objectives. All aspects of the teacher training curriculum were taken into account. A close coordination was also forged with the Uttarakhand Examination Board so that it too could align with the refurbished curriculum.

It took about a year for the curriculum to be developed. Different groups took on the tasks in different areas – from the perspective of education, to the nature of the subjects. There was a decision to not include lectures. A conscious decision was also made in favour of not having textbooks. Therefore, this was a different approach towards classroom practice.

### **From curriculum to practice**

Once the curriculum was ready, there was need to create enabling conditions in the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) in terms of infrastructure and human resources so that the curriculum could be delivered in a suitable manner. A survey of the DIETs to evaluate the available infrastructure and human resources was carried out. There were ten DIETs and three District Resource Centres (DRCs, also called, 'mini DIETs') in the state at that time and it was found that each was short of infrastructure and human resources. An analysis

was done to find out if there were any unutilised funds available with the DIETs that could be used to resolve the infrastructure issues. The Foundation played a crucial role in this analysis. The Directorate was entrusted with the task of making available the desired human resource in the institutions. Within a short span of time, all the institutions acquired reasonably better infrastructure as well as human resources. The infrastructure included the latest technologies, such as broadband connection and LCD projectors. A list of books was suggested for the libraries and the Foundation came forward to make some of these books available at all the DIETs and the DRCs to facilitate a smooth transition to the changed curriculum.

Since there was a paradigm shift in the curriculum as well as the pedagogy, there was need to orient the heads and faculty of the institutions. The heads of institutions were given orientation regarding the administrative and academic tasks required to fulfil these needs. This was broadly based on the following categories:

- Management and planning
- Coordination with faculty
- Supervision of curriculum transaction
- Weekly in-house meetings
- Feedback to the SCERT – administrative and academic
- Resource support
- Liaison work
- Evaluation of training

In addition, there was the newly recruited faculty which had earlier mainly worked in secondary education and did not have the experience of teaching in the Pre-Service Teacher Education. So the training had to be rigorous and with constant follow-up of the curriculum transaction.

Interestingly, the leadership in the SCERT had changed at the time but the new Additional Director, N C Kabadwal, shared the vision of his predecessor, NNP Pandey, and led the efforts that were already in progress, towards the desired direction. He was instrumental in the smooth conduct of the orientation programs and was physically present to facilitate most of these sessions. From every DIET in a region, a core group from the faculty was rigorously oriented for a week and then they were entrusted with the task of passing on this orientation to the rest of the DIET faculty at their institution.

Since the entire process was revolutionary to some extent, attempts were made to keep the excitement

alive for this change. A festive environment was created at the DIETs in such a way that the aspirants for the BTC course could feel the excitement of joining the new course. There were banners welcoming aspirants and overall the students were excited to attend the course.

There was also meticulous planning to review the transaction of this revamped curriculum across DIETs and DRCs. A team, consisting of one member from the SCERT and one from the Foundation, visited the DIETs and the DRCs. This team observed classrooms and held meetings with the faculty and the student-trainees. In later courses all these teams sat together at the state level and shared their experiences regarding different aspects ranging from the transaction of the curriculum to the availability of resources in these institutions. This also helped in highlighting and sharing the good practices on the curriculum transaction in various locations.

There were all kind of reactions from different stakeholders. The teachers initially found it difficult to adapt to the change in curriculum and pedagogy. Constant support and reading material was made available to them by connecting all the institutions and the key people by email. The website of SCERT, Chhattisgarh was also handy as it had material relevant to the revamped D.El.Ed. curriculum. Some innovative practices also emerged during this transition, noteworthy among these being the use of external resource persons, resource mobilisation within institutions and using the expertise of student-trainees.

It also became obvious that the faculty required constant support and hence the idea of Regional Resource Groups (RRGs) emerged. Subject-wise RRGs comprising subject-matter experts from the DIETs, the SCERT and the Foundation were formed. The RRGs from both regions of Uttarakhand – Kumaon and Garhwal- met at their respective locations at the end of each semester to review the semester and to plan for the next. This idea worked well in terms of the sharing of good practices in different locations. Since the Uttarakhand Examination Board had been engaged during the curriculum development, reforms in assessment were also done on a similar pattern -- less emphasis on information and rote learning and more on the understanding and application of the curriculum.

#### **An assessment of the curriculum**

The change in the curriculum had also created some worries and uncertainties in the minds of

the students regarding the examinations, but after they appeared in the first semester exams and were exposed to the revamped assessment practices, they found it interesting too. A study on this was conducted by the Foundation in 2011-12. The objective was to understand the status of the changed curriculum and to analyse the experiences of the concerned educational stakeholders. The report found the revamped curriculum in alignment with the NCF 2005 and the NCFTE 2009. The key inferences by the stakeholders were:

- The student-trainees, especially the Shiksha-Mitras (Para-Teachers), specifically highlighted their learning in understanding child psychology. But they pointed out that there were no discussions on the teaching-learning processes for Children With Special Needs (CWSN), Multi-Grade, Multi-Level (MGML) and also subjects like, Moral Education and Sanskrit. In Mathematics, the level of content given in the curriculum was much higher than was required for primary classes.
- All the principals, the in-charges of DIETs and DRCs were quite satisfied with the curriculum. Some of them found the curriculum very effective as it was practical rather than theoretical, as opposed to the previous (the six-month special BTC) curriculum. They liked that the focus of the new curriculum was on the qualities of a good teacher, how a teacher should teach in school, how to make teaching interesting and how to interact with children. The DIET faculty also liked the semester-wise structure of the curriculum.
- The curriculum - development team had aimed at ensuring that the curriculum focused more on interactive processes rather than on the content. Introducing 'Nature of Subject' concept (a shift from dealing primarily with content) in the curriculum was very advantageous. It helped student-trainees understand their subjects better.
- The curriculum development team also realised that the course was good from the philosophical

point of view, but it was not practical, mainly because it did not take into account the actual situation. Another problem was that the course and activities could not be carried out in totality because of the large number of students.

- The DIET faculty felt that the main quality of the curriculum was the freedom of the student-trainees to express their thoughts, take part in group discussions and presentations and also to listen to others.

However, at the institutional level, the report is not very encouraging. There were still challenges in terms of infrastructure and human resources. Secondly, frequent change in leadership of these teacher education institutions affects a steady pace of transformation. The libraries of the teacher education institutions were inadequate to meet the demand. The disinclination of the DIET faculty members was also a challenge because of their limited exposure to the changed curriculum in the initial phase. Some aspects of the curriculum like internship could not be implemented in totality. The allocation of the number of student-trainees per DIET was exceedingly high, which was one of the basic reason for scarcity of resources.

As per the report, the public-private partnership played a crucial role in the implementation of the course. This facilitated on-site support, meetings of the RRGs to understand the challenges of the faculty and suitably address the issues. Making special provisions for the 'visioning' of all DIETs faculty members, providing content to each institution were some of the key points where the Foundation were able to ensure timely support to the DIETs.

Overall, it was a great effort on the part of the government to ensure that synergy among all departments and stakeholders was established and the revamped curriculum is established in the state now. The story of Uttarakhand clearly reflects that sincere involvement and commitment from the bureaucracy can lead to significant change in the system and, when the underlying causes are suitably dealt with, the change is sustainable.

#### References:

- 1 The Conceptualization and Implementation of Pre-Service Teacher Education Curriculum (BTC), 2010-12. Uttarakhand.

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