Integrated Model of Teacher Preparation: An Alternate Representation

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If, education is a difficult process to model, more so is teacher education. Multiple objectives of teacher education, interdependencies among schools, teacher-education institutions and universities, regional disparities in demand and availability for teachers across the country, how to ensure quality and effectiveness of the system by conceptualizing a system of feedback through measurement as well as complex institutional, political and organizational arrangements all make proposing a conceptual framework for teacher education a daunting proposition. By conceptual framework, this paper means a cluster of ideas about the goals of teacher preparation and the means for achieving them. It is not tied to particular programmatic structures. The scope of this discussion can be single component or an entire professional sequence, and can be applied to elementary as well as secondary programmes and even education of teacher educators. The model presented here cannot be an exhaustive one nor does it have any semblance of a fully-fledged model. It does not espouse a uniform or explicit position or well-developed practice. It only summarizes what author conceives, at present, for organization of teacher education programmes, especially content and relations among teacher education programme components. Moreover, the descriptions reflect the espoused rather than the enacted practices. Rather, it is an attempt to organize and present some thoughts that emerge in author's mind, now and then, with the participants of this congregation of a national level, so that the ideas become clearer.

Many suggestions here in evidently are not original to this paper. Author has adopted ideas and propositions from Unesco (1990); Zeichner (2002); Valencia, Martin, Place and Grossman (2009); Feinman-Nemser (1990); Darling-Hammond (2006); Lynn, and Smith-Maddox (2007); Dangel and Guyton (2004), Van Huizen, Van Oers, and Wubbels 2005); and, Markey (2004).

Requirements of future teacher education

The framework of teacher education that is presented below, for the most part agreeing to the constructivist perspective of education and teacher education is formulated bearing in mind that the new model needs to cater to remedy the following areas of weaknesses of present teacher education.

1. Teacher education should assist novice teachers to deal with uncertainties in their practice, especially tensions between fitting in and experimenting

2. Desirably, teacher education programmes need be more coherent than at present with more school experience and more academic content courses

3. Emerging system of teacher education must possess organizations and practices to do away with hierarchical triads that coexist during student teaching creating impediments in the free development of future teachers

4. Teacher education for the future, that one can foresee, must be based on constructivist principles that integrates relevant, non-mutually exclusive views in a flexible way

While elaborating upon the above requirements, this paper assumes the following.

1. All teacher-education institutions can be required to possess their own demonstration or experimental school, as recommended by many of commissions and committees on education reforms.

2. Teacher education will cease to be "cash cow" in universities and educational organizations to fund other activities; and, that required resources will be generated, allocated and utilized by all concerned for building up a viable and efficient system of teacher education across the country.

3. Schools of education will resist pressures to water down teacher-preparation, which ultimately undermines the preparation of entering teachers, the reputation of schools of education, and the strength of the profession.

Tensions between fitting in and experimenting

Many a teacher educators see conflicting demands of teacher education, viz., 1) preparing teachers for meeting professional competencies and commitments for the current requirements in schools; and 2) preparing teachers for a better school and system of education than that exist today. The contemporary requirements of a highly hierarchical system of school education with their varied syllabi and student background, it must be accepted, are not uniform; and hence, teacher education that exists today cannot prepare teacher for even today, forget the future aspiration of the system. However, if one takes a rational approach it is clear that no open and democratic system of education can remain the same and it will continually evolve along with the society, and hence, teacher education that truly requires the future teacher to be prepared for the 'present' is teacher education that prepare for future and emerging ideas and practices.

More school experience and more academic content

There is new awakening that nations across the globe, including India, have allowed the very real pressures of finance, staffing, and political expediency to reduce the quality of education and that if we drop standards it will take a generation or more to lift our beads up again. Increasingly, all concerned including regulatory bodies like National Council for Teacher Education, are awakening to the fact that without well-prepared teachers, it is not really possible to raise the standard of education. This is true of primary, secondary and tertiary teacher education. There is near global consensus that the case of primary teacher education and secondary teacher education needs urgent attention, as it is where children develop their basic attitudes and approaches to learning and that when the child's first teacher is poorly trained and poorly motivated, the very foundations on which all subsequent learning is built will be unsound. And, researches indicate that there is positive correlation between length of preparation and performance at work.

A two-year teacher education programme at primary level and one-year programme at secondary level is insufficient to adequately prepare teachers to cope with the full range of professional work and responsibilities demanded of them. The extension of the training period is also necessitated by educational reforms taking place, such as the introduction of new subjects in the school curriculum. Many educators support this view. Teacher educators increasingly realize, and the system of education increasingly learn from the failure of new policy initiatives to improve the quality of education at all levels, that how difficult it is to change the often tacit beliefs, understandings, and worldviews that future teachers bring to teacher education programmes. In some cases, teacher educators and researchers have learned that prospective teachers transform the messages given in their teacher programmes to fit their preconceptions.

Hierarchical triads coexist during student teaching

There is no existent organizational structure for teacher education to support fundamentally needed cooperation among teacher educators, mentor teachers at schools, and the student teachers. Consequently, there is no genuine relation between the goals of teacher education programmes imparted theoretically at teacher education institution and the practical experiences that student teachers derive during student teaching at school. Fissure between the change agenda of teacher education and the survival goal of pre-service teachers to fit into the day-to-day challenges raised by the real school and classroom requirements depicted and

presented to them by mentoring teachers at schools, is real. Researchers on teacher education are becoming growingly conscious of the shifting hierarchical triads of relationships that coexist during student teaching. These triads are teacher-educator and student-teacher, student-teacher and mentor, student-teacher and students. These often leave student teachers in the role of mediating these relationships that often results in letting down the intended professional development for pre-service teachers.

Integrating constructivist principles into teacher education

Constructivism if at all incorporated in teacher education in India, and for that matter across the nations, seems to be heading toward a jumble of conflicting ideas rather than an approach that integrates relevant, non-mutually exclusive views in a flexible way. Teacher education system is yet to respond effectively to the missing aspects of the learning-teaching process not considered by most constructivists.

Organization of students into cohort enquiring groups

It must be accepted that a comprehensive teacher education application of constructivism is still evolving. For example, teacher educators still grope the dark when they come to explain and demonstrate their student teachers on questions like how to include all students' needs in the planning of their teaching, what is the clearest way to represent a concept, what makes learning in a content area easy or hard, how to master new content and pedagogy and integrate them into practice, how to align pedagogy with instructional policies, and, how to create real opportunities for all students to master demanding learning goals. While preparing student teachers for practice teaching, one need to understand that these issues may not be theoretically and finally solvable at present, but student teachers are to face them in classroom in immediate future. Organization of students into cohort groups to discuss these problems on and off the school needs be encouraged and built into teacher preparation.

What is to be the content of teacher education?

Teacher education at present tends to ignore the question of what teachers need to know about their subjects to teach the subject effectively. It must be accepted that, though the exact procedures and techniques vary across paradigms, teaching is concerned with transmitting knowledge and developing understanding among students. Teacher's role as intellectual leader, scholar and subject matter specialist cannot be wished away. Hence teacher education of all levels require to stress the importance of teachers' academic preparation, subject matter

knowledge, and of liberal learning among future teachers, utilizing images of good teaching of all hues, even those with expository instruction and Socratic inquiry. Requisite knowledge is not likely to emerge from academic study alone. Subject matter or content knowledge consists of knowledge of the facts, concepts, and procedures that define a given field and an understanding of how these pieces fit together. It also includes knowledge about knowledge--where it comes from, how it grows, and of how truth is established in different fields. In addition, teachers need a special blend of content and pedagogy that is labeled by experts as "pedagogical content knowledge". Hence, teacher education of any stage must focus on broad understanding of the disciplinary roots of school subjects at the given level, knowledge about how pupils learn in different subject areas, and knowledge of effective teaching strategies that promote conceptual understanding.

In addition to the content knowledge, as is being emphasized today, a teacher requires professional knowledge to the tasks of teaching. This has to be built around a set of teacher behaviors and strategies associated with student achievement. Procedural knowledge of how to achieve specified objectives, solve familiar problems, and accomplish routine tasks must always be in the repertoire of all teachers. Student teachers to really understand these practices, they need opportunities to learn about the theory or rationale behind a given strategy or procedure and a chance to see a demonstration followed up by practice to receive feedback on their performance. Through continued and cyclical practice and feedback, student-teachers require developing the insight to invent temporary responses in the face of unsolvable problems in classrooms.

A methodological shift from teaching to learning

Teacher education systems have to place student-teachers at the center of educational process. If future teachers are to be really constructivist and original, learning to teach has to be understood as a process of learning to understand, develop, and use oneself effectively. Prospective teachers should experience the same independence in their teacher preparation, as the education system expect as they should be latter as developed teachers in schools. The prominent goal of teacher education must be teacher's own development. For this teacher education classrooms require to reflect upon student teachers' needs, interests and hopes. This will facilitate in every student teacher the psychological shift from the partly dependent role of student to the fully responsible role of teacher, developing a personal psychology and

discovering one's own unique style of teaching. This requires that apart from being role models and experts in content and pedagogy, teacher-educators to function as counselors, helping prospective teachers explore academic, contextual and personal problems.

If future teachers are to enable students' learning in their classrooms, teacher preparation has to provide them with an understanding of the principles of human development, including the attributes of hierarchically ordered, developmental stages; the ways to align these stages with the core content areas of the curriculum; and help them translate developmental principles into pedagogical decisions, judgment, and practices in school settings. This requires a spiral of learning, reflecting and re-learning that leads student-teachers to higher levels of understanding about their area. To this end, many teacher education system require weekly group conferences where student-teachers can learn from their peers through group reflection and problem solving, informal exchange with peers, and the development of a personal style of teaching not fully bound within a rigid system of separate theory and practice sessions and lecture, seminar and workshops conducted to merely providing a score for certification.

Required shift in the environment of teacher education institutions

Those with social orientation to education, across the national boundaries have argued that if we want schools that are not instrumental in preserving social inequities and instead want schools that combines a progressive social vision having teachers with radical critique of schooling itself, teacher education must help in creating a learning community that promotes democratic values and practices, teachers who participate in curriculum development and policymaking, teachers who work to improve school conditions and educational opportunities through community involvement and political activity. In order to equip future teachers to develop curricula around the traditions, histories, and forms of knowledge often ignored in school, student teachers themselves have to compile oral histories of the communities in which they teach and analyze the role of different community agencies. Hence, in addition to content learning and practice teaching through general education, professional preparation and laboratory experiences, teacher education must incorporate ethnographic studies, journal writing, and curriculum analysis and development. The shift from learning to teaching and vice versa has to be gradual and not abrupt.

These interpersonal transactions create patterns of meanings, values, and cognitive structures, continuing development and renewal of the individual and social practice and help to

avoid practice-shock experienced by beginning teachers. This require teacher education to function in a context of apprenticeship and continuing professional development where valid ideal forms of teaching have to be critically evaluated, appropriated, and personalized. Reflection and inquiry focus student-teachers on the continuing harmonization of action and meaning. This will help future teachers to grasp that meanings of education and teaching are not self-evident, and that meanings of education and teaching are subject to contrasting and changing views. This ensures that meanings of educational practice are integrated into the personality through a process involving valuation and choice, leading to 'strong' socialization experiences in professional education instead of the so called 'strategic compliance', a socialization under pressure which enforce mere outward behavior.

Evaluation and ensuring quality in teacher education

The commonly reported remedies for improving teacher education are entrance examinations, exit examinations, national standards, a national teacher examination, and, recently, a trend in some places to wholly eliminate a teacher education courses or reduce the emphasize there on. The most widely reported method of teacher assessment in teacher education is observation where teachers are observed and rated on their lesson designs and teaching techniques. There is lack of agreement by teacher education colleges and other professionals on what constitutes good practices. There is wide acceptance on the observation that teacher evaluations tended to be inflated, with ratings tended to skew toward the high side; that there is little direct improvement in classroom instruction in parallel with changes in grading of student–teachers, and that nearly all methods are subjective. Observations do not take teaching differences into account; instead, observers tend to look for the same practices from different subject teachers. Other methods of evaluation available for teacher-education system include teacher portfolios, student evaluations, value-added assessment, and peer evaluations. Teacher education needs to strengthen its evaluation practices through a mixed approach that include observations and portfolios, insisting on providing documentary evidence for the teacher rating wherever possible. Teacher education for future has to ponder how student achievement and test data be used in student-teacher evaluation, and how to account for variations in school factors. Teachers, and hence student teachers needs to be evaluated based on how effectively a teacher or school increases what students know, the "value-added" by the teacher to student learning by taking into account gain scores instead of raw scores in measuring teacher effect.

Fundamentally, teacher education system has to approve that the only present, fair, objective, and dependable method of evaluating teacher effectiveness is based on scores and the measurement of achievement gain shown by students during the period during which the teacher was responsible for instruction (Bock, Wolfe, & Fisher, 1996, p. 69).

Conclusion

Teacher education of future needs to be long drawn and allowing student-teachers to be re-oriented appropriately to the new profession. Teacher education must help among them create awareness of pre-conceptions about knowledge, society, education and teaching-learning process. Teacher education instead of being linear must be a learning process proceeding in cycles. There must be ample opportunities for learning through inter and intra institutional and personal exchange and co-operation of ideas. Teacher education must encourage future teachers to make informed choices about the content, methods, values and practices. The above discussion in no way has set aside the other aspects and issues of education and their implications for teacher education such as multi-grade teaching, children's language and cultural backgrounds, building teacher attitudes for addressing plurality and diversity in the classroom, education for sustainable development. Special issues that emerge in relation to education of girls, scheduled caste and tribal children have also to be accounted for. It is a further challenge to address such issues in teacher education programmes.

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