

**STRATEGIES TO CLOSE GAPS BETWEEN TEACHER TRAINING AND
SCHOOL EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

The expectations of the school system from a teacher change from time to time, responding to the broader social, economic and political changes taking place in the society. During recent years, the epistemology of learning has undergone a major change; i.e. learning does not involve discovering the reality, but constructing the reality. Thus a teacher needs to be prepared in relation to the needs and demands arising in the school context, to engage with questions of school knowledge, the learner and the learning process. But the present teacher education program adopted by various universities appears to be inadequate to meet the challenges of diverse Indian socio-cultural contexts and the paradigm shift envisaged in the NCF 2005. The programme does not address the needs of contemporary Indian schools and also not prepares teachers for present day inclusive schools. Teacher education should be liberal, humanistic and responsive to the demands of inclusive education. In the light of change in the approach of learning and expectations of stakeholders of school system the whole pedagogical approach of teacher education needs to be reoriented. In this paper, authors deliberated upon changes that are required to bridge the gap between expectations of stakeholders from the teachers and teacher training. Strategies have been proposed to bridge this gap.

Introduction

The expectations of the school system from a teacher change from time to time, responding to the broader social, economic and political changes taking place in the society. During recent years, the epistemology of learning has undergone a major change; i.e. learning does not involve discovering the reality, but constructing the reality. Knowledge and cognitions are to be constructed and affects are to be felt. Thus, learning is no more passive absorption of knowledge and ideas, but the construction of ideas developed on one's personal experiences. Learning is also perceived as an integral part of learner's physical, social, and cultural contexts. This concept

has come to be known as situated cognition and is the guiding principle of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2005) developed by NCERT. It is envisaged that a teacher needs to be prepared in relation to the needs and demands arising in the school context, to engage with questions of school knowledge, the learner and the learning process.

In the light of change in the approach of learning and expectations of stakeholders of school system the whole pedagogical approach of teacher education needs to be reoriented. The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2010) tries to ensure that teacher education courses align with the epistemological shift as envisaged in the NCF (2005) and develop teachers as facilitators of learning. It also emphasized that some other changing school contexts such as Right to Education Act (RTE 2009), issue of academic burden of students, and universalization of secondary education etc have great implication for teacher education. NCFTE (2010) included the contexts and concerns that empower teacher trainees in learning to teach. For this, it is recommended that curriculum of teacher education should be liberal, humanistic and responsive to the demands of inclusive education. The major concerns addressed by this framework include inclusive education, ensuring equitable and sustainable development, utilizing community knowledge in education, and integration of ICT and e-learning in the curriculum of teacher education which are in tune with the thrust of NCF 2005 and the needs of contemporary Indian society.

Ideally, any reform in educational system should ideally be accompanied by reforms in teacher preparation courses also. Thus, developments and changes at both the levels mutually reinforce the concerns necessary for the quality improvement of entire system of education. Consequently, with change in the curriculum framework for school education needs subsequent efforts to adjust the teacher preparation curricula accordingly. But due to commercialization of B.Ed. colleges, the teacher education became weak both in theory and practice (NCFTE 2010). The education colleges have become stagnant in terms of their growth as the approach used by these is highly traditional which did not change over the decades. The recommendations to prepare humanistic and reflective teachers who have the potential to develop more professional teachers and improve the quality of education seems to be absent from the agenda of money munching colleges of education. The present teacher education program adopted by various universities/colleges appears to be inadequate to meet the challenges.

Besides this, in literature many questions have been raised regarding pedagogy of teacher

education such as: insufficient field experience, not preparing them for the complexities classroom life, incongruence between the teacher education program and “real world”, less focus on ICT skills, viewing of “disciplinary knowledge” as independent of professional training in pedagogy, no place for evaluating attitude, disposition, habit and interest in teacher etc. (Tezci, 2011; Haser, 2010; Kumar, 2012; Sharma 2012). Further, it is envisaged that teacher education systems work with the conventional approach, where they follow a ritual in which the teachers are trained to adjust into the existing education system. Many other researchers noted that at all stages, teacher education institutions provide little or inadequate professional training to handle the tasks for training effective teachers. With the mushrooming of teacher education institutions over the years, the situation has become critical as the supply of teacher has not kept up with the increasing demand for faculty and institutions have compromised on the quality of training given to the prospective teachers (NCF 2005, NCFTE 2009)

Further, some reports on teacher education also mention that prescribed curriculum and textbooks are taken as ‘given’ and teachers are trained to teach the curriculum following those textbooks through making a fixed number of lesson plans; which even have a standard format and have no space of flexibility (NCERT 2005, Verma, 2012). Also these rituals have a fixed way of conducting other activities also: from morning assembly to competition of slogan writing, writing thought of the day; making charts and standard models as teaching aids (Verma, 2012).

A change has to be brought to remove the gaps in teacher education and actual school teaching. The weak relationship between present teacher education and school education can be built stronger either by bringing a change in the curriculum of teacher educators or by changing the mode of transaction adopted by teacher educators for present teacher education (Pandey, 2011). In order to achieve the intended quality of teacher education course, it is imperative to now put constant efforts on the anvil of implementation of the strategies and recommendations suggested by various researchers and the documents (NCFTE 2009 and NCERT 2016) which could bring some discernible change in the content and process of teacher education. The role expectation to produce an effective teacher should not be taken as rhetoric but as a goal to be constantly striven for, the urgency is to address the training institutes seriously to examining the issues related to the preparation of teachers as well as to prune the theory and practice of teacher education.

Strategies to bridge gap between schools’ expectations and existing teacher education

Subject knowledge

Subject knowledge is one of the most important aspects of being an effective teacher. An effective teacher is one who knows what he/she has to teach and rarely glances at a text-book during the lesson and moreover has a good grasp of the subject-matter. No matter how kind, amicable and well-meaning teacher is, he/she will not succeed unless he had a thorough knowledge of the subject he/she is teaching (Misigo, Kodero & Too, 2012; Wenlinsky, 2002).

Strategies to improve subject knowledge of the trainees

1. Firstly, the quality of entrants should be high. For this, there should be an entrance test for the candidates who wish to pursue their career in teaching. Their subjects' knowledge should be tested, for what knowledge they have gained till graduation level, as it is the general education responsible for the knowledge of the subjects before entering the B.Ed. course. Only those students who have adequate knowledge of their respective subjects should be made eligible for the course.
2. Also there should be content of the respective subjects covered in the pedagogy courses. NCFTE (2010) also emphasized that it is essential that several theoretical concepts learnt during general education in school and college be revisited and reconstructed to prepare prospective teachers in developmentally appropriate ways and with critical perspectives to present subject-content.
3. One year B.Ed. can be replaced by 4 year integrated course of graduation cum B.Ed.; where educators can simultaneously teach topics and its methodology of teaching in classrooms. Various activities which can be conducted to make a particular topic interesting and learner centered can also be taught. By this, after 4 years, a trainee will be strong in the subject as well as the methodology.

Similar suggestions were given by Verma Committee report (2012) and NCFTE 2010 report, where it discussed about the time as the critical factor in teacher preparation. It was mentioned that the duration should provide enough time and opportunity for engagement with the pedagogical activities, the learners, and the school along with rigorous theoretical study.

Pedagogic Understanding

Effective pedagogy expects a teacher to be well prepared, organized, explained and presented their lesson content well, understands the learners, encourages questions and corrects learners'

incorrect responses politely (Saafin, 2005). It is felt that prospective teachers require learning a wider repertoire of pedagogical strategies to grapple with the challenges faced by teachers in classrooms. Literature supports that there is a need of “practice turn” in teacher education. This can be done by: engaging teacher education curriculum with school education curriculum, increasing language proficiency of teacher education, linking theory courses with the practical work and ground realities, providing opportunity for teachers to examine their own basis and beliefs and reflect on their own experiences as part of classroom discourse and enquiry, reorienting from traditional behaviorist to constructivist approach (Wayne, 2007; Reid 2011; Yadav 2011; Sharma 2012).

Regarding ‘how to teach’, the trainees should be aware of the variety of pedagogical approaches, where they should be trained to understand learner’s psychology, various teaching methods, making effective and appropriate lesson plan, using variety and appropriate evaluation techniques etc.

Using array of techniques: The trainees should be educated enough to know about the range of pedagogical approaches which can be used in varied learning situations as there is no single approach which is best suited to all the learning conditions and there is no comparison amongst different approaches for better learning. Effective teachers are those who are skillful and flexible in adapting, combining and using a variety of approaches to fit their situation. It is also reported in NCFTE 2009, that teachers need to be trained in organizing learner- centered, activity based, participatory learning experiences- play, projects, discussion, dialogue, observation, visits, integrating academic learning with productive work.

Teacher trainees must be enriched with the array of the techniques that can be used while teaching in classroom. Below is the list of the techniques, a trainee should know along with their purpose as there is no single approach which is best suited to teach in all conditions. The role of an effective teacher is to combine the approaches/ use a variety of techniques that fit best in the present situation. The trainees must be aware of the purpose of each technique and the process followed for each technique, only then they will be able to use the technique in appropriate manner and for teaching appropriate topic/concept/skill. Following are certain most discussed techniques:

a. Child centered approach

The teacher trainees should be able to plan the lesson well to maximize students' interest and learning, practice good delivery skills, and use questions and discussion to reinforce the key concepts. The teaching should be such effective that it captures students' attention and sparked their curiosity/ creativity. The lesson should be illustrated with the best suited teaching aid that includes student participation of the students in best possible way.

b. Activity based teaching

The trainees must be aware of how to divide the class into small/large groups (depending on the activity to be done), which immediately multiplies the amount of student activity and participation. They should be trained how to structure groups according to ability, needs and interests of the students and conduct various activities best suited for the group activities such as group projects/ educational game/ solving a problem etc. For example, trainees should know that, for *debates and contests*, the class can be split into two groups. For *discussion and projects*, five or six students per group usually are an ideal number, but this depends on both the activity and the students.

After a presentation by the teacher or a text reading, the class can form small discussion groups to address questions chosen by the class or the teacher. One way of organizing these groups is to give each student a role in the group: discussion leader, recorder, timekeeper, reporter, and the observer. Post discussion, the class re-groups, and the reporter from each group makes a short summary of his/her group's conclusions.

Also, for different subjects, they should be able to conduct different activities. In *science classes*, groups can be asked to conduct experiments or make observations; in *language classes* groups may be asked to write and act out a skit, play a word game, or have a structured discussion. *Math* students might play number games or work out problems individually, in pairs or in small groups.

c. Role play

Role playing is a highly motivating activity because students can learn through experience and apply their learning in a relevant, yet relaxed, low-risk situation. It can help to promote student - student interaction, encourage empathy for others, and develop social skills and values.

In *language classes*, the trainees can be asked to use the role play to reinforce patterns and vocabulary, to place language in cultural contexts, and to encourage students to use the language creatively. The trainees must be trained how to prepare the class with the basic vocabulary and

patterns which the role play will require. For *sciences and mathematics*, abstract, basic concepts can be given personality, humor and life through role plays (interaction of atoms and molecules, variations in geometric forms, etc. and historical figures can bring scientific and mathematical debates to life in the classroom.

d. Games and simulations

Games can be used to reduce competition and encourage cooperation by having rotating teams or changing the game's objective. Games are frequently used for language and mathematics practice, but can be adapted for any subject.

Trainees must know how to introduce a game for introducing a new unit to capture interest or as a final experience to put learning in perspective. Games should be structured to maximize participation and learning. The trainees should be trained to look for ways to decrease competition (use of teams, rotation of members among teams, etc.) or eliminate it altogether. It is important to plan time after the game or simulation for discussion of the key concepts and students' experiences and questions.

e. Drama and music

Drama and music are highly motivating activities for students of all ages. They also provide variety in lesson plans for teacher and student alike. Dramatic activities include skits, structured improvisation, free improvisation and full scale plays. They are most useful in language classes. Students unaccustomed to improvisation should first be given more highly structured roles and situations such as those previously discussed under role play. Written skits are also a good way to begin using drama in the classroom. After students have become comfortable with their roles in the skits, they can be encouraged to make changes in their lines, which will lead to freer improvisation. Music and songs are excellent methods to involve students and introduce cultural aspects. New words to popular songs can be written by the language teacher to reinforce patterns and vocabulary. Folk and popular songs can be taught in social studies and language classes to add a cultural dimension.

f. Field trips

Field trips help link the real world to the classroom, show how studies can be applied and bridge the gap between classroom and community. Appropriate field trips can be planned for any subject. *Science classes* can conduct observations of nature and collect specimens, social studies

classes can engage in local community investigations and interview members of the community, and *mathematics classes* can measure and time any number of objects or events.

Activity box

1. The trainees can be asked to think of a topic that they enjoy teaching. Now, they can be asked to choose any three techniques to teach the topics/ sub topics/ activities/ examples for the lesson.
2. Then they can be asked to mention, why do they think that a particular technique was best suited teaching a particular area?
3. Groups can be formed according to the teaching subjects and techniques such as role play, games, drama can be assigned to the trainees to teach topic of their choice.
4. The trainees can be asked to write the topics which are best suited to be taught with different techniques and why?

Redesigned Lesson plan

The trainees should be educated enough to integrate the three elements in their lesson plan in an effective manner.

- a. Objectives of the lesson
- b. Teaching/ learning activities
- c. Strategies to check students' learning

The trainees must be made expert to keep and include the following points while preparing a lesson:

1. Nature and use of learning objectives and defining them in clear terms and statements.
2. Able to select the teaching method/technique and teaching aid/model according to the learning objectives.
3. Know how to use effective classroom management strategies to handle in-disciplined students, exceptional children and cater to individual differences.
4. Make a list of array of questions to enhance the learning of the students. they should be trained enough to frame questions for different purposes, including close ended and open ended questions in a balanced manner.

5. They should be trained to plan questions in such a sequence that it encourages high order thinking.
6. Select various evaluation techniques in order to assess the students at different stages. They should be able to frame evaluation questions which intend to assess, evaluate, appraise, defend and justify.

Various researchers also mentioned that the educators must train pupil teachers to prepare lessons that are tailored to both learner and the context. They should know how to use teaching methods and conduct different activities that are consistent with pupils' abilities; thereby creating interest and also know how to manage classroom (Zeichner, 2006; Grossman, et al., 2009).

For writing of the objectives, the trainees must be trained to write the specific objectives well. They should be aware of different domains (cognitive, affective, psycho-motor) for writing instructional objectives. They should know the different verbs used to write different type of objectives.

Activity box

1. Trainees can be asked to write the type of objective along with the example of the objective related to their subject/ topic to be taught in classroom.
2. The supervisor/ educator can give at least 3 verbs, asking the trainees to identify the type of domain along with writing the objective with that particular verb of respective subject.
3. The trainees can be asked to design three different ways to introduce the lesson effectively in classroom.
4. Design an idea for a learning game. Consider your topic and mention the number of participants in each group, learning objectives through the game and the materials required for the same.
5. Write three questions of each type (direct, probing, higher order and divergent) for a specific lesson and topic of your choice.
6. Think of a lesson for which role play can be used. Mention description of each role and different situations/ settings for enacting a particular role.
7. The educators can ask the trainees to design activities which cater to individual differences, and how they can use them in classroom?

8. Which all classroom management techniques would be used by the teachers in classroom? On what basis these techniques have been chosen?
9. Trainees can be asked to mention the at least 4 activities through which they will assess/ evaluate students' learning.

School experience programme

Regarding the school experience programme, the duration of teaching practice should be increased with proper supervision of teacher trainees. The supervision can be done through a team of experts –subject expert, teacher educators and school teachers; where a comprehensive and quality training can be given to the trainees during the teaching practice. The teaching practice should not be just for the sake of completing the set ritual of delivering set number of lesson plans but it should be a real time experience to teach in classrooms. The transactional approaches, guidance and counseling skills, evaluation skills, communication skills, managerial skills should be taken care of while the trainees deliver their lessons through the team of experts.

Training in Evaluation techniques

The trainees must be taught that they should not associate the term evaluation with assessment as it creates anxiety and stress in the minds of the students (NCF 2005). For comprehensive evaluation, the trainees must be aware of various assessment techniques for evaluating and grading students at different stages. They should not only assess students on the basis of traditional methods of evaluation (written examination, which includes multiple choice questions, short answer type, long answers). They should know how to evaluate students through observation technique, dialogue/creative questioning, group projects, conducting quizzes, presentation skills and co-curricular activities. They should be capable to do variety of activities for formal assessment of students such as short quizzes, end term examination etc.

Activity box

1. The trainees can be asked to devise different techniques for assessing different areas and explain why that particular technique is best suited?
2. The situations can be given to the trainees and they can be asked to tell which is the best suited technique and why?

In addition to judging the quality of the students' achievements, a teacher would also need to collect, analysis and interpret their performances on various measures of the assessment to come to an understanding of the extent and nature of the students' learning in different domains. Needless to say, this does not mean that tests and examinations will have to be conducted frequently. On the contrary, routine activities and exercises can be employed effectively to assess learning. Well-designed assessment and regular report cards provide learners with feedback, and set standards for them to strive towards. They also serve to inform parents about the quality of learning and the development and progress of their wards.

Training in Classroom management

The trainees must be trained regarding the classroom management styles e.g. how to maintain students' attention in classroom and even handling in disciplined students through various disciplinary approaches. They should be aware of the general strategies to maintain the discipline and also the strategies to deal with the trouble maker. They should be taught to maintain a positive learning environment while teaching in classroom. NCFTE 2010 also mentioned that trainees should be trained regarding the strategies for classroom management (p.67) and also the practicum courses should be designed based on themes of classroom management (p.48).

Activity box

1. Ask the trainees to think for the most effective teacher in their school; how did that teacher maintain discipline and what type of atmosphere was there while he/she taught.
2. Trainees can be asked to make a list of different classroom management styles along with different situations and discuss it with their educators.
3. The success of the schools' extra-curricular programs requires careful management and good organization. Teachers as the main personnel in implementing extra-curricular activities should also have sufficient knowledge and skills to carry out the tasks entrusted upon them, for extra-curricular educational objectives to be realized. Therefore, teachers must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, expertise and the latest developments in the areas of extra-curricular management and activities so that they can carry out their duties confidently and effectively. The concept of extracurricular activities has changed as it is been accepted as a part of school curriculum rather than activities outside the classroom School curriculum emphasizes on the cognitive characteristics while the extra-curricular activities focuses more on

acquiring affective and psychomotor skills. Thus, the importance of extra-curricular activities is equivalent to the importance of the academic curriculum and participation in extra-curricular activities complement the overall learning process in school. Therefore, teachers need the knowledge and skills to perform the task, which in turn will determine the effectiveness of the management of extra-curricular activities at school but the teachers lack the skills and interest responsible for conducting the activities. Their involvement is only superficial and they consider it as an onerous task and are less interested and motivated to carry out (Salamuddin, Harun, & Abdullah, 2011). Also, they don't have experience in conducting these activities as the system of education emphasizes more on academic excellence, so they don't have experience and background in conducting co-curricular activities (Halim & Meraah, 2005).

Enhancing Language proficiency and communication skills

The trainers must be highly trained in verbal and non-verbal communication as NCF 2005 document also focuses on the enhancement of the communication skills of the trainers as it is critical for dealing with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Also, the lesson planning, teaching methods/techniques, delivery of the content, giving feedback, guiding students etc. are only efficient if teachers possess good communication skills i.e. they are able to transact the lesson efficiently.

The trainees must be trained to pay attention to both verbal and non-verbal messages of the students, be clear and concise, refrain from getting offensive, try to emphasize with both verbal and body gestures. They should try to start and end with a positive note, which encourages building strength rather than eliminating weaknesses of students.

For enhancing the communication skills of the trainees, they can be best enhanced while teaching practice, as for the entire period the trainee communicated with the pupils. The supervisors, while observing the lessons can rate a trainee on various components such as intonation, facial expressions, clarity of thoughts, sequencing of ideas, right body posture, keeping eye to eye contact etc. moreover, the lessons can be recorded and shown to the trainees for self-evaluation too. The supervisor can guide the trainees time and again in the real time teaching rather than keeping it as a theoretical aspect to be taught in classrooms. They can be trained regarding the acceptable body postures in the classroom, the hand movements and the eye coordination etc. Also, the trainees who lack good communication skills can also be asked to

observe the lessons of the trainees with excellent communication skills and improve on their shortcomings.

Enhancing knowledge regarding contemporary issues

The trainees must be trained rigorously regarding the engagement with the contemporary issues related to diverse disciplines (history, political science, science, education, economics etc.) Also the issues related to India's pluralistic nature; issues of poverty, equality, equity and diversity should be engaged in the teacher education curriculum. This help the teachers contextualize education and develop deeper understanding of the subject and classroom as a social context. Due importance should be given for these issues through seminars, debates, plays and games in order to avoid the criticism. Presently the education programs are not paying attention, thereby producing ineffective teachers who lack personal as well as professional growth (NCERT 2005, NCFTE 2009).

Developing other quality dimensions

The qualitative dimensions of being an effective teacher such as teachers' attitude towards teaching, moral values, maintain the decorum of being a teacher, discipline and other professional capacities should be developed through focused workshops and seminars and also by educators in the classroom while teaching. Though there is only quantitative evaluation of the teacher education programmer which covers the curricular inputs only, but it is recommended to have a comprehensive evaluation system which includes qualitative and quantitative methods of evaluation. The attitudes, dispositions, habits and capacities in teacher should also be given importance while overall evaluation of teacher is being done as they are equally important to be present in an effective teacher as reported by the stakeholders too.

Teacher education curricula should give enough space to student teachers to develop logical reasoning, critical thinking, problem solving and meaning making. According to Hoban (2004) the curriculum design should "prepare teachers for coping with the nature of their work and how to think about it". The curriculum for teacher education should involve developing the skills, attitudes and knowledge that make up the core competencies of an effective teacher. These competencies would include pedagogical knowledge, subject knowledge, knowledge of social and cultural contexts and the development of values and beliefs, which are often stipulated as essential by teacher registration boards, education departments and employing authorities.

Besides all these enrolment of candidates in teacher education programs is another major concern. The professional status of the program is linked with the quality of the intake that joins the profession and the rigor that characterizes the various aspects of the program. Admissions to institutions of teacher education should be carefully made to admit only those, who have the highest promise of becoming successful teachers. There are many colleges where the enrolment in Teacher Education is near full, but, the physical presence in the face to face mode is nearly nil. These are exclusively commercial centers than educational ones. There should be immediate ban on these institutions, whether, these institutions are under the purview of the NCTE or not.

Conclusion

Present day secondary teacher education program is based on cognitive philosophy of learning; where it trains teachers to adjust to a system where education is seen as the transmission of information rather than developing the needed counseling skills and competencies to be a facilitator capable of encouraging learners to construct their own knowledge. The program does not address the needs of contemporary Indian schools and also not prepares teachers who can impart quality education in schools. The program trains teachers to adjust to a system in which education is seen as transmission of information. But the changing context of school system needs overhauling of teacher education. Teacher education curricula should give enough space to student teachers to develop logical reasoning, critical thinking, problem solving and meaning making. According to Hoban (2004) the curriculum design should “prepare teachers for coping with the nature of their work and how to think about it”. Teacher education curriculum should involve developing the skills, attitudes and knowledge that make up the core competencies of an effective teacher. These competencies would include pedagogical knowledge, subject knowledge, knowledge of social and cultural contexts and the development of values and beliefs, which are often stipulated as essential by teacher registration boards, education departments and employing authorities.

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