

Continuing Professional Development of Teacher Educators: Vision and Action

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The MHRD, Government of India, document on ‘Restructuring and Reorganization of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Teacher Education: Guidelines for implementation (2012) has given clear policy directives for continuing professional development and capacity building of teacher educators across all levels of education (Ch. XI; 2:39(f)) : DIET faculty (4:32), academic staff of CTE (5:6), and faculty of IASEs (6:7). The document envisages faculty development to be a continuous process in order to upgrade the knowledge and skills of their faculty and ensure that the nation’s children have access to quality teachers and quality education in its schools. How best can we discharge this function and make our efforts bear the desired results and explore newer and effective ways form the core of discussion in this paper.

The Present Scenario

Continuing professional development of teacher educators has always been in place. But today it has got a renewed mandate under Teacher Education Mission. The question is how seriously it is being pursued and with what results. We only need to look at the results to decide what processes need to be put in place. Anything that we do needs to be goal oriented. Are our present efforts giving us the results in terms of the goals? If they do not and yet we continue with them, it smacks of ritualism. If we do the same things over and over, we only get the same results. So if we want different results, we need to change our actions!

There are a couple of things that I would like to point out with regard to our present efforts with the continuing education of teacher educators. First of all, it is a top down approach. The authorities decide what the teacher educators need to learn. It is something that is done to them. Therefore, most educators resist it and yet go through with it lest they invite negative consequences for themselves. If this is the case, it goes against the very fundamentals of what learning is. For any serious learning, the learner engagement is an absolute necessity. If we

further reflect on the scenario, this is how education is practiced in schools – pushing information and knowledge on students who are unwilling to learn!

Secondly, the approach to training is mostly didactic and prescriptive. It may sound very erudite and one may get the feeling of becoming knowledgeable. But its take home effect and the ability to put it into practice is negligible. Just getting informed does not suffice for the purpose of professional development.

Thirdly, often professional development efforts are clinical and find fault with the present practices. This will only serve to further dis-empower the teacher educators. If this is so, it would be like the treatment becoming worse than the disease itself. This is not to deny the fact that there are things that need to be changed.

What is professional development?

Professional development is not a quick fix, one shot affair. No one is a full blown professional at the end of a professional education degree like that of a B.Ed., M.Ed., or Ph.D. Neither are we just “born teachers “. As teacher educators we are in the process of “becoming” effective teachers. We need to discover who we are and what we stand for, our intentions both for ourselves and for the profession of our choice, and how we want to express ourselves as persons and contribute to the causes we have espoused. We do this through ongoing and consistent study, through our deliberate practice as well as reflection on our practice and through our dialogue with our peers and mentors. Becoming an authentic educator is also about discovering our unique gifts, building our strengths, learning from others, cultivating our best qualities, nurturing ourselves, raising our levels of awareness, connecting with our passion for teaching, fostering meaningful relationships with students and peer groups.

Taking into consideration the description of professional growth as given above, we may define it as a range of learning activities through which professionals improve and broaden their knowledge, skills and attitudes and develop their personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional duties. In order to translate the ideas contained in the definition for the development of both the person of the educator and professional competence, I propose training of the educators in all the three areas of their activity, namely,

1. Development of the person of the educator – Intra-personal skills

All of us have a personal or ‘inner side’ as well as an ‘outer side’ that is represented by our actions and behaviors. The two are intertwined. It is the inside that is the cause of the outside. The reality of our experience is totally subjective. All our actions and the results that we produce are in terms of the persons that we are. That is, all our behaviors are ‘inside – out’, but the illusion under which we live is the ‘outside – in’ paradigm, that is, we believe that our behaviors are caused by others and the situations! The tipping point is when we realize that all our behaviors are caused from the inside, and give away our ‘outside – in’ explanation. Doing so is totally transformative and empowering.

There is a lot of work that we need to do with our inner side, which consists of our thoughts, beliefs, feelings and emotions, drives, motivations, aspirations, interests, values and principles, attitudes and commitments and so on. This is the engine/energy that drives us to do or not to do or how to do things. Working with the inner side leads to self-growth and self-empowerment. Education has neither acknowledged its importance so far nor attempted to develop it in a systematic way. Maslow had acknowledged that the problems that we face both as persons and as humanity is because people are not growing as persons.

2. Development of interpersonal / facilitative attitudes and skills

Teaching is as much or even more about learning to relate to students as it is about imparting knowledge and skills. Therefore, it goes without saying that the teacher educators’ interpersonal skills and attitudes, what we usually refer to as facilitative skills, are crucially important for an effective educator. When students resist learning, whether it is in the primary classes or postgraduate classes, it is often that they are resisting the teacher! If we observe the use of teacher power in the classroom, it is most of the time authoritarian or patronizing, both of which inhibit and suppress students.

If education is the cultivation of the whole child, the teacher needs to have the skills of facilitation for students' overall growth and learning. Often it is the socio-emotional issues that the students are faced with that stand in the way of their academic learning.

3. Development of academic and pedagogic competence

Learning to teach is a lifelong developmental process and one gradually discovers one's own style through training and learning through reflection as well as critical inquiry.

Training is a process that amplifies and provides a context for learning in the three main areas, namely,

- Subject contents and how to apply them (the knowledge base of teaching),
- Skills of teaching and learning the best practices (the Pedagogical base of teaching),
- Attitudes and values (the facilitative base of teaching)

Training and Development

Training is one of the major ways that we employ in order to enhance the capacity of teacher educators. Therefore it is necessary that the training is made meaningful and meet their needs. In order to make training meaningful, it should be based on the identified needs of the trainees, that is, what they need and want to know. That is, the training goals must be what they want to learn and do. Besides, the training methodology must be experiential and participatory in approach.

We are dealing with adult professionals who have their own experiences and ideas and are responsible for their learning. The *experiential – participatory methodology* is suitable to engage them and exploit their experiences and provide ways to translate ideas and principles into action.

The emphasis is on learning and not on teaching, following the true spirit of facilitation. By having the participants work in small groups, the methodology prepares the learners for cooperative learning as well.

Teacher Educators as Leaders

Each one of the teacher educators needs to experience that he/she is a leader. The leader is one who says, ‘the buck stops here’, takes the initiative and influences his or her immediate sphere of activities. By doing this we change the prevailing environment of negativity and passivity. Our individual and collective energies are sucked up because of negativity. Instead of succumbing to the crippling negativity and the prevailing culture of blame and victimhood, teacher educators need to see themselves as change agents who will bring about the long awaited - educational transformation. The entire edifice of education rests on the foundation of teacher education and each one of us in teacher education needs to affirm and live by this thought every single day of our life. We have today the technology of training that can initiate a transformation movement.

Capacity and Credibility

I am convinced of the importance of having capable teacher educators. Along with capacity, we also want our teacher educators to be credible. Capacity and credibility are two different things. Capacity is about what one is capable of, what one can do or achieve. It refers to one’s potential. Credibility is about the choices that we make, the actions that we take and the results that we produce. We demonstrate through our actions and results what we are capable of. It is what makes the educator inspiring and worth following. Therefore, we want our teacher educators to be both capable and credible.

Action Plan

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, I propose a three-phase training for the entire body of Teacher Educators in order to orient them toward greater personal and professional capacity building and performance. The training will begin with the SELF in the first phase, then deal with, the OTHER, the interpersonal aspects in the second phase, and move on to the PROFESSIONAL side in the third phase. The training will be holistic in nature, helping Teacher Educators integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes in the process of living and working every day. A brief description of each with a partial listing of topics under each phase follows.

Phase I : Self Discovery and Self Empowerment

The focus of this phase of training will be on helping Teacher Educators discover the unique persons that they are and their call to greater fulfillment and happiness through service and contribution.

- Who I am as a person: self awareness. Mindfulness.
- My unique purpose in life and how it relates to my profession as a Teacher Educator. My personal vision and mission.
- Why do I behave the way I do? Transactional Analysis (TA) and Neuro – linguistic programming (NLP) approach.
- The ‘Inside-out’ versus ‘ Outside-in’ paradigm of human behavior.
- Cause and Effect : the Proactive versus Reactive modes of behavior.
- Belief and belief change.
- What motivates me?
- Attitudes and Mindsets.
- Stress / self management
- Self confidence and Self Mastery.

Phase II : Relating and Empowering Others :The Art and Science of Mentoring and Facilitation

Teaching is as much relating to students in empowering and facilitative ways as it is imparting knowledge and skills. This phase of training will focus on practicing skills and attitudes of effective communication, interpersonal relationship and problem solving skills. A tentative list of topics are given below.

- Attending
- Listening

- Rapport building
- Empathy and related skills
- Respect / Unconditional positive regard
- Genuineness / Authenticity
- Concreteness and use of Open questions for processing experience
- Confrontation
- Self- disclosure
- Immediacy issues in interpersonal relationships
- Problem solving

The rationale for the first two phases of training is built around the idea that we need these skills to live our lives effectively (intra-personal skills) and to relate to others in nurturing ways (interpersonal skills) to enable them to grow and learn. There is a skills deficit in most people in these two areas. They do not form part of any formal education in any substantial way. And they are the foundation for both personal and professional excellence.

Phase III : ' Sharpening the saw' - **Enhancing** Professional Attitudes and Skills

This phase of training will deal with updating professional knowledge and skills. In order to keep pace with the developments in the world of knowledge in any field it is imperative that we are constantly keep learning. In fact this must occupy the greater part of a teacher educator's profession. Some suggested topics are given hereunder.

- My vision as a teacher educator
- Working in teams / creating engaged teams
- Teacher educator as a leader
- Facilitative approach to supervision and feedback

- Commitment
- Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL)
- Experiential Paradigm of teaching and learning: Reflective thinking, Critical thinking, Creative thinking, Constructivist approach
- Professional learning communities
- Devising a code of conduct for teacher education

Conclusion

Through the three dimensional training intervention proposed in the paper, we take conscious steps toward empowering teacher educators with personal, facilitative and professional attitudes and competencies that will help them contribute to the preparation of teachers with such attitudes and skills. In doing this we are responding to the concerns expressed by most of our recent policy documents like preparing reflective, student-centered, with democratic attitude and practice, being able to respond to students' emotional needs and thus, are able to create a positive and nurturing learning climate. The path is long and arduous as some of the aspects that we deal with militate against strongly held habits, beliefs and attitudes held away from our conscious mind in the subconscious. But the effort is worth it! There is always light at the end of a tunnel.