



Innovations and Interventions of a Teacher Development Programme

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Abstract

The teacher education programme in India seems to be on a crossroad since last couple of years. It is undergoing various sorts of experimentations in the name of innovation and enrichment and still nobody is sure what exactly is going to be the fate of teacher education system in our country. The duration of erstwhile first teacher education degree and that of the master's programme have been doubled. However, the content enrichment for the extended teacher education programme seems not to have reached up to the mark. The school contact programme and school internship programme are still in a pre-mature phase of development. And, there are other practical problems associated with these issues, which are still to be resolved. Amidst all this, the present paper describes the nuances of an innovative teacher development programme, which was initiated by an NGO named 'Eklavya' in the state of Madhya Pradesh in early eighties. The teacher development programme was the part of one of the flagship programmes of 'Eklavya', i.e. the Primary Education Programme (PRASHIKA) and was implemented in the government schools of Madhya Pradesh, India. Though the paper presents a part of the outcomes of the study conducted on in-service teacher training programme, still the paper contends that the nuances of the programme can have great bearings on the pre-service teacher education programmes as well.

Keywords: innovations, interventions, teacher education programme

Introduction

Teachers' place in the school process plays an important role in either accelerating or improving the situation or maintaining a state of inertia. School provides educational planning and ideas with a testing ground to see the feasibility of any programme and the teacher is in a pivotal role to translate those ideas into practice. If an educational programme is implemented within school system or a change is initiated, it is the teacher who acts as the agent of change or implementation. The very nature of the educational programme gets filtered through the existing understanding of the teacher, before its execution. Thus the outcome of educational processes in schools depends, to a great extent, on teachers' preparation and continuous professional development including the planning of the educational programme and pedagogical practices.

At present, the teacher education programme in India seems to be on a crossroad. It has been undergoing various sorts of experimentations in the name of innovation and enrichment and still nobody is sure what exactly is going to be the fate of teacher education system in our country. The duration of erstwhile first teacher education degree and that of the master's programme have been doubled. However, the content enrichment for the extended teacher education programme seems not to have reached up to the mark. The school contact programme and school internship programme are still in a pre-mature phase of development. And, there are other practical problems associated with these issues, which are still to be resolved. Amidst all this, the present paper describes the nuances of an innovative teacher development programme, which was initiated by an NGO named 'Eklavya' in the state

of Madhya Pradesh in early eighties. The teacher development programme was the part of one of the flagship programmes of 'Eklavya', i.e. the Primary Education Programme (PRASHIKA) and was implemented in the government schools of Madhya Pradesh, India.

Conceptual Background to Prashika's Teacher Training

The concept of primary education in Prashika indeed made very severe demands on the teacher. They were expected to continuously participate in the process of innovation and re-examine their point of views regarding the entire teaching learning scenario and its various components, i.e., the child, the curriculum, and the learning situation.

In the child's context, teacher needed to be the one who could establish a certain open-ended relationship with his pupils so that a free flow of knowledge, culture, language, emotions and sentiments could be ensured. The assumption at the core of the whole scheme was to understand not only the child and his learning, but above all to articulate what is understood. Besides this a curricular understanding was considered as an imperative, which entails basic insights into the cognitive development and the child's learning process that relates the educational process with the child's environment.

The Teacher Development Programmes

Teacher Development Programme of Prashika included its main orientation workshop followed by a three-day cluster level training and subsequent monthly meetings. This, further, was supported by regular follow-ups by the resource persons of Prashika team and resource teachers of the respective clusters. There were 130 government primary schools (during

year 1999-2000) in Shahpur block divided into 13 clusters. There were Cluster Resource Coordinators (CRC) as well as Cluster Academic Coordinators (CAC) at each cluster for ensuring the smooth functioning of the system. Resource persons such as the academic people were previously trained and experienced teachers, who looked after the teaching as well as non teaching issues, provided guidance and helped at cluster level to schools and the teachers in charge. The teacher training used to be conducted in three phases, the main orientation programme, the three-day cluster level training and monthly meetings. In addition, there was also a system of ongoing professional resource support. The following sections focus on these.

The Main Orientation Programme

The Orientation Programme used to be conducted on a large scale for teachers of all clusters together. It was usually a 15-day programme (partially residential) held generally in summers and was usually backed up by the follow-ups made in schools. A seven-day resource teachers' training for the preparation of the main training preceded this workshop. The summer workshop focused on the skills and concepts of the curriculum. It intended to expose the teachers to new ways of thinking about primary education, to concrete alternative methods of activity based and child centered teaching. It also attempted to help them open up, break their inhibitions and learn to enjoy themselves as well as be creative in the process of teaching. The issues of difficulties faced by the schools were generally taken up for discussions. The session did not entail lecturing but instead an active participation among the coordinators and the participants would be encouraged. The sessions had no definite structure but were flexible enough to adjust according to the responses generated. The main thrust was on doing away with the problems encountered by teachers during teaching sessions and their inhibitions for certain activities like singing, drawing, etc. so as to make them more participative as well as responsive in terms of the children's behaviour, needs and sentiments.

Another important feature of the training programme was the emphasis on doing. The workshop progressed through a series of activities. If the objective of the session was to enable the participants to understand how to impart the concept of volume and measurement to children, then participants would be encouraged to get involved in experiments, where they actually measured by pouring water from one container to another, of different sizes. If the session's objective was to impart to the participants sensitivity towards children's dreaming, then the session would begin with teachers actually dreaming whatever they would feel like. Many participants had inhibitions about dreaming; they gradually opened-up over the period of days. Such a method led one to question one's set beliefs, indeed, the step before this being to realize one's beliefs. Through such activities an understanding about various issues is evolved rather than thrust upon the participants by the resource persons. The crux of all these sessions was learning by doing. No readymade solution was supplied to the participants.

The curriculum of the workshop was spiral in nature. The training workshop focused on various themes associated with the Prashika curriculum. The resource persons would initiate

the discussion or an activity which would revolve round the language or mathematics related issues and each day some new activities would be planned related to linguistic and mathematical components of the school curriculum. The undercurrent of the activities was to engage teachers in sustained deliberations and arrive at any consensus without any haste. It often happened that a discussion did not lead to any conclusion. The basic underlying assumption of the activities was to acknowledge individual differences of opinions and the emphasis was given to facilitate them arrive at some consensus or construct their opinion through mutual agreement or consensus. Even if the differences of opinion remained that were given due recognition. For those who would like an answer (prescribed) to a question, this could be a frustrating experience. But many times and very deliberately the debates were left uncompleted with the statement, "let us think over it".

In the training programme for the teachers of the first and second classes (class 1 & 2), there was emphasis on playing games, singing children's songs. Initially teachers would find it difficult to break their inhibitions. But later on after seeing others participating with enthusiasm, they would open up and would feel at ease. The initial couple of training sessions, when this started, were very crucial. Eventually, as many participant teachers narrated their experiences of the training sessions, it became a joyful experience for which teachers would keep waiting to happen.

Three days' Cluster Level Training

The main orientation session of the Prashika's teacher development programme was complemented by a three day cluster level training session. Since 15 day training was supposedly not enough to cover the whole of the package and methods of handling material in particular classes, a three day decentralized programme at cluster levels was also taken up, to fill the gaps. It was held in the middle of an academic year, normally, in October and November. There were about three parallel trainings at the block level i.e. two or three clusters combined for the trainings. The most significant feature of this training programme was that they were conducted in schools to provide the teachers and trainers with a hands-on experience of handling material with children. Activities developed for assisting the learning process were also tried out at these venue schools to check their viability.

Before the training, there used to be a preparatory meeting held at block level at BRC. The Eklavya team, resource persons, CAC and CRC were required to be present at this. The main thrust was to enable the resource teachers and academic coordinators to shoulder the responsibility of planning and conducting this training.

Monthly meetings

The two major dimensions of teacher development programmes of Prashika, as discussed in the preceding section, were further supplemented by a regular review of achievements in the form of monthly meetings. A constant schedule of monthly meetings was maintained for this purpose with its chief objectives to discuss the problems faced in everyday teaching and finding solutions thereof. It entailed assessment of previous work, agenda planning for the next

month's working as well as sharing of the problems experienced both academic and administrative, between the teachers, CACs, CRCs, etc.

These meetings emphasized on issues such as preparing activities for children in order to improve fluency in reading, comprehension and expression, consolidating the concept of addition, subtraction and multiplication and exploring higher levels of observation, analysis and map reading. This also included identifying the learning levels of children, difficulties faced by them and problem areas related to language and mathematics, which required reinforcement.

During these meetings all the efforts were primarily channelized in the direction so that the resource persons of Eklavya and resource teachers made attempts to solve problems practically by going to actual classrooms, in school premises, where meetings were held. Purpose was to clarify all problems there and then. Interaction with resource persons and teachers brought out the fact that such meetings opened up various issues. For example, the lack of coordination and communication between the schools and community were acknowledged and solutions of such issues would be worked out. Parents were also invited to the meetings, though initially they showed inhibitions as they had the least idea about the educational issues of debate. However, it was observed that from the administrative point of view, these communities could provide massive support if exploited well. These meetings really proved helpful, as a conducive environment was often created among teachers of different schools to give them an opportunity to put forth their problems for remedies.

Ongoing Support

For a sustained effort with respect to the pedagogical practices that Prashika adopted, it needed a regular and effective follow-up system, which could provide appropriate resource inputs to the teachers in the school. For this purpose, there was an academic coordinator at each cluster who acted as a full time follow-up person.

These coordinators were expected to conduct regular follow-ups of the schools within their cluster. Their work was to closely follow and keep track of the academic requirements of the teachers in their cluster and make a consolidated record of each school of the cluster and from this identify issues for the monthly meetings. They were also expected to interact intensively with the schools and on the basis of such interactions develop strategies and processes for enriching classroom teaching and strengthening teachers' skills and understanding.

Impact Assessment

Prashika carried out its teacher development programme with full enthusiasm and vigour. The outcome of such programme should have been in the line of its goal. But, as it has many other factors to put constraints on it, the outcome of the programme came up with certain degree of divergence and heterogeneity. Though the training seemed to be achieving its purpose, as it was observed that teachers were ready to change in tune with the basic premise of the programme, it also had a lot to do with their mindsets. It was observed that mostly the resource teachers developed an articulated insight into the programme, whereas, other teachers and *Shikshakarmi* were

still having a vague conception about it.

The Teacher Training Program of Prashika aimed at developing skills and creating a certain kind of awareness among its teacher participants through innovative activities and interactions. However it was found in specific cases, as observed, that the results were not achieved to the extent as anticipated. This emphasized the need for a better linkage between the actual and the perceived framework of the programme. The programme was discontinued in year 2000 due to various reasons and constraints, but it certainly outlined and proved to a large extent that innovations, carried out with genuine intention, can bring out remarkable systemic change for the betterment of one and all.

Implications of the Teacher Training Programme

For any effort to reap true results the people involved need to be sincerely interested in the effort made, as well as sufficiently be aware of their own potentials and try to work on their points of improvements. All this critical observation and polishing needs a platform to start with, which in the context of teachers is suitably met at the teacher training programmes. But if the training is merely an exercise in isolation, pressuring the participants to accept the truths provided to them insistently then the real purpose of the entire drill is lost in a jiffy. The individual differences, aspirations and capabilities are all needed to be kept in mind while formulating a plan of teacher training and executing it. And, situating Eklavya's teacher training programme into this perspective it can be seen that the purpose was achieved to the large extent.

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