

NCFTE Excerpts

The Changing School Context and its Demands

A teacher functions within the broad framework of the school education system – its goals, curricula, materials, methods and expectations from the teacher. A teacher education curriculum framework needs to be in consonance with the curriculum framework for school education. 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. 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.

School education has seen significant development over the decades since independence. According to the Government of India estimates while 82 per cent of the 20 crore children of the 5-14 age group were in school as per enrolment figures¹, nearly 50 per cent of these children drop out before completing class VIII². One finds the situation on the ground ridden with difficulties. Regional, social, and gender disparities continue to pose new challenges. This reality increases the challenge of implementing the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act and, in particular, the role and place of the school teacher.

The teacher must be equipped not only to teach but also to understand the students and the community of parents so that children are regular in schools and learn. The Act mandates that the teacher should refrain from inflicting corporal punishment, complete the entire curriculum within the given time, assess students, hold parent's meetings and apprise them and as part of the school management committee, organise the overall running of the school³.

The Act, vide section 29 (2), emphasises the following areas while laying down the curriculum and evaluation procedures:

- Conformity with the values enshrined in the Constitution.
- All round development of the child.
- Building up child's knowledge, potentiality and talent.
- Development of physical and mental abilities to the fullest extent.

- Learning through activities, discovery and exploration in a child-friendly and child-centred manner.
- Medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in child's mother tongue.
- Making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety and helping the child to express views freely.
- Comprehensive and continuous evaluation of child's understanding of knowledge and his or her ability to apply the same.

These areas are particularly significant to the professional development of teachers at all stages, both in their initial and in-service training.

In addition, the NCF requires a teacher to be a facilitator of children's learning in a manner that helps children to construct knowledge and meaning. The teacher in this process is a co-constructor of knowledge. It also opens out possibilities for the teacher to participate in the construction of syllabi, textbooks and teaching-learning materials. Such roles demand that teachers be equipped with an adequate understanding of curriculum, subject-content and pedagogy, on the one hand, and the community and school structures and management, on the other.

The launch of the massive Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2002 and the financial commitment and education cess to augment the UEE mission have underscored the need to prepare the teachers adequately to address the growing demand for quality education. A similar demand may arise in the context of the impending universalization of secondary education in the coming years.

The continued decline in quality of the state school system and the proliferation of sub-standard unregulated private schools pose several challenges to the national declaration of catering to the basic learning needs of all children in the 6-14 age group through the elementary education system. Increasing privatisation and differentiation of the school system have vitiated drastically the right to quality education for all children. In addition, the pressures of globalisation leading to commercialisation in all sectors including education and increasing competition are forcing children into unprecedented situations that they have to cope with. It is expected that the

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act will play a major role in arresting some of these trends dictated by the market forces.

There is now a public acknowledgement that the current system of schooling imposes tremendous burden on our children. This burden arises from an incoherent curriculum structure that is often dissociated from the personal and social milieu of children as also from the inadequate preparation of teachers who are unable to make connections with children and respond to their needs in imaginative ways. Teachers need to be creators of knowledge and thinking professionals. They need to be empowered to recognize and value what children learn from their home, social and cultural environment and to create opportunities for children to discover, learn and develop. The recommendations of the NCF on school curriculum are built on this plank. Educationists are also of the view that the burden arises from treating knowledge as a 'given', as an external reality existing outside the learner and embedded in textbooks.

This view of education points to the need to take a fresh look at teacher preparation. Education is not a mechanical activity of information transmission and teachers are not information dispensers. Teachers need to be looked at as crucial mediating agents through whom curriculum is transacted and knowledge is co-constructed along with learners. Textbooks by themselves do not help in developing knowledge and understanding. Learning is not confined to the four walls of the classroom. For this to happen, there is a need to connect knowledge to life outside the school and enrich the curriculum by making it less textbook-centered.

Systemic Concerns of Teacher Education

The proliferation of sub-standard private teacher education institutions and the current state of teacher education programmes are both serious impediments to fulfilling the objectives of the NCF and the Right to Free and Compulsory Education. The programmes have come under severe

criticism for not addressing the needs of contemporary Indian schools and not preparing teachers who can impart quality education in schools. Their design/practice is based on certain assumptions which impede the progress of ideas and professional and personal growth of the teacher. They train teachers to adjust to a system in which education is seen as transmission of information. They take the school curriculum and textbooks as 'given' and train teachers to adjust to the needs of the existing school system through fastidious planning of lessons in standardized formats and fulfilling the ritual of delivering the required number of lessons (NCERT, 2005).

The NCF has described the current concerns of teacher education as follows:

- Experiences in the practice of teacher education indicate that knowledge is treated as 'given', embedded in the curriculum and accepted without question; there is no engagement with the curriculum. Curriculum, syllabi and textbooks are never critically examined by the student teacher or the regular teacher.
- Language proficiency of the teacher needs to be enhanced, but existing programmes do not recognize the centrality of language in the curriculum.
- Teacher education programmes provide little scope for student teachers to reflect on their experiences.
- Disciplinary knowledge is viewed as independent of professional training in pedagogy.
- Repeated 'practice' in the teaching of a specified number of isolated lessons is considered a sufficient condition for professional development.
- It is assumed that links between learning theories and models and teaching methods are automatically formed in the understanding developed by student teachers.
- There is no opportunity for teachers to examine their own biases and beliefs and reflect on their own experiences as part of classroom discourse and enquiry.
- Theory courses have no clear link with practical work and ground realities.
- The evaluation system followed in teacher education programmes is too information-oriented, excessively quantitative and lacks comprehensiveness.
- Apart from conceptual and pedagogical aspects, existing programmes need to develop certain attitudes, dispositions, habits and interests in a teacher. The present evaluation protocol has no place for evaluating these aspects.

The above observations provide distinct pointers for addressing issues on the different aspects of teacher education curriculum reform.

Contemporary Context and Concerns that need to inform Teacher Education Reform

- Inclusive Education – Courses to include the perspective, concept and strategies of inclusive education
- Perspectives for Equitable and Sustainable Development: In the present ecological crisis, promoted by extremely commercialised and competitive lifestyles, teachers and children need to be educated to change their consumption patterns and the way they look at natural resources
- Role of Community Knowledge in Education: The NCF promotes the inclusion of locally relevant content in the curriculum as well as pedagogy. This puts an added responsibility on the teacher for which s/he needs to be equipped to select and organise subject-content and learning experiences from the community for the classroom
- ICT in Schools and e-learning: ICT can be imaginatively drawn upon for professional development and academic support of the pre-service and in-service teachers.