

Transforming Classroom Practice: Teacher Education and Pedagogy in India

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The Education of Teachers and Pedagogic Practice

- This review draws upon disciplinary and inter-disciplinary perspectives to comprehend the intimate relationship between pedagogic practice and the education of teachers. This is understood in two specific contexts:
 - the larger socio-economic and political context that **has** shaped the international policy discourse and hence classroom practice, and
 - the immediate educational context of preparing teachers that **intends** to shape educational practice

Educational Discourse in Contemporary India

- Two **parallel but opposing strands** of thought:
 - the neo-liberal frame of standardisation, teacher accountability and learning outcomes and
 - the academic-led perspective on school curriculum (NCF, 2005) and proposed radical change in the preparation of teachers (NCFTE, 2009)
- the policy imperative is to bring both these contending streams into the fold of education.
- The agenda is to create knowledge ‘workers’ for a ‘service economy’, not an active citizenry.

The Policy-Practice Interface?

- These strikingly different assertions are based on **different models of society** and on **different ideas** about the role of education in a democratic society.
- This fundamental difference is couched in dualities that seek justification in theory-practice gaps
- Thus tension between policy imperatives and the lived reality of school education continues

International Educational Reform: Fundamental Shifts I

- In **free market** economies, education becomes the key to developing a highly **skilled workforce**
- This is an extension of the same logic that led education reforms in developed countries in the past few decades.
- Studies reveal greater 'monitoring' and 'control' over the **performance of schools** and **recasting** teacher education within a discourse of educational effectiveness across Europe, UK, North America, Scandinavia and New Zealand (Thrupp, 1999) leading to a 'new public management regime' (Mahony, 1997)
- More importantly, these reforms reflect a **fundamental shift** in thinking about **education and its purposes**

International Educational Reform: Fundamental Shifts II

- Viewed from the context of praxis:
 - educational discourse in the US and other developed countries had seen a **different kind** of major shift: one of redefining the problem of teacher education from a **training problem** during the 1960s and 70s to a **learning problem** in the 1980s (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005)
- Thus educational reform since the 1980s was also characterised by opposing viewpoints (Carr, 2005):
 - the voice of the academia and
 - politicians, policy makers and educational professionals
- A renewed emphasis on education as 'deliverables' and 'outcomes' took shape as a result of such reforms

International Educational Reform: Fundamental Shifts III

- this discourse speaks of economic efficiency as linked to the educational framework of improved learner assessment, accountability and effectiveness
- In this frame the pedagogic enterprise is to **'teach to test'** and the central thrust of pedagogic practice is one of 'control' and 'outcomes'
- Much of this discourse derives from and is not in any fundamental way different from the increasingly discredited behaviourist traditions of educational psychology of the 1950s and 1960s

The Contemporary Indian Education Reform Agenda

- Teacher accountability, learning guarantee programmes, learning achievement levels and school management have become significant constituents of the '**quality discourse**'
- As a result of an increasing engagement of the corporate sector in education
- All major policy documents in India, including the RTE seek to ensure teacher accountability, while consciously **evading any serious engagement** with the professional concerns of teachers
- This is accentuated by an entrenched teacher education **discourse and practice** that has become largely immune to interrogation and challenge.
- The policy-practice interface remains purposefully unexamined

Forced Choices for Teacher Preparation

- Several issues, long debated, are being **positioned as ‘forced choices’ for teacher preparation.** These include:
 - the conflict between diversification and selectivity of the teacher workforce
 - Multiple locations as the site for teacher preparation: private and public
 - Long duration pre-service teacher education vs short-term measures of in-service training
 - the contradictions of simultaneous regulation and deregulation

Teaching: a Practical and Political Activity

- Given this backdrop we can now explore how classroom practice is fastidiously tied to the manner in which teachers learn to engage with teaching as a practical and political activity.
- The premise: teaching and teacher education are essentially political
- Examining teacher education through **a social and ideological lens** reveals how social interactions and patterns of engagement within teacher education institutions shape pedagogy

Teacher Education Institutional Arrangements I

- Important to draw insights from studies that describe institutions as ‘systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interaction’
- ‘Rules’ are understood as **socially transmitted** and **customary normative dispositions**’ (Hodgson, 2006)
- Teacher education institutions in India, rooted in the colonial context, ‘reproduce shared habits of thought’ through the ‘conventions’ and the ‘rituals’ of ‘teacher education’

Teacher Education Institutional Arrangements II

- Within an overpowering **conformist framework**, the convention of unconditional acquiescence to the ‘guru’ (read teacher educator) forms the core of the culture of learning in institutes of teacher education.
- Within this, the teacher is ‘trained’ to view herself as ‘implementing agency’; and remain uncritical in attitude and mind

School Curriculum and the Teacher

- This would then explain: why the legacy of 'logical positivists remains etched in the practice of many (science) teachers despite attempts to redesign school curricula in the frame of 'the reconsidered epistemological basis' (Webb, 2007)
- why learning is perceived as 'acquisition of knowledge' rather than as 'understanding and conceptual change'.
- In order to understand this deeper, it is necessary to problematise the practice and discourse of teacher education, in particular the dualities

Dualities in the Teacher Education Discourse

- each of the crucial elements of the teacher education discourse wraps itself in dualities, thus getting circumscribed and resistant to meaningful interrogation.
- dualities around the child and curriculum, pedagogy and curriculum, theory and practice are reinforced and even extended by the very processes that seek to 'train' teachers
- The hiatus between educational studies as a field of academic enquiry and the practice of teacher education further reinforces existing dualities and conceptual disconnects

Teachers' Knowledge and Pedagogy I

- One of the most fundamental reforms in UK has been an attempt to **reconstruct the nature of teachers' knowledge**
- Researchers studied processes by which teachers selected and represented aspects of a knowledge domain to students; and how they developed subject-specific pedagogical knowledge - **pedagogical content knowledge** (Shulman, 1986)

Teachers' Knowledge and Pedagogy II

- Two **erroneous assumptions** were made:
 - that teachers already had a strong understanding of the content and modes of enquiry within a discipline which would help them develop pedagogical content knowledge
 - teachers' formal knowledge has **little connection** with the **search** for a **scientific basis for teaching**

Dominance of the Psychological I

- A significant reason for this is that the building of **teachers' pedagogic knowledge** has had a **psychological orientation**: emphasising cognitive processes and taking the individual as the unit of analysis (Poulson, 2001)
- Also, a focus on **teachers' tacit knowledge** has led to an emphasis on the personal dimensions of teacher-thinking and knowing: particularly the notion of **teachers' voice** (Clandinin and Connelly, 1987; Elbaz, 1991)

Dominance of the Psychological II

- Attempts to **link the socio-cultural and historical contexts of teachers' knowledge and to understand teaching as 'social practice'** are rare
- Thus, the practice of education remains an unexplored field for developing pedagogical theory.

Subject-matter or Pedagogy?

- Curriculum studies (late 1960s-early 1970s) attempted to interface foundational disciplines with the practice of education
- However, **psychology** with a much older engagement continues to assume an **overarching influence** on matters of curriculum transaction and learning through customary rituals of 'training' teachers
- For instance, the emphasis on the **computational model of the learner's mind provides the practical frame**
- Even though research has highlighted the **situated nature of cognition and learning in social and cultural practice** (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991)

Subject-matter or Pedagogy?

- the **tension between subject matter knowledge and pedagogy** creates a duality that disallows deeper engagement with questions of school knowledge
- **Leading most educators to accept the unproblematised conception of knowledge**
- The contested terrain of formal knowledge necessitates an engagement with the epistemological underpinnings of school subject-matter
- but is consciously left out of teacher education programmes
- It also cannot be adequately addressed through re-design of school curriculum alone

The Individual Narrative I

- **Educational Psychology** as a foundational discipline has created the **'individual narrative'** as a **dominant presence** in the **teacher education discourse** (Billings, 2006)
- It is not surprising then that **most teachers readily make a 'psychological diagnosis'** about students who are struggling in schools

The Individual Narrative II

- Concepts of 'slow learners' and 'low IQ' are '**naturalised**' in the amalgamation of a folk psychology discourse and the entrenched discourse of teacher education
- these are not cultural or social prejudices alone, they are reinforced and extended through the behaviourist frames of teacher education programmes

Fragmented Notions of Knowledge

- What permeates the curriculum of pre-service teacher education is **fragmentation** in terms of:
 - content of courses,
 - relationship between theory and practice and
 - social-cultural influences
- Cross-national appraisals of teacher education programmes indicate that ‘teachers have **few opportunities** in teacher education programmes to **develop connected understanding of subject matter with pedagogy**’

Changing Notions of Knowledge I

- There is also the need to view the practice of teacher education from the viewpoint of **social science and philosophical perspectives** and
- not from the perspective of the **psychological** and the **knowledge domain** alone
- Questions of what knowledge is; its relationship with power; how knowledge is selected and presented;
- how power equations of social relations based on gender, caste, religion and language operate in educational practice and
- how these are reinforced, extended or challenged to form the critical core of the preparation of teachers are important to examine

De-theorising the Discourse of Educating Teachers I

- International scholars have argued that “new policy repertoires have played a significant part in a de-theorizing project”.
- The virtual disappearance of sociological theory (Acker, 1994; Coffey, 2001) and philosophy (Carr, 2003) from teacher education has been combined with an increasingly centralized curriculum for the training of teachers.
- In India, pressures to recruit a large teaching workforce to meet RTE obligations have led the Indian state to once again seek comfort in convenient solutions that ‘equip’ teachers to ‘deliver’ education for which theory is not necessary, nor the design of meaningful ‘learning experiences’.

De-theorising the Discourse of Educating Teachers II

- Thus, classroom practice is being shaped by the culture and social ethos of teacher education as much as the neo-liberal frame within which teachers' work and worth is being viewed and judged.
- The 'public belittling of theory' in the preparation of teachers fits the agenda of letting the markets dictate the purpose of education - sans people and society