



Empowering the Torch-bearers: Developing Teacher Empowerment Program to realize the new vision of education

Seema Sharma^{a*}

^aAditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi, Bawana, Delhi, 110039, India

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ABSTRACT

Teachers being “the fulcrum around which education revolves”, the teacher education is identified and understood as the “most challenging sector” for systemic reforms in school education. A teacher is expected to be the facilitator of students’ learning in a manner that helps them to construct knowledge and meaning which eventually utilizes their individual experiences. The teachers are concerned, in an important way, with the total development of human beings – physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral and spiritual. While the dimensions of teaching other than the informational and cognitive aspects may have been overlooked in modern times due to a variety of factors, one cannot deny that they constitute an integral part of the teachers’ role and functions. The implication of this is to give due emphasis to developing reflective teachers with positive attitudes, values and perspective, along with skills for the craft of teaching. Keeping this in view, the present paper attempts to design and develop a comprehensive program aiming at the holistic empowerment of teachers to assist them to do justice to their reinvented role in the wake of new vision of education.

Keywords: Teacher Empowerment, Teacher Education, Professional Empowerment, Current trends

Introduction

The world that we are preparing our children to enter is changing swiftly. Undeniably, with the astounding advancements in science and technology and our increased momentum towards knowledge society, all possible dimensions of human endeavor have shown tremendous dynamism. The last part of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century have already seen dramatic changes brought about by globalization. Education, being a potential instrument for human kind to keep pace with such unprecedented growth and development, cannot remain static and indifferent to these developmental changes. With this serious evolution in education, all teachers also need to evolve likewise. Thus, discussing teacher education cannot afford to ignore the forces that will shape education in the future, which will prepare our children to live in an even more challenging and advanced distant future world.

Background to the Program

The New Vision of Education

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF, 2005)¹ followed by the Right to Education (RTE, 2009)² have created a new environment for school education. The vision of education is substantially different from the traditional one, entailing changes in curricular goals, pedagogy and

assessment. In this new vision of education, curricular goals integrate content with process and affective outcomes and aim for the development of autonomous, confident and capable individuals. The NCF, 2005 also emphasizes the principles of constructivist teaching and learning that include active participation of children in the classroom in achieving the objectives of learning; reasoning as opposed to authority as a basis for learning, using children's prior knowledge, thinking, reasoning, communication and problem solving abilities as initiating points for teaching and learning, creating a space in the classroom for children's expression in all possible forms (speech, writing, action) and promoting a culture of listening and discourse. These changes reflect a renewed commitment to universal education, to a democratic ethos and to a constructivist pedagogy based on a better understanding of how children learn.

New Perspective to Teacher Education

The teacher is the key agent in the transition to this new vision of education. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC, 2007)³ has observed that the teacher is the single most important element of the school system and has stressed the need to substantially enhance teachers' professional capabilities, standing and commitment to education. Besides the demands made in terms of knowledge for teaching, the new vision of education also entails changes in beliefs and attitudes that are currently widely held among the teaching community. Beliefs and attitudes change at the level of a community rather than at the level of an individual teacher. Such changes can happen when the community of teachers internalizes a new vision of education as a real possibility that can be achieved in their own classrooms.

The RTE, 2009 has laid down several essential parameters for quality education at the school level. One of these essential parameters is the right of the child to have a qualified and regularly updated teacher. Recent research has also shown that in the prevalent in-service teacher education programs, the

Address:

Seema Sharma
Asst. Prof., Deptt. of Education, Aditi Mahavidyalaya,
University of Delhi.
Email: seemas2111@gmail.com

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important personal skills, like self awareness, staying in control of one's emotions, being able to coach the best out of people and managing relationships, broadly, social, emotional and thinking skills seem to be taken for granted.

RTE, 2009 & NCF, 2005 call for a fresh perspective to teacher education. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE, 2009)⁴ has developed National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009).⁵ This framework has been prepared in background of NCF, 2005 which necessitated an altered framework on Teacher Education which would be consistent with the changed philosophy of school curriculum recommended in the NCF, 2005. While articulating the vision of teacher education, the framework has some important dimensions of the new approach to teacher education. The principles of a teacher education program as charted out by NCFTE, 2009 are:

- Integrative and eclectic
- Liberal and humanistic
- Developing capacities for self-directed learning and ability to think, be critical and to work in groups.
- Responsive to the demands of inclusive education
- Pedagogical discourse to take in sociological and anthropological inputs
- Providing opportunities to observe and engage with children, communicate with and relate to children.
- Opportunities to be provided for self-learning, reflection, assimilation and articulation of new ideas
- Reflective practice is the central aim of teacher education

Apart from these, other thrust areas in education include education for sustainable development, education for peace, addressing child rights issues, inclusive education and value education.

It is a well known fact that the quality and extent of learner achievement are determined primarily by teacher competence, sensitivity and teacher motivation. It is a common knowledge that the academic and professional standards of teachers constitute a critical component of essential learning conditions for achieving educational goals. The length of academic preparation, level and quality of subject matter knowledge, repertoire of pedagogical skills teachers possess to meet the needs of diverse learning situations, the degree of commitment to the profession, sensitivity to contemporary issues and problems, and level of motivation critically influence the quality of curriculum transaction in classrooms. Thereby it affects pupil learning and larger social transformation.

Thus, the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2010)⁶ advocates teacher education to be open and flexible, emphasizing dialogical rather than didactic communication, diversity of social contexts and learning spaces as sources of inspiration, and teacher education based on reflective practice rather than on a fixed knowledge base.

The NCTE, 2009 observes that teachers are concerned, in an important way, with holistic development of human beings – physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral and spiritual. While the dimensions of teaching other than the informational and cognitive may have suffered neglect in modern times due to a variety of factors, one cannot deny that they constitute an integral part of teachers' role and functions. The implication of this is to give due emphasis to developing reflective teachers

with positive attitudes, values and perspective, along with skills for the craft of teaching.

“The status of teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of a society; it is said that no people can rise above the level of its teachers. The Government and the community should endeavor to create conditions which will help to motivate and inspire teachers on constructive and creative lines. Teachers should have the freedom to innovate, to devise appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs and capabilities of and the concerns of the community. Teacher Education is a continuous process, and its pre-service and in-service components are inseparable” -National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986)⁷

Commenting on how inadequacy of programs of teacher preparation lead to unsatisfactory quality of learning in schools, the Yashpal Committee Report (1993)⁸ recommended that “...the content of the (teacher preparation) program should be restructured to ensure its relevance to the changing needs of school education. The emphasis in these programs should be on enabling the trainees to acquire the ability for self learning and independent thinking.”

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 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. 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 RTE, 2009 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, organize the overall running of school. (NCFTE, 2009)

The RTE, 2009 emphasizes 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-centered 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 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.

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. At the heart of teacher education is the question 'What value does teacher education add to the prospective teacher's ability to face challenges of facilitating the development of critical and creative students and subsequently adults?' (NCFTE, 2009)

Gardner (1994)⁹ contends that the most common form of in-service teacher education is that which provides an opportunity to teachers to update, refresh, improve and try out new knowledge and skills in specially created situations such as a workshop or a seminar. While these are necessary, they do not suffice in ensuring field application by the teacher, mainly due to their 'simulated' nature. In-service education programs have grown in variety in terms of how 'near' or 'far' from the workplace they are provided.

Rationale for the Program

As evident from the above discussion, almost all national agencies into education have expressed their concern for quality of teaching. They have also observed that **the country is already facing a severe shortage of qualified and motivated school teachers at different levels. NCF, 2005 also states that most teacher education programs provide little scope for pre-service teachers to reflect on their experiences and thus fail to empower teachers as agents of change.**

What makes great teachers stand out is their ability to engage both their minds and their emotions. To get to the next level of teaching success **they must build on the intellectual capability, blending it with their self awareness and emotional competencies, because it is these skills that will help them overcome issues such as aggression, youth unrest, suicides, stress, retention, morale problems, conflict and bad behavior. It will also improve creativity, teamwork, speed up the information flow through people networks, drive our purpose and ignite the passion to inspire great performance in our young people** and win themselves and the world around them.

No pre-service course of teacher education can be sufficient to prepare a teacher for her whole career of 30 or 40 years. Thus, continuous professional development is an essential process by which teachers (like other professionals) keep themselves motivated, updated and at par with others in the field while boldly facing the modern day challenges in education.

The rationale for this program emanated from this dire need of reflective, motivated teachers in the society and supposed neglect of above discussed dimensions of teacher's personality in our Teacher Education Programs.

TEACHER EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM (A workshop-based program)

For the purpose of this paper and the proposed program the terms 'empowerment' and 'teacher empowerment' are explained as follows:

Empowerment

Despite the fact that the concept of empowerment has been used with great vigor and popularity during the last few years, a look into the relevant literature discloses that there is no consensus on the definition of the concept, especially one that could cross disciplinary lines. Broadly, empowerment can be seen as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important.

One of the most prolific authors in the field of empowerment, J. Rappaport (1985),¹⁰ offers a broad-based definition of the term.

"(Empowerment) suggests a sense of control over one's life in personality, cognition, and motivation. It expresses itself at the level of feelings, at the level of ideas about self worth, at the level of being able to make a difference in the world around us... We all have it as a potential."

Rappaport and his colleagues have further described empowerment as a construct that tie personal competencies and abilities to environments that provide opportunities for choice and autonomy in demonstrating those competencies (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988).¹¹

Dunst (1991)¹² has suggested that empowerment consists of two issues: (1) enabling experiences, provided within an organization that fosters autonomy, choice, control, and responsibility, which (2) allow the individual to display existing competencies as well as learn new competencies that support an strengthen functioning.

Gutierrez (1995)¹³ adapted this definition and tried to elucidate it by adding **four necessary changes** which have to be seen in a person before he/she can be described as "successfully empowered" - an increased self-sufficiency, a developed group consciousness, a reduction of self-blame in the face of problems and the ability to assume personal responsibility for change. That is, not relying on other people to help out, but trying to take matters in one's own hands and pursuing a change to the better.

Teacher Empowerment

Wilson & Coolican (1996)¹⁴ points out that the concept of teacher empowerment includes extrinsic as well as intrinsic power. The extrinsic power is concerned with the phenomenon of teachers having a status of affirmation, knowledge they need, and the process of participatory decision making. The intrinsic power is involved with teachers' attitude and confidence in displaying their capacity of mastering their own work, and the representation of intrinsic power counts on

teachers' own self-determination and sense of self-efficacy a lot. Empowered teachers are self-motivated and know how to manage their emotions. They are also confident that their thoughts and feelings are valuable.

Short and Rinehart (1992)¹⁵ identified six dimensions of teachers' empowerment.

1. Decision-making: This refers to the level of teachers' involvement in decisions that directly affect their work.
2. Professional growth: This refers to teachers' perception that the school in which they work provides them with opportunities to grow and develop, to learn continuously, and to expand their own skills through the work life of school.
3. Status: This pertains to teachers' perceptions that they enjoy the professional respect and admiration of those with whom they work and that they have collegial support and respect for their expertise and knowledge.
4. Self-efficacy: This pertains to teachers' perceptions that they possess the skills and ability to help students learn, that they are competent in building effective programs for students, and that they can effect changes in students' learning.
5. Autonomy: This refers to teachers' beliefs that they can control certain aspects of their work life.
6. Impact: This refers to teachers' perceptions that they exercise an effect and an influence on school life (Short, 1994)¹⁶.

In this paper, **TEACHER EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM** is proposed for the prospective teachers to prepare them to train and educate the future citizens of our changing society.

Teacher Empowerment Program is designed with the objective of empowering teachers for modern day challenges in education and in an endeavor to assist them become reflective practitioners and agents of transformation in their own contexts. This program would prove to be a valuable resource for teacher education colleges, schools and educators who will be directly or indirectly benefitted from the same.

Broad aims of the program

To enable the participants to develop competence in the following areas of development

- **Self Reflection:** the ability to examine their own assumptions and biases, to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses, on ways to improve.
- **Critical Inquiry and Problem solving:** Developing self esteem and confidence to be able to overcome the emotional barriers to question world, themselves, others, and to imagine the possibility of change.
- **Creativity:** developing the ability to innovate and to adapt based on their students or their context.
- **Professionalism:** to see themselves as professionals, to develop a culture of shared learning and accountability.
- **Sensitization:** developing sensitivity towards and acknowledgement of marginalization, and willingness to explore ways to counter it.

- **Curricular/pedagogical updation:** keeping up with developments in the field of education, to enrich and update knowledge in their pedagogy and other areas of curriculum.
- **Awareness & understanding of Current Issues:** Understand and update their knowledge on current educational and social issues and issues in allied subjects.
- **Developing and practicing an innovative methodology:** to understand the currents trends in education and adapting them as per the needs of their own classrooms. To research and reflect on gaps in students' learning and their progress.

The program is broadly divided as follows:

- **Teacher as a Humane Professional-Comprehensive Personality Empowerment Program**
- **Teacher as a Life-long Learner-Current Trends & Innovative Teaching Methods**

Teacher as a Humane Professional

Comprehensive Personality Empowerment Program

Focus Areas: Roughly based on the Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, this covers areas ranging from personal health and grooming, emotional intelligence, to relationship and conflict management, skill of negotiation and multi-tasking leading to **personal and professional** excellence.

Personal Empowerment

1. Personal Health & Grooming
2. Self-awareness & Emotional Competence
3. Thinking Skills & Problem Solving
4. Interpersonal Communication & Relationship Management
5. Stress Management & Coping Strategies
6. Group Dynamics & Team Building
7. Pragmatic Spiritual Competence & Personal Excellence

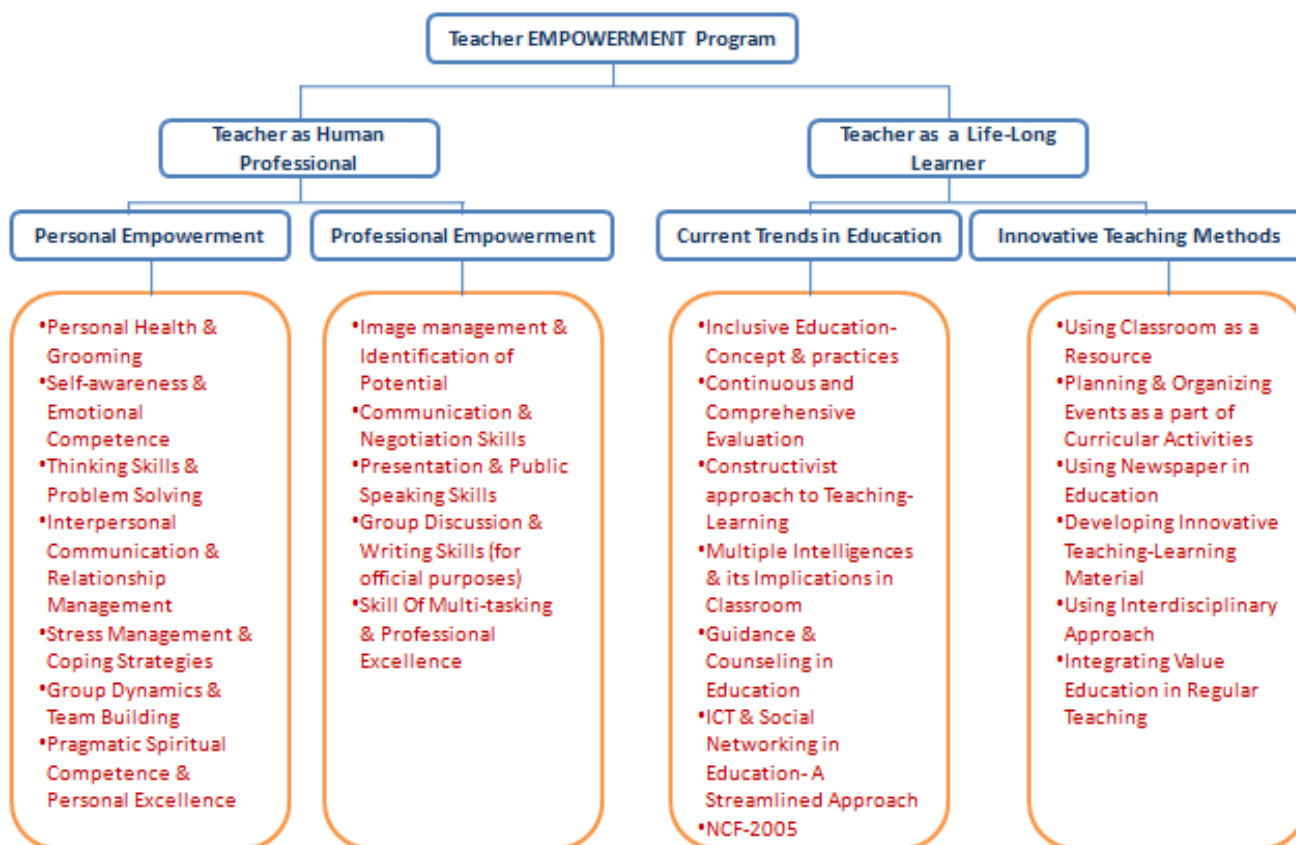
Professional Empowerment

1. Image management & Identification of Potential
2. Communication & Negotiation Skills
3. Presentation & Public Speaking Skills
4. Group Discussion & Writing Skills (for official purposes)
5. Skill of Multi-tasking & Professional Excellence

Teacher as a Life-long Learner

Current Trends & Innovative Teaching Methods

Focus areas: The areas covered under this relates to various thrust areas in the field of education, current trends in teaching and innovative teaching strategies.



Current Trends in Education

1. Inclusive Education- Concept & practices
2. Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation
3. Constructivist approach to Teaching-Learning
4. Multiple Intelligences & its Implications in Classroom
5. Guidance & Counseling in Education
6. ICT & Social Networking in Education- A Streamlined Approach
7. NCF-2005

Innovative Teaching Methods

1. Using Classroom as a Resource
2. Planning & Organizing Events as a part of Curricular Activities
3. Using Newspaper in Education
4. Developing Innovative Teaching-Learning Material
5. Using Interdisciplinary Approach
6. Integrating Value Education in Regular Teaching

On the whole, the complete program focuses on self knowledge, creativity, diversity of talents, critical-thinking skills, decision making skills, entrepreneurship, right-brain and left-brain directed skills, global competences, and a host of other abilities and knowledge that are not practically included in the current curriculum of teacher education program.

Conclusion

In the light of above discussion and in the scheme of holistic education the teacher is seen less as person of authority who leads and controls but rather as “a friend, a mentor, a facilitator, or an experienced traveling companion”. Open and honest communication is expected and differences between people are respected and appreciated. Cooperation is the norm here, rather than competition. The reward of helping one another and growing together is emphasized rather than being placed above one another. Teachers help young people feel connected by fostering collaboration rather than competition in classrooms. **To be able to do justice to this reinvented role, a teacher is expected to continuously focus on comprehensive self-empowerment for which ample opportunities should be provided on a continual basis.** This work needs to be evaluated in the global context and programs need to be realigned to the needs of education in the present context. Although the existing programs may already be overloaded with all mandated courses and experiences, educationists and policy makers must think creatively about how to infuse a humane element in it. For children to live successfully and peacefully in this globalized world, they must be helped to develop appropriate skills, knowledge, attitudes, and perspectives. And teachers, being in fore of this whole developmental process, need to reinvent themselves continually to keep pace with the changing time.

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