

# Field Experience

## A Reflective Practice in Education

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### ABSTRACT

*This is a qualitative paper employing the narrative style of reporting a field experience in school from a reflective perspective. It delineates the objectives and the methodology adopted; elaborates the field activities undertaken and discusses the reflective gains from this practice to education-both that of learning and teaching and the learner and teacher.*

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### Introduction

Field experience is an individualised, experiential learning opportunity where one applies her/his knowledge and skills. The goal of field experience is to bring teaching to life by specifically helping professionals strengthen their philosophy and understanding of the field. Field experience can provide opportunities for the professional to apply the knowledge, theory, concepts, skills and abilities to teaching; be personally involved in developing, planning, executing, and evaluating activities with and for groups and individuals; gain additional insight into learning styles, teaching strategies, teaching-learning material, classroom management, school-community linkages and teacher training programmes; deploy appropriate intervention programme(s) for student empowerment; increase professional self-awareness and accumulate experience to help enhance one's own professional competence through a process of reflection.

NCERT's field experience program is designed to reflect its commitment to a community of learners guided by knowledge,

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values, and experiences. The purpose of the programme includes teaching in the school along with carrying out research/study/feedback collection/try-out of materials/advocacy or any other such intervention as deemed to be fit and is in accordance with the mandate of NCERT. To achieve this purpose faculty working in different constituents of the NCERT are required to undertake fieldwork in different schools of the country for a period of at least 3 months. This enables to reflect on the various aspects of its materials including textbooks, programmes and policies based on actual field data and feedback. When an organisation engages itself in reflection it equips itself to become an "educative organisation" as it is able to rethink ways to harness the very considerable reservoir of talent and energy invested in its workforce. Self-energising, self-renewing organisations, we know, are ones that are also more successful (Smyth, J. 1993).

### **Objectives**

To enable the field investigator to reflect on the:

- approaches and strategies delineated in the NCF 2005 in the teaching of Social Science (Constructivist approach and Critical Pedagogy)
- use of CCE tools in the teaching of Social Science
- on the NCERT textbooks through the perceptions of students and teachers
- the school guidance and counseling package
- on the linkage between theory and practice of teaching

### **Methodology**

#### ***Planning***

The premise for selection of school for field work was that the school be adhering to the principles and approaches towards teaching and learning as delineated by the NCF 2005, while using the textbooks and TLM designed by the NCERT and that it should cater to the needs of rural children, so as to gain an understanding of the nuances of teaching and learning there in. The investigator visited a few schools for this purpose. *Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya* at DMG halli, Mysore was identified as the school fulfilling the aforesaid criteria, after the investigator paid an initial visit to the school.

The fieldwork was executed for a period of three months, where in the investigator was engaged full-time in the school. The activities

included teaching of social science and the employ of approaches and strategies of constructivism and critical pedagogy in the course of teaching; design and use tools of CCE; school guidance and counseling; and gathering perceptions of students and teachers on NCERT's textbooks.

### **Tools**

The tools used include lesson plans, Teachers Teaching Profile (*developed at RIEM*), feedback form for students on classroom practices and questionnaire on perceptions of students and teachers on textbook, (*developed by investigator*), Standard Progressive Matrices –Raven, J.C., High School Personality Questionnaire –IPAT, Scientific Aptitude Test Battery—Agarwal and Arora, Personal Style Analysis (*Source-IDGC- developed at RIEM*), Class Talks and Career Talks (*Guidance and Counseling Package developed at RIEM*).

### **Activities undertaken**

#### **Teaching**

The investigator taught social science for classes VI to X and completed eight lessons in the course of the fieldwork. This enabled to try out approaches such as constructivism and critical pedagogy. Lesson Plans were developed for the same. A sample of the lessons using constructivist and critical pedagogy approaches are discussed.

**Constructivist Approach**—The investigator employed the constructivist approach in teaching Social Science by planning lessons according to the seven E's of constructivist learning (Arthur Eisenkraft, 2003)—Elicit, Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate and Extend. Elicitation through inquiry questions enabled to generate discussion and debate. Topics in social science allow for building conceptual understanding by engaging the students thus. Students were also prompted to provide plausible causes and justify issues in the light of contemporary events. They were motivated to explore for other information to substantiate their explanation by using other sources like the library and internet. They attempted to evaluate social situations and draw conclusions based on evidences. They were also able to elaborate and extend their understanding and inferences to events happening around them.

Through the lesson “Sectors of Indian Economy”, students were engaged in a discussion about the transition of economy from an agrarian sector to industrialised and service sectors; inquiry

questions enabled them to explore possible factors that brought about this transition; explained the necessity to transit; elaborated and evaluated the effects of developing all the sectors of economy and extended its impact on the world economy. In the process of constructing the concepts about the sector, students were able to provide ample examples from their own lives (as most of them belonged to agrarian families) and the society around them. They tried to reflect on the impact of the transition on their own lives.

**Critical Pedagogy**—The field investigator used critical pedagogy as an approach in the teaching of social science by employing a shift from the narrative method to the critique method of teaching. Critical pedagogy as a teaching approach attempts to help students' question and challenge domination, along with beliefs and practices that dominate them (NCF 2005). Teaching-learning practices are designed to raise the critical consciousness of student's regarding oppressive social conditions; provides for an opportunity to critically reflect on issues in terms of their social, political, economic and moral aspects; entails the acceptance of multiple views on social issues and commitment to democratic forms of interaction. A critical framework helps children to see social issues from different perspectives and understand how such issues are connected to their lives (Burbules and Berk, 1999).

This approach actually enabled students to enquire and explore how society is structured, managed, and governed. They were able to critically examine the forces seeking to transform and redirect society in various ways. Through this process of learning, the dynamics in the class provided for difference in opinion. The approach to teaching was thus open-ended wherein the teacher (field investigator) was only a facilitator to direct the course of debate and discussion. The lesson "Money and Credit" provided ample scope to critically examine various types of credit, variety of credit engagements in the rural sector and the role of banks in promoting agriculture in India. Students were able to collect additional information regarding credit facilities provided by nationalised banks for various types of agricultural purposes, along with small and large industries; substantiate their arguments for greater agricultural credit facilities and a more vigilant RBI; relate information to the conditions of their families as agriculturalists. It provided for exchange of ideas and experiences; enabled to develop skills of constructive argumentation, tolerance for difference of opinion and social awareness and participation. The students presented their arguments for farmer-

friendly agricultural credit facilities in the form of a letter to the Governor of RBI.

Teacher teaching profiles and student feedback forms were used to collect feedback from the teachers and students.

### **Evaluation**

**Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE):** The investigator designed and used tools of CCE such as open book test, assignment, class discussion and debate, poster presentation, observation report and note checking. The open book test enabled students to read the textbook thoroughly and refer to additional reading material to answer given set of questions. Four different sets of questions were prepared so that students would not be able to consult their peers. Students were asked to exchange their answer sheets. Post test discussion of answers enabled them not only gain an understanding of the concept but also the style of presentation by their peers. Assignments included theme-based tasks to be completed as class work/homework. These were open-ended or structured and some were also based on contexts beyond textbooks like assignment on the lesson Sectors of Economy included presentation of a report on 2011—budget of the central government, towards allocation for primary and secondary sectors.

Class Discussion/Debate included topics like “Industrialisation: Boon or Bane for workers in Bombay” and “Consideration of Colonialists in South Africa in the designing of the Constitution”. Students had to present their arguments by referring several sources and the references were included in the report. Poster Presentation allows for the use of pictorial, graphical, news cuttings to represent learning concepts. Graphical representation of data on the ‘credit facilities by nationalised banks for various agricultural and industrial purposes’ and pictorial representation of the earth by satellites were activities assigned to students.

Through observation reports students reported observation of the ‘*sapta rishi*’ and the ‘pole star’ in the night sky, and related their experience including the direction and their position on the ground. Students’ notebooks were checked and feedback provided regarding—irregularity, handwriting, spelling errors, and conceptual errors. A feedback form was used to collect student feedback.

### **Perceptions on the Textbooks**

A questionnaire developed by the investigator was used to collect

student and teacher perceptions on the textbooks. The analysis of the perceptions of both teachers and students of the class X social textbooks showed that, they found the content and style of presentation, evaluation exercises interesting and visuals particularly good with respect to the geography and economics books. In the case of History they found the content is bulky but presentation is good. Some of the exercises were not found interesting and a few visuals were not clear. The politics book was found to be the most interesting and exciting; visuals especially the cartoons are thought provoking and enable picturesque comprehension. The students particularly were amused that there was a controversy about using them and expressed in unison, that it provided respite from the drudgery of learning with mere words and in no way was a matter of ridicule.

### **Intervention: Guidance and Counseling**

#### ***Appraisal through Cumulative Profiles***

The investigator planned a programme of psychological assessment and appraisal for class XII on the referral of the class teacher. Psychological assessment fulfills the goals of counseling. It involves integrating and interpreting of assessment data (Hood, A. B and Johnson, R. W. 2002). Here, the investigator used psychological tools to test mental ability (Standard Progressive Matrices-Raven, J. C. 2004), personal styles (Personal Styles Analysis), personality (High School Personality Questionnaire, IPAT) and scientific aptitude (Scientific Aptitude Test Battery SATB –Agarwal and Arora 1993) and correlated this with the academic achievement (test scores of class XI- CBSE).

Based on appraisal data provided after the analysis, students were grouped and the Principal arranged to meet with each individual student along with the investigator in order to provide for additional academic support according to their needs wherein the investigator also oriented them on preparing weekly study plans for each subject. During the course of this meet the class XII teacher reported that four students of the same class showed little or no interest in academics, engaged in disruptive behavior in class and when coerced to study were aggressive. The investigator required preparing a cumulative appraisal profile of each of them. Cumulative appraisal profiles enable to organise, summarise and integrate appraisal data for reporting (Milner, J., and O' Bryne, P. 2004) Herein,

the cumulative profile consisted of data on mental ability, scientific aptitude, academic achievement, interest, personality, personal style analysis, observation reports, cumulative records, interviews and case conference reports. Through these the investigator was able to provide guidance to students. Through all these exercise of collecting data through the tools and analysing teachers were engaged.

### **Group guidance activities**

Substitution classes were used for group guidance activities such as class talks and career talks. The activity was chosen according to the level of the class. Group guidance activities included class talks, career talks and life skills. Topics for class talks include—developing study habits, achieving excellence in exams, healthy competition and cooperation, need for educational and career planning, time management, improving memory and goal setting; Career talks included careers in Journalism, Indian Army, Fashion designing, Civil aviation, Advertising, Science research. The investigator deliberately chose to talk on careers that student were not much aware about. Talks on life skills included- Decision-making, Problem solving, Self-awareness, Effective communication and Coping with stress. Teachers of the school also chose to talk on some of these topics with the aid of material provide in the Guidance package.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

For the investigator, the fieldwork is a reflective experience as a teacher educator involved in training teachers to undertake all the above activities. On analysing the experience it enabled to gain insight into various aspects of the processes in the school.

Students expressed that their learning experiences were different from those of regular classes engaged earlier; they could participate freely and actively in the class; motivated all to engage in the class; able to connect to the subject by relating it to their everyday life; their own experiences were valued; they were able to contribute to the larger picture of the concept; became aware of their social responsibilities in the course of discussing various issues that were closely connected to their families and community and able to draw plausible solutions to problems and issues in society. They also learnt to give a patient hearing to other's points of view and respect differences. They said that strategies adopted enhanced their interest in learning the subject. Teachers reported that they had received theoretical inputs on such approaches of teaching and engaging

content through workshops but were unaware of the practice. After the observation they too engaged in similar ways and requested the investigator to observe and provide for feedback accordingly. They also observed that it was not possible to use innovative approaches for the entire syllabus due to paucity of time.

Reflecting on the linkage between theory and practice, the investigator had the opportunity to actually check out the oft-expressed apprehensions of trainees that it is not pragmatic to try out innovative approaches/strategies in the classroom. The ingenuity lies in providing for as much creativity and flexibility in the plan as the innovative approach/strategy itself, so as to be able to create and recreate the lesson as the teaching moment demands in the class. The challenges being the compulsion to complete the syllabus, catering to the needs of different types of learners and their levels of learning and the resistance to change, both by the teachers and the school system. The teaching moments and experiences of the classroom will enable to provide realistic illustrations in teacher education classes.

Engaging in peer observation and team teaching illuminated the investigator of innovative strategies employed by teachers like peer tutoring, mnemonics for timelines and events and peer evaluation.

Students found CCE activities to be interesting and different in that they did not have to copy from the text for completing assignments which they had expressed was a boring exercise. They particularly were excited about poster presentation wherein they used cartoons to present information; this exercise was found to be creative too. They found the task of collecting information from other sources to be very informative and improvised their browsing skill. Working in small groups taught them to tolerate differences and help each other and improvised communication and persuasive argumentation skills. They expressed that the open book test was not as simple as it sounded as the questions compelled them to deliberately read the textbook purposefully and also use additional material from the library and net. Teachers appreciated the CCE activities and said they were always following the traditional method of assessment, which was cumbersome and time consuming. They began to employ some of these techniques in the next set of CCE.

The spirit of CCE also was comprehended better when put to actual use in the classroom by teachers and the investigator. CCE was not to be viewed as a boring and tiring exercise, apprehending students and deterring their performance. Reflecting on this, the



investigator came to realise that practical exercises should be a part of CCE workshops within simulated class situations.

Students also expressed their gains through group-guidance activities as the information provided through class talks could easily be put to us; increased their awareness of a wide range of career options and it forced them to rethink their choices. Students who were referred for counseling said they had gained by the direction provided, and that they were unaware that they needed help. They also opined that their teachers should be enabled to help out in this aspect. Cumulative profiles enabled class XII students and teachers to gain a better understanding of the course of action to be adopted by them. Teachers expressed that the hands on experience in the guidance exercises provide them inputs and confidence in handling student issues. They were also encouraged to put to use substitution hours effectively for group guidance. They suggested changes in the guidance package modules based on their context and need.

The investigator also took the opportunity to try out the earlier developed School Guidance and Counseling Package in the course of the intervention undertaken in the field. It was found that inputs were required to be added and revised in the perspective of, purpose and objectives of different school systems such as the JNV, needs of students in a residential set up, locale and socio economic conditions of students, relationship between teachers and students there in, role of the school in school-community linkage. Reflecting on the experience it is also required to provide for practical exercises for teachers in workshops on guidance and counseling.

It was a first-hand experience for the investigator to use the NCERT textbooks for teaching Social Science. This enabled to try out the learning activities of the textbook in the class and observe student participation. It also provided an opportunity to note the extent of textbook usage by students and their ability to comprehend the same. The perceptions of teachers and students on the textbook prompted the investigator to plan a thorough exercise to analyse the textbooks.

The teacher educator's experience of actually being the teacher in the field to study and experience the ground realities will surely enable her to recount these experiences in the teacher education classes and aid in bridging the gap between educational theory and actual classroom practice, revisit materials developed and plan practicum based training programmes for teachers.

## Conclusion

Thus, engaging in fieldwork provides for a valuable opportunity to apply the theory of teaching; design and try out activities; gain insight into learning styles, teaching strategies, textbooks, classroom management, student guidance and counseling, school-community linkages and thereby increase professional self-awareness and accumulate experience to help enhance one's own professional competence as a teacher educator and in turn re-design teacher education programmes. It is imperative that field-engagers also meticulously plan a programme based on one's area of priority and reflection. As teacher educators, such exercises enable us to reflect on our practices.

For, reflection is fundamentally about creating improvements in educational practice, and the social relationships that underlie those practices. Reflection is founded on the belief that knowledge about teaching is in a tentative and incomplete state, and as such, is continually being modified as a consequence of practice (Smyth, J. 1993).

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