

Some Transactional Aspects of School Internship in Diploma in Elementary Education Course in India

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Abstract

The course of Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.) aims at preparing teachers to impart quality education at elementary level, i.e., Grade I–VIII. Since the agreement on universalisation of elementary education and further due to compliance to the Right to Education Act, 2009, imparting elementary education has become more challenging in India as it has entrants from different socio-cultural context with a vast majority of first generation learners. This has spawned the need for preparing teachers who could facilitate learning processes that enable every child to learn and achieve her/his optimum potential. For this, the teacher must have a thorough understanding of child, learning processes and rights of the child. This requires a teacher to observe experiment and reflect on her/his transactional effectiveness and learning apart from having acquired knowledge of nature, content and pedagogy of subjects. The ‘School Internship’ in D.El.Ed. curriculum, comprising 80 working days across the course, provides the teacher an opportunity to connect with school and acquire desirable learning to develop herself/himself as a professional practitioner. The study investigates whether this element of ‘School Internship’ in the course has been successful in achieving the anticipated objectives. The primary analysis reveals that there are numerous individual and institutional negotiations that reduce the potentiality of school-based learning for student-teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher preparation programmes have been a core concern for academicians and education administrators. Studies have revealed that isolated events like trainings, workshops and seminars have little impact on the learning of teachers (Gallimore, Erneling, Saunders, and Goldenberg, 2009). In contrast, when the teacher preparation programme includes school-based learning, the teachers are likely to become better professionals (Desimone, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon, 2001) as the belief of teachers, the classroom environment and school contexts collectively shape the learning of teachers (Strom, 2013). There are evidences which claim that the student-teachers who teach in school during teacher preparation programme acquired the ability to raise learning level of students (National Research Council, 2010; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff, 2009). However, there seems a great need to further explore how multiple variables work together in school setting to affect teacher learning (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). The findings from several studies advocate the role of school-based learning as a linchpin for preparing professional teachers that could significantly contribute in learning of children.

This paper examines how the Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.), the elementary teacher preparation programme in India

has recognised the need for school-based learning. The course has got significant space for school-based learning known as School Experience Programme, School Internship, etc., in different states. The principle behind the thought is to break the linear conception of teaching and transform it into a theory-practice dyad. To facilitate this inquiry, this study analyses the 'school internship' element of D.El.Ed. course developed by National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE), State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) of Uttarakhand, Delhi and Bihar, and State Institute of Education (SIE) of Chandigarh, to enquire the scope of school-based experiences to preparing student teachers as professional practitioners.

OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL INTERNSHIP IN D.EL.ED. COURSE

In India, the National Council of Teacher Education is the nodal agency responsible for teacher preparation curriculum. It has developed a two-year curriculum with two phases of school internship, each of 45 days during both the years. The curriculum, as one of its element, focuses on teacher preparation through experiential learning by observing school practices, evaluating resource material and reflecting on practices in the first year, and by performing role as a regular teacher with critical reflections on own learning in the second year. To improve this further, partnership between school and

DIET has been emphasised upon to effectively facilitate the process of school internship. Taking insights of the national level curriculum of teacher preparation, different states have used either the curriculum as it is or by modifying some part of it (Curriculum Framework, D.El.Ed., 2015, pp. 132–36).

The school internship programme in Bihar is known as School Experience Programme (SEP). The student-teachers are supposed to engage with schools for 40 working days every year throughout the two-year D.El.Ed. course. The curriculum does not make any segregation on the roles of student-teacher as observer or as practitioner. The student-teachers are expected to facilitate at least 80 lesson plans each year. They will also identify school level problem(s) and conduct action research to systematically resolve at least one problem/issue which they finally have to submit to concerned faculty of DIET. It is also suggested for student-teachers to prepare school development plan on the basis of analysis of school level secondary data and also using their personal experience for the same school (Curriculum and Syllabus, D.El.Ed., 2013, pp. 113–16).

In Uttarakhand, the overall duration of 80 days for school internship, 35 days for the first year and 55 days for the second year, is aimed at experimenting with the learning gained by the student-teachers at DIET so that they could

effectively prepare themselves for their actual professional responsibilities as regular teachers. The format of engagements for both the years is different during school internship. While the first year primarily focuses on observational learning, evaluation of existing resource materials and sharing reflections at appropriate platforms, the second year is to perform all the roles as regular teachers in the school which also includes attending meetings of school management committees and block and cluster level meetings. Action research is also expected from student-teachers in the fourth semester (D.El.Ed. Curriculum, 2014, Uttarakhand, pp. 129–30).

State Institute of Education (SIE), Chandigarh has viewed school internship as a structured partnership between the school and SIE where the intern must function as a regular teacher, for which she/he needs to be provided physical space as well as pedagogical freedom to innovate. Quite similar to the curriculum of NCTE, the intern, in her/his first year, will focus on understanding school, its environment, children and the teaching-learning process, whereas in second year, she/he will function as a regular. The objectives for internship exactly match with what is already suggested by NCTE except one, i.e., “To participate in teaching school subjects to the children of Classes I to V”. However, it has been clearly mentioned in background note that the student-teacher will

perform the role of a regular teacher. It says, “In the second year, the intern will function as regular teacher but with support of teacher-education institution in the form of guidance from and dialogue with faculty supervisors” (Syllabus, D.El.Ed., SIE Chandigarh, n.d., pp. 34, 80–81).

The School Experience Programme (SEP) in Diploma in Elementary Education developed by SCERT, New Delhi has been allocated 40 working days in each year, which have been further distributed in three phases of 5, 20 and 15 days’ each. The DIETs have also provisioned a five-day orientation programme on SEP to discuss all its key components like objectives, lesson planning, assessment, conducting school profile, writing reflective diary, conduct action research, etc. Unlike other three states, they have placed student-teachers under the overall control of heads of the school (Curriculum and Syllabus, D.El.Ed., SCERT, Delhi, 2014 pp. 128–34).

In all the states, the duration of school-based learning is almost similar; however, there are variations in visualising this time period in terms of its execution. Also, the primary role of teacher-educator is to mentor and monitor the student-teachers throughout the school experience programme.

SCHOOL INTERNSHIP — WHAT MATTERS BUT DOESN’T EXIST?

School-DIET Partnership: Every student-teacher has to spend at least

80 working days in a government school to internalise school level processes as well as practice as a regular teacher. To make it a meaningful experience for them, the DIET must have structured partnership with internship schools so that schools also equally own the school internship component of the course, and provide student-teacher desirable space to learn as well as to perform. Concerned institution and the internship schools jointly have to map out the roles of each other to systematically and effectively support the student-teachers during their tenure at internship school as well as articulate student-teachers’ engagements in the school. The prevalent practices lack any such kind of structured partnership between DIET and schools and the faculty members at DIET simply communicate to the schools through a formal letter to allow student-teacher in the school for the expected duration. The curriculum by the NCTE, SIE, Chandigarh and SCERT clearly mentions it but does not elaborate it further. The curriculum prepared by SCERT, Delhi clearly mentions about the ownership of SEP schools so that schools could work with student-teacher collaboratively and enable student-teachers to prepare them as professional teachers.

Internship Schools: There is mostly uniformity in allocating schools to student-teachers by DIETs. It has been seen that individual and institutional factors often

influence decisions while allocating internship schools for individual student-teachers, thus negotiating with the quality of internship. In many institutions, the student-teachers are allowed to choose any government school in the vicinity of their current residence so that visiting the school is convenient to them. There are also evidences where institutions identify schools with inadequate teaching staff so that the issue of teacher inadequacy could be addressed temporarily. These practices somehow derail the idea of school internship. Bryk, Cambum and Louis (1999) found out several factors that facilitate professional community, including social trust among teachers, school size and principal leadership. Building on this work, Bryk *et al.* (2010) argued that schools that have better learning environments for teachers are also providing better learning environment for students. Kraft and Papay (2014) also revealed in their research that teachers improved at faster rate, as measured by student test score gains, while working in schools with better environment. Jackson and Bruegmann (2009) demonstrated that teachers become better teachers in higher achieving schools because they have more efficient colleagues from whom they can learn effective instruction. The prevalent practices for school selection are non-systematic in terms that they do not primarily aim at strengthening professional capacity

of teacher. The study on “*What are the school types that matter for school internship*” reveals that the school leadership, classroom environment, and teacher beliefs collectively shape teacher-learning (Zeichner and Gore, 1990). This highlights the need to allocate student-teachers potential schools who have desired school characteristics so that they could prepare themselves as professional teachers.

Frameworks for Year One and Year Two School Internship: The D.El.Ed. course has two phases of school internship, one in each year. School internship during Year-One primarily focuses on school observation, evaluation of resource material (including textbooks) and reflection sharing, whereas student-teachers are expected to perform their role as a regular teacher during Year-Two school internship. This idea seems worthy in terms of easy mentoring and monitoring, engaging all the teachers keeping out any complexity in the process and implementing school internship smoothly. The study carried out by Candice Bocala has argued for this idea. The study revealed that the teachers who have rich experience of teaching, always prefer to experiment their knowledge in the field. In contrast to this, the teacher coming for the course without any teaching experience, wants to observe actual practices in field. If we agree with this study, the idea of simply putting all the student-teachers in a common

template maybe useful for some, but not for all because in D.El.Ed. course, students come from diverse background where some of them already have exposure to teaching while others are novice. As the primary objective of school internship is preparing professional teachers, it will be important to look into what suits to each student-teacher and place her/him in internship accordingly.

Frameworks for Mentoring and Monitoring: The visualised primary roles of faculty members of DIETs are to mentor and monitor student-teachers' practices during internship. The faculty members visit schools and discuss the experience of student-teachers. It is noteworthy that the decision of what to mentor and what to monitor lies with the individual faculty members. The absence of any common framework at DIET level leads to complete absence of space for mutual sharing amongst faculty members visiting different schools and interacting with student-teachers. Having a common understanding on principles of mentoring and monitoring will better enable faculty members of DIET to systematise mentoring and monitoring during school internship. It becomes even more essential in cases where the DIET faculty members themselves have not been prepared/trained adequately for such roles (This is a different aspect but nevertheless pertinent to the issue being discussed).

School Internship and Action Research: Action research in the school is being considered as a key element that can contribute in capacity development efforts of any practitioner. The guidelines document on restructuring and reorganising the centrally-sponsored scheme on teacher education (2012) in India strongly recommends for action research at school and DIET level. It has also been reflected in D.El.Ed. curricula of all studied states except the curriculum suggested by NCTE. The student-teacher during their internship will identify problem and resolve it through action research. Placing it in school internship without proper induction on action research becomes a burden for the students that merely engages student-teachers without any linkages with their professional development.

Orientation on School Internship: The curriculum developed by SCERT, Delhi has given due attention to prepare student-teachers through a five-day orientation on what and how the student-teachers will be doing during school internship. This preparatory phase is missing in all other studied states' curriculum. In such case, either it is conducted by negotiating with school internship working days or by manipulating with the content of other similar core components of the course.

Primary Impressions of School Internship: The time space given to the course, 80 working days for both the year, clearly indicates

the recognition of importance of school-based learning in preparing professional teachers across all states. The interaction with concerned faculty at DIETs and student-teachers reveals that the allocated time is actually used for the same purpose. But, the content detailed out in the curriculum for school internship points out the difference between school internship and other component of D.El.Ed courses. While the courses other than school internship have been detailed out in a thoughtful model that includes rationale, design of the course, objectives, detailing of content, mode of transaction, practical exercises, assessment and list of reference material, this model is missing for school internship. There is hardly anything about content, framework for implementation of school internship and reference material to better understand the usefulness of school internship. This is an indication of the ignorance of the importance of school internship and dominance of other components in the course.

CONCLUSION

Teaching has been considered as a non-linear practice. Teaching has also been viewed as an assemblage that is shaped by teachers' belief, school context and classroom environment collectively. This point of view strongly advocates for pivotal role of school-based experience

that would significantly contribute in preparing student-teachers as professional practitioners. The time space generated in the course is acknowledgeable but it must be planned systematically. The DIET-School partnership must be established with a common understanding and defined achievable. The states must have an operation plan to implement it in expected manner even if there is a lack of qualified faculty members in many DIETs. The faculty members need to chalk out how the individual teachers should be sent to school so that she/he get maximum opportunity for learning and experimenting. Each and every engagement needs to be reviewed in the terms that it contributes to professional development of student-teachers. Clarity on mentoring and monitoring, role of action research in school internship, content designing in curriculum will further strengthen the idea of school internship.

WAY FORWARD

The primary purpose of this study was to focus attention on transactional strategy of school internship. There is further need to inquire into other important aspects also like clarity of objectives as some of them are simply activities; possibility of distraction due to huge expectation from student-teachers in each internship phase, assessment of student-teachers which is mostly based on perception of mentors and documentation by

student-teachers, etc. Studying these aspects may better support in strengthening the efforts of teacher preparation programmes.

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