

Improving Quality of Teachers: Why and How?

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Abstract

Teacher quality plays a critical role in affecting student's performance. Not only do policy makers hold students to high standards, but they have elevated their expectations for teacher standards also. Emphasising teacher educators have much to contribute to the development of quality amongst the teachers; the author offers suggestions for improving quality of teachers.

Introduction

The most important contribution academe can make to supporting learning in our country is if colleges and universities would commit their substantial resources to better preparing those who become elementary and secondary school teachers. Although colleges and universities may genuinely strive to prepare education students effective teachers, the beginning teacher typically enters the world of full time teaching fairly naive. Critics of teacher training programmes lament the intellectual emptiness of the curriculum and the lack of connections between

what is taught and the realities teachers find when they walk into the classroom. Frequently, there is a disparity between the academic practices that colleges and universities teach their students and the experiences students actually encounter as beginning teachers.

Schools today face enormous pressure to educate an increasingly diverse and complex student body. Croker (1999) maintained that to be successful, education students have to balance notions of teaching based on their preparation at the institution with the reality they face in the classroom. High expectations of what children

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should know and be able to do, an increasingly diverse student population and breakthrough in research about how children learn, increase the pressure on teachers to possess the skills and knowledge necessary to educate children in the 21st century (Shankar, 1996). To improve student learning, there is no need to change the structure, rather change the instructional practices of teachers. The schools that seem to do best are those that have a clear idea of what kind of instructional practice they wish to produce, and then design a structure to go with it (Wong and Wong, 2009).

Better teachers are the key to improving public education and that colleges of education have a responsibility to prepare teachers accordingly. Studies do show a positive connection between the level of teacher preparation and the degree of impact and performance in the classroom (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2002). It is felt that pre-service training focuses almost exclusively on knowledge acquisition, with little attention to pedagogy, instructional practices and classroom management skills is not preparing teacher for the 21st century (NCTE, 1998).

Although understanding the subject content is important, to be successful in the classroom, teachers should also be able to do in the domains like student development, diverse learners, multiple instructional strategies, motivation and management, communication and technology, assessment, professional growth, etc. Therefore, the key issue for teacher educators should be to develop effective teaching skills in those who have

the potential to become good teachers (Andrews, 2000). They should provide teacher trainees with challenging instruction or educating them deeply, either in the content they will teach or in the knowledge and skills of their profession like encouraging students to persevere, strategies for explaining difficult material, methods of managing a productive and respectful classroom, etc.

Strategies for Improving the Quality of Teachers

The following strategies in this regard may prove useful:

Modeling by Teacher Educators

Teacher educators should model the strategies and theories they teach and promote. Learning the theories of intelligence, personality learning and motivation is important but teacher trainees need to understand how to apply them in the classroom. In other words teacher trainees should be taught how to use the information aspect for solving problems in general and teaching in particular. Therefore teacher educators should create 'Environment in the classroom'. Pose a problem before the teacher trainees and help them find solutions to these problems. Provide them with materials so that they can do the experiment in the class. Assign them with projects, take them on field trips. This way they will experience the educators actually teaching the manner that they want them to teach. This will lead to a deeper understanding of the concept in question, which in turn help the trainees successfully apply and incorporate it in to their own classroom. Hence the need arises for the teacher

educators to delve on specialised skills that add quality to the professional functioning.

Current Classroom Experience

Teacher educators should visit the classroom sites to see how students and the process of teaching have changed. How there is a shift in the emphasis in learning environments from teacher-centred to learner-centred; where teachers move from being the key source of information and transmitter of knowledge to becoming guides for sufficient learning; and where the role of students changes from one of passively receiving information to being actively involved in their own learning. Observing the new trends and processes that are found in many classrooms and then incorporating this knowledge in to the course work would be a useful tool for teacher educators to use in order to prepare pupil teachers for the reality of the teaching world.

Restructuring Field Experience

Field experience remains an integral part of teacher education programme. It affords pupil teachers the chance to visit school sites. Sound field experience should provide opportunities to pupil teachers to visit school sites for observing experienced teachers at work while learning how students learn, how to assess learning, and other effective teaching strategies; and then actually teaching a group of children. Further, field experience can be provided in a variety of settings.

Continuous Professional Development

Research affirms that the single most

important determinant of what students learn is what their teacher knows. One of the most important factors in a high quality education is the knowledge, experience, and capability of the classroom teacher. There is strong evidence that having a high-quality teacher affects learning and is an important factor in explaining student test score gains (Clotfelter, Ladd, and et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond and Youngs, 2002; King, 2003; Loeb, 2000; Wayne and Youngs, 2003). One widely cited study by economist Eric Hanushek (1992) suggests that the estimated difference in annual achievement growth between having a good and bad teacher can be more than one grade-level equivalent in test performance. Therefore, to improve student learning, it is imperative that teacher learning be improved. With the changing needs of the society, teacher educators and in-service teachers have to be up-to-date with the knowledge aspect and the use of ICTs. In this regard orientation programmes foster desirable competencies in them which is helpful in achieving required quality. Refresher courses, seminars, conferences, workshops, extension lectures, etc. and other training programmes can facilitate them with new approaches and methods of teaching, skill inculcation techniques communicative as well as analytical skills.

Education systems around the world are increasing pressure to use the ICTs to teach students the knowledge and skills they need in the 21st century. Three Rs for the ICT based 21st century are:

- *Reading*: Finding information by

- searching in written sources, observing, collecting and recording.
- *Writing*: Communication in hypermedia involving all types of information and all media; and
 - *Arithmetic*: Designing objects and actions (UNESCO, 2005).

For education to reap the full benefits of ICTs in learning, it is essential that pre- and in-service teachers are able to effectively use these skills for learning. Teacher education institutions must provide the leadership for pre- and in-service teachers and model new pedagogies and tools for learning. Unless teacher educators model effective use of technology in their own classes, it will not be possible to prepare a new generation of teachers capable of employing a variety of technology tools into all phases of academic, administrative and research and extension functions.

Therefore it is imperative for the teacher educators and in-service teachers to get trained with the ICTs to enhance their skills to compete with the quality standards of education. They cannot be expected to learn these skills in their teaching after a one-time workshop. They need in-depth, sustained assistance in the use of the technology. Also, they must have sufficient access to digital technologies and the internet in their institutions also.

Redrafting Teacher Education Courses

There is need to draft teacher education courses that have totally specialised knowledge and specialised skills. More getting theoretical knowledge of philosophy, psychology or such other

subjects is not sufficient. The present situation demands our future teachers start philosophising or thinking psychologically to find solution to their classroom problems.

- Integrate action research projects into curriculum.
- Classroom management course must be added. More instruction in classroom management techniques and parent communication strategies should be provided.
- Integrate ICT into curriculum. The aim of teacher education is to develop skills and appropriate knowledge among teacher trainees for using and integrating right technology in an appropriate manner. So there has to be change in terms of curriculum at pre-service level. Focus should be shifted from learning from technology to learning with technology in order to facilitate learning for children having different learning styles and making learning more effective involving more senses in a multimedia context.

Making Provision for Induction Programmes for Beginning Teachers

Teacher induction programmes provide new teachers with the needed support during the frequently difficult transition from college student to the actual classroom teaching experience. Induction programmes may also aid in forming a professional base on which the beginning teacher can build his or her teaching career. Successful induction programme can be based upon four elements:

- Using orientation as a means to familiarise new teachers with school

procedures and to introduce them to existing faculty, culture and resources of the school.

- Training to assist teachers with classroom management and organisational strategies.
- Support from a mentor. Mentors can provide novice teachers with invaluable help by sharing teaching strategies, classroom management tips, and offering encouragement and support during stressful moments.
- Assessing new teacher's teaching performance.

Conclusion

Teacher educators of today have to shoulder dual responsibilities. They have not only to nurture present day teachers

but have also to prepare teachers for the future. It is the teacher alone who can do justice to the profession, to the students, to the academic community and to the nation as a whole. So he has to acquire professional competencies, commitment and empowerment to perform multiple tasks inside and outside the classroom. These and other similar steps would help improve quality and performance of teacher educators, teachers and their students, on the one hand, and development of better human resources in the society, on the other. Let us hope for the best in the days to come, to get a bunch of quality teachers in future who will look after the well-being of the cause of education.

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