

Possible role of DIETs in devising new curriculum

Abstract

As per the policy document Govt. of India, DIETs are the premier institutes at the district level, which look after both pre-service and in-service teacher education at the elementary level. The D.Ed. course is required to gear potential teachers to deal with field level challenges. The faculty of DIETs is thus familiar with ground level reality. While revising the D.Ed. curriculum in Telangana, it was felt that faculty from the DIETs and other Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) as well as Teachers Resource Group members should be involved in the exercise so that the focus is on the gaps in the existing curriculum, both in theory and in field level practices.

Development of D.El.Ed. Curriculum in Telangana - Some reflections

During the implementation of basic education projects such as the district primary education programme (DPEP) and the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), strong State Level Resource Groups (SRGs) were developed in all the subject areas. Over the years, these groups have been involved as Resource Persons in various training in elementary education. They were also involved along with the DIET faculty in designing D.El.Ed. curriculum in the State. In Telangana, we have conducted 3 workshops with the SRGs, selected district resource persons (DRPs), classroom teachers, DIET faculty and discussed field level challenges and issues to address the same in Teacher Education curriculum.

The field level challenges and gaps being observed and the reflection on same led to these being included in the process of curriculum design for Teacher Education at elementary level. They also influenced the selection of knowledge, pedagogical approaches, assessment procedures etc. and focused on realities in classrooms and schools. The Pre-service Teacher Education Curriculum was revised based on field inputs of the DIET faculty who critiques the existing courses including the field experience part.

Areas of change and focus in the revised D.El.Ed. Curriculum

The curriculum development team, being aware of direction of reform, aligned the revised D.El.Ed

in such a way that content and pedagogy enables trainees for self-learning and independent thinking. Key areas required for a teacher were especially highlighted and some new papers added and the title revised to reflect the changes. Based on the inputs and reflections of the team, the following areas were highlighted in the revised D.El.Ed. curriculum:

- Early literacy and numeracy, with theory and appropriate teaching practice based on classes 1 and 2 textbooks. Earlier, the trainees usually selected 4th and 5th classes for teaching practice and never classes 1st and 2nd. Now, this has been made compulsory by giving 50% of weightage in the teaching practice to the transaction of classes 1 and 2 textbooks. Trainees will then take up teaching practices for classes 1&2 and 3, 4, 5 separately.
- Development of subject specific and class specific curricular standards and learning indicators at elementary level. The reforms in School Education in evolving standards and learning indicators are reflected in the Teacher Education Curriculum.
- The revised curriculum tries to ensure deeper engagement with disciplinary knowledge and integrates it into the pedagogy courses.
- Emphasis was laid on development of deep conceptual clarity and doing conceptual mapping of a whole area related to a topic.

- Given that the school textbooks are aligned to the State Curriculum Framework, SCF-2011, focus was also on how to use the textbooks effectively and engage students in active learning in a participatory way.
- Engagement with deeper understanding of disciplinary knowledge: The pedagogy courses integrates content knowledge and sufficient time is provided for dealing content matter of pedagogical subjects. Developing conceptual clarity through conceptual mapping and ways of introducing the concepts have been discussed in the D.Ed. curriculum. Further, how to engage students with deep content knowledge which adds value to the textbook content is also focused on for meaningful classroom transaction in schools.
- Developing appropriate perspective of trainees on the basic areas such as understanding childhood and understanding learning. There are several assumptions among teachers and trainees about children and learning which are not based on any scientific evidence. Therefore, deep and critical discussion on these areas has been included.
- Separate paper "**Knowledge, Curriculum and Pedagogy**" was developed to discuss Nature and Construction of knowledge, Ways of creating knowledge etc.
- Criteria of curriculum construction, connections among knowledge, curriculum, pedagogy and learners to be discussed with the trainees.
- Focus on issues of diversity and inclusion including gender, caste, and class.
- Two separate areas on Pedagogy and language across curriculum emphasise the common principles in these.
- Papers on Health & Physical Education and Arts & Cultural Education, Value Education & Life Skills, Work & Computer Education etc. were modified and strengthened.
- There is a separate paper on "**Understanding Self**" to enable trainees to understand their own biases so that through a reflective process, they can actively foster skills and commitment for improving themselves as individuals and professionals.
- Exposure to alternative approaches and innovations to include marginalised children.

Field experience programme

The field experience programme is an essential component of all pre-service teacher education programmes as it gives the student-teachers a brief taste of what actual school teaching is all about. In the new revised programme, attempts have been made to enrich the field experience and make it more relevant. For this:

- About 40% of weightage has been given to field based practices and projects in non-pedagogical subjects. Within that, 70% weightage has been given to the practicum, teaching practice and internships in the pedagogical subjects. The idea is to see the translation of understanding of theory into field based practices i.e. examining theory in the field.
- The key principles of NCF-2005 such as connecting knowledge, life outside the school, keeping children away from rote learning, enriching the curriculum by making it less textbook centered are addressed by increasing the field based projects in Teacher Education Curriculum.
- The alternative approaches and innovations from the NGOs for improved literacy and numeracy practices, conducting bridge courses for out-of-school children etc. have been discussed and taken up as a part of teaching practice.

Changes in the Transactional process

Along with changes in the curriculum and syllabus, we have also tried to change the way classroom teaching occurs in the D.Ed. colleges. While this requires extensive interactions with teachers and orientations, we have proposed some guidelines that can help in changing the transactional process. For example,

Voices of Teachers and Teacher Educators

- Existing way of treating knowledge external to learners needs to be changed, foregrounding learner experiences should be the focus.
- Experience of tasks needing independent thinking, reflection & collaborative learning among trainees should be ensured.
- Emphasis should be on co-curricular subjects, both in theory and practice.
- A programme in every subject on '**Reading and Reflection**' of basic books has been introduced
- The pedagogy should include classroom discussions, reading the texts and reflecting on them, individual and group presentations, projects, field tasks, experiential learning.
- The assessment process for the course now involves providing feedback and continuous dialogue to share suggestions with the learners.
- The DIET faculty is expected to develop new questions and assignments to help learners reflect and analyse their learning.
- The existing practice of teaching i.e. isolated lessons/ concepts is addressed by making trainees deal with one complete unit along with exercise part and conducting Formative Assessment and reflecting on practice teaching.
- Focus should be on critical pedagogy and social construction to question the assumptions and beliefs about knowledge, learner, learning processes and on other issues of gender, caste, class and develop habits of independent thinking, reflection and collaborative learning among the trainees.
- While teaching, reflections and small studies to authentically understand teaching-learning should also happen.
- ICT can be integrated in transacting curriculum through groups and Open Educational Resources (OER).
- The trainees develop and transact two (2) multimedia teaching activities for each methodology paper.

Challenges

While the curriculum has been revised, there are still many challenges in its successful implementation. For example, the DIETs are insufficiently staffed and the faculty required for teaching all subjects are not available. There are also a large number of private training colleges with their own set of problems. For example:

- There is no mechanism for proper regulation of the large number of private colleges and as a result they lack academic focus.
- The DIETs are unable to orient and train the faculty in private teacher education colleges, due to lack of numbers as well as capability.
- Assessment processes are also compounded by large numbers.
- Sources of learning such as library, labs, ICT resources in the TEIs are inadequate.

There is a need for more orientation and capacity building of the DIET and the SCERT faculty on the revised curriculum and the basic concepts of education and contemporary trends in pedagogy and field based practices. All this is needed to overcome deficiency in Teacher's Knowledge base.

Some of our learnings in the course of working with schools and while undertaking curricular and evaluation reforms

During the curriculum revision process and also in our previous work we have learnt some valuable lessons. For example, DIETs need to be engaged in the formulation of State Level school curriculum and textbook development processes under the guidance of well-informed National Level educational persons. This will not only develop their capacities but also help them understand the decision making and selection process thus enabling them to conduct more informed teacher orientations. Further, this engagement cannot be sporadic; the DIET faculty needs to be engaged with the reform process for sufficiently long time to develop the ability to lead the effort.

Lastly, if they are to meet these expectations, the DIETs need to be adequately populated with the

faculty and provided with capacity building opportunities through workshops or/and online courses in collaboration with organisations engaged with the state's reform processes i.e. VidyaBhavan Society, Eklavya, Homi Baba Centre for Science Education etc. The current understaffed DIETs find it difficult to manage their day to day tasks and this effects their motivation to take part in other activities.

Areas that still need attention in D.El.Ed. Curriculum

While efforts have been made in the revision process to undertake various reforms, there are still many areas that could not be included. Perspective building on the part of student teacher on how quality can bring equity, social justice, and how poor learning levels impacts the nation building and national identity has to more extensively dealt with. There are many other spheres that need more attention such as:

- Care for children and love for them: Opening up this phrase to understand the nuances associated. Does it mean that teachers should be with them, should understand children, their family background and their social, cultural and economic context especially for first generation literates? Is anything else a part of this?
- Diversity in the Class Room i.e., social, cultural, linguistic which can be a positive factor. How to capitalize these diversities that the children bring to the class rooms?

- Participation in community activities and understanding socio economic background and challenges they face and take a proactive role in encouraging the parents and community to participate in the school programmes and activities.
- MGT and multi-level situations in most of the schools is a reality with grade specific textbooks. Focus on how deal such classes.

Innovations and exemplary practices

The team also explored different practices in different states to understand their usefulness and decide if they should be included in the new curriculum. It has been suggested that documenting local knowledge resources by Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) can be part of project-work of the trainees, as being practiced by the DIETs of Uttarakhand. Further, conduct of school assembly/ prayer in Maharashtra, Mid-Day Meal programme in Tamil Nadu, ODL programme in Chhattisgarh, the process of curricular reforms and textbook development in the States of Andhra Pradesh/ Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Bihar etc. are the exemplary practices as per the JRM reports. These need to be explored and implemented. The curriculum reform process has now expanded to include our DIETs and school faculty and the effort now is to further widen it to include best practices and ideas from across the country.