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In-Service Capacity Building of Teachers

Abstract

The paper considers the mechanism for In-Service Capacity Building of Teachers and points out the need for systems that have participation of teachers with a sense for their need, choice and purpose. It suggests that mechanism for large scale training through cascade needs to be reimaged as different from replication of the previous stage of the cascade in a manner that the participant teachers feel respected, stimulated and excited about work.

Teacher education in the last four decades has been drawing attention for many reasons. From the late sixties emphasis has been laid on it. Starting with the Kothari commission 1966 and then in the National Education Policy of 1986 and the Program of Action of 1992, teacher capacity building has been taken up at an unprecedented scale and in many-many different ways. In the early nineties there was a great enthusiasm generated for capacity building and orientation of teachers. These efforts involved besides the state education structure and the people in it, many other organisations as well. Prior to this, the NCERT and the SCERT had already started training programs that were organised at scale and reached many teachers. As the government institutions were seriously engaged with developing their own model of training there were educational institutions outside the government fold who were working with the government system also and evolving ways to make teacher training effective and meaningful. The interaction between these sets of institutions had started generating ideas about the nature, content, method and logistics of training.

The SSA and the RMSA set up systematic processes of training on scale and many of these were done

through independent bodies created specifically for this purpose and many were co-ordinated by the SCERT. There were however, commonalities in these. These included a multi-tiered model of training. Starting with the State team to the District (often including and located in the DIET) and then the block and/or the cluster. Many training and stay facilities of mixed quality were created to make this possible. There were many variations used for this with the key requirement of scale in a 'reasonable' time frame. In this sense these further expanded the range and area and accelerated the speed of the reach of the training processes involving many more people. We examine here the mechanism for a large scale process and the key elements that may be kept in mind for such an effort to be meaningful. This analysis in the light of the recognition that teachers' need to refresh and learn continuously. The question apart from considering how best can that be done is also what does it mean to be refreshed and continue to learn. As we will see this question is often overlooked in the desire to quickly reach more teachers.

Massive in-Service teacher training started with the MOST program after the New Education Policy of the 1986. This was followed by the SOPT in the

year 1993-94. These programs were organised in a cascade manner and reached a few million teachers. These trainings were happening at a time when alternative ways of in-service training were being explored both for the public school teachers and for others by organisations working in education. Some of these were small scale and located at the institution that was delivering it, but others of which the Hoshnagabad Science Teaching Program is a prime example were also in large numbers and located at public institution sites. Unlike the MOST and the SOPT trainings these were not cascade trainings. The HSTP in particular involved university and college faculty to directly train teachers and these faculty members worked alongside elementary school teachers as trainers. The idea of college teachers training school teachers was also seen in the earlier extension model of training for the secondary school teachers. Run through the extension departments of the teacher training colleges these formal training programs were broadly of two categories. The refresher courses and the short term intensive courses.

The refresher courses as described by Vedanayagam E.G. 1966 suggests that these courses were weekend courses at that time and were focussed at bringing to the teachers ideas of methods, materials and models that they could not access otherwise. The short term intensive programs were longer, could be up to 3 weeks in duration and were content focussed. They were also to help teachers to start teaching a subject that they had not learnt during graduation. Apart from this there were other possibilities where teachers worked together. These included seminars, study circles, action researches and demonstration lessons at the school site.

The programs of the extension departments were very different from the subsequent massive large scale programs. The earlier programs were slow in outreach and had a broad common framework but were very differently focussed and directed. The resource persons were mostly college teachers and the focus of the trainings was largely content. The MOST and the SOPT trainings on the other hand were comparatively expanded far more rapidly. The module was developed centrally and repeated in the same way through a series of steps to the teachers. The trainers at these levels comprising persons with a largely different background. The first training was of the people who would then train other teachers. This was perhaps the first example of a cascade model training in India and was organised in a hierarchical format. These have been followed by the trainings under the Lok Jumbish, Bihar Education Programme, Education For all project of UP and then the DPEP, SSA and the RMSA subsequently. Most programs under these were in the cascade mode. The manner of training, the period of training, the content, the context, the materials, arrangements and even the purposes all kept on changing.

The rationale and reasons for in-service training in the education policy statement of Lord Curzon in 1904 suggests its need to build a relationship between the training college and the school and try to ensure that the methods taught in the college are used by the teacher in the school. The 1913 policy document suggests that the periodic trainings are a must to prevent the teacher from deteriorating. In 1929 the Hartog committee suggests in-service training to combat the isolation felt by the teacher and to give her motivation and encouragement. It suggests publications for teachers in

regional languages, refresher courses, teacher conferences and meetings and teacher associations. The subsequent commissions on education also underlined the need for teachers to undergo periodic training and updating. As we have said the first centralised effort for providing in-service training was focussed on making the teacher aware of the thrust ideas of the National Policy on Education 1986. It aimed to sensitise teachers to the then major concerns in education. These included the commitment to universalisation of elementary education, encouraging the learner-centered approach and enrichment of their content knowledge. The subsequent Special Orientation Programme for Primary School Teachers (SOPT) from 1993-94 was to implement the ideas of the MLL based approach to the classrooms and use of the Operation Black Board materials to improve quality of class-rooms. It aimed to continue the effort towards UEE and adoption of the child-centered approach to teaching. (Vedanayagam E. G. 1966)

The Lok Jumbish program and similar programs in the other states were made possible through the support of external grants and subsequently through loans. Based on some analysis of the earlier macro efforts they made some radical departures to make training with quality at scale possible. In the conceptualisations and implementation of the training many non-governmental organisations were involved. In some cases a few non-government educational organisations expanded their team in order to fulfill the role of delivering training at the massive scale. The initial trainings showed a reluctance to use the cascade model and instead created a system where a large number of resource persons worked with groups of teachers in small teams. The aim of the effort in this training

was to make them feel empowered and feel more capable, motivated and purposeful. The recognition for alternative ways of interact with the experienced teachers being trained and the importance of hearing their voices and their articulations led to a different model of resource team constitution and their preparation. The training at scale meant apart from the larger number of resource persons, required many centers where such workshops could be held parallelly as well and then back to back also. The multiple levels of cascade were somewhat reduced by ensuring that the pace of the training was not too rapid and the preparation time for the resource group reasonably large. The teachers training itself was for longer time and focussed around content and method praxis. There were sessions on educational principles as well but they were un-linked to any theoretical grounding for the teachers. The interaction was instead at the level of feeling and sharing of life experience and wisdom. We would come back to the challenges of this subsequently but at the moment the other important point that needs to be stated is that these trainings were designed and implemented with the participation of and based on the experiences of other organisations that had been working in education. These did not have the same set of principles in details, but had overall common understanding of education and of training. The result was thus a blend of these but in implementation it evolved its own independence both due to the number of people involved and the nature of the situation they were working in.

The pace of these efforts even though much more than the efforts of the non-governmental effort was not enough for the large system and hence under the DPEP faster and rapid scale up was envisaged and the trainings went to

the cascade model. The cascade model is less resource intensive in terms of time and cost also in some sense can be more participative. It however, at risk of becoming mechanical, repetitive, meaningless, diluted, distorted and may become one way transmission. The initial exercises of cascade model were sensitive to some of the criticisms of the cascade model and tried to build possibilities that were somewhat free of that. In fact the Lok Jumbish and other projects also had elements of going to scale, but at a pace that they thought was reasonable to go to school. In Lok Jumbish the training was conceptualised by a large group through discussions, trials and then reflection on the trial. The conceptualisation group was to be diffused through the interactions with teachers present there. This was important as the training sessions may have to accommodate to the participants and also help the team delivering the training understand the reason behind what was visualised in the sessions and in the training as a whole. Clearly this required a long effort at preparing the flexible module and developing a collective understanding of the main purposes of the training as well as the non-negotiables.

They DPEP effort in many states tried to fulfil the need for reaching all teachers in a reasonable time frame and address the challenges of the cascade model. The programs were created around carefully structured modules and supplementary materials. In fact this started with Lok Jumbish and the BEP, having modules with clear focus and detailed outlines of what had to be done. The initial modules allowed the facilitators to consolidate the session based on the group discussions in the training session and allowed the views emerging from the group tasks to dominate. The attempt to make uniform the outcomes and homogenise

the learnings alongwith the lack of confidence in the facilitators due to the rapid pace led to the modules containing the expected outcomes of discussions and the entire session in to the summary. This meant the training was no longer experiential or reflective, but became an attempt to transmit what was pre-conceived. This made the entire exercise meaningless and with the module being widely available alongwith no space for alternative ideas to be included in the summary, the exercise became just of reading the module and that to prefuntorily. The exercise was not to analyse, debate and construct on what was being said in the module, but to accept it as given as facts.

This worsened as the pace of training increased as 'facilitator' word lost its meaning entirely and in many cases could not respond to the issues being raised by teachers. The modules stopped being created through trialing and a wider involvement of stakeholders. The Lok Jumbish had the teachers and the cluster team members as a part of the process and the academic leads of the development process were people who had interacted with the community in many cases and were atleast sensitive to the need for awareness to their aspirations but the subsequent efforts did not have the time or involvement of people who had this background or even the awareness of the importance of these components. The process became an effort to transmit ideas to teachers in a hurry.

The underlying sensibilities in these were of filling up gaps in the knowledge and abilities of teachers. The major belief of those designing and impementing the effort was that teachers do not know and are indifferent to their role. There are a few exceptions who are great teachers and they can be used as fellow trainers, but

the rest need to be nudged, coaxed and forced to follow what was ‘proper and appropriate’. The follow up trainings and other meetings were similar as they could not reflect on the experiences of the teachers in the class-rooms. There were other challenges in the organisation of this massive training at this scale. The logistics were not easy to manage and the sensitivity to the needs of teachers coming from outside could not be maintained. Unlike Lok Jumbish not enough effort was made to improve the conditions in all States. The construction of the facilities for training came too late and were also not perhaps adequate. The trainings therefore did not go down well with the teachers and led to a huge outcry.

There is a need to analyse this failure and the possible way forward given the fact that there is a need for teachers to have the opportunity to take a break and think about what they are doing and feel they are continuing to learn. They should not feel lonely and isolated in their jobs when located in small schools in rural areas. There is also a need for them to need to refresh content and clarify the doubts they have in their work. The criticism of the way these massive trainings were taken up and the way teachers reacted to it has led to major re-thinking about the training. The problem has been identified mainly in terms of the fact that the trainings were not as per the needs of the teachers and also that the logistics of taking them out to a different place and have residential training. It was also concluded that the teachers do not like to be disturbed in their holidays and hence the trainings should be a part of the work schedule and not outside it and in any case they do not like to have long workshops and trainings. Since, the interactions are now organised during the session implies that it can not ever have

teachers from the same school sharing their experience as a group or construct the way forward ahead. The monthly or bi-monthly meetings can also only be of the same nature making the possibility of school as a structure reflecting on its work impossible. The belief that teacher needs have to be addressed led to a lot of effort to ask them what they need and construct trainings on that. These efforts however, also do not seem to have changed the quality of participation and attitude to training.

In order to see the way forward it is important to recognise that teachers do participate in processes where they benefit. Most of these are not developed by asking them for their needs, but are rather developed based on an understanding of what would be useful for them. The examples of these are too wide-spread to all be mentioned but the trainings under the Hoshangabad science teaching program involving large number of government and private teachers and the recent efforts of the learning centers for teachers of Azim Premji Foundation are two examples that have worked in partnership with the govt for sustained capacity building of teachers. These efforts have some common features such as they have invoked a certain spirit of voluntarism and personal stake. The teams leading them are able to and willing to listen, understand and learn. They keep open minds are willing to admit, they do not know something and it is alright not to know something and not to hide it but to make the effort to learn it. The effort is to include teachers in the process of learning and relating it to what they need and can use. Attempt is to increase the role and responsibilities that the teachers can take with constant support and guidance.

The programs are structured such that the experiences of teachers are considered relevant and their

questions of merit. Specific responses and materials can be curated for the specific issues that arise with mutual support and referring to existing literature and expertise in that area. The key points are the nature of the processes and the actual expertise and the attitude of the facilitators/trainers/experts. These three terms are all needed as they are essential for the sessions and the program to be meaningful. The atmosphere of learning and discourse where questions and alternate thoughts are valued, respected and talked about. All this is essential for their participation, their desire and their ability to learn. These examples are possible on some kind of scale and in fact at times even in the

large systems under the Lok Jumbish, The BEP and in DPEP effort in some States, the trainings had a certain attraction and energy for the teachers and they felt they learnt from it. They felt valued, respected and therefore felt it was important for them to participate in the training. The teacher education policy has all the basic elements that are necessary for making the effort at refreshing the teachers and maintaining their motivation possible, the difficulty is implementing that. There is now enough knowledge about what does not work and evidence of what may work. The point is to see how to construct and mould programs such that all this may happen.

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