

Voices of Teachers and Teacher Educators

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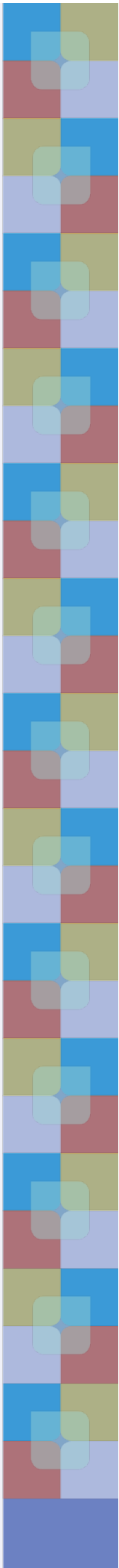
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Editorial

Twenty five years ago the committee set up by the Govt of India under the stewardship of Professor Yashpal submitted its short report in 1993. The report made some important points that covered content and process issues as well as organization and governance issues. 25 years hence is a good time to look at the key recommendations and what we think of them now. The most important of the point was about what must be the focus of what happens in school, what should the school aim for. The committee argued that the school programs were a burden as they were incomprehensible to the students. The focus was on more and more information with little emphasis on knowledge. This was in continuation of the efforts to talk about conceptual understanding as the focus of the school program and statements like doing 'less' is doing 'more'. It argued that the purpose of education should be not to provide answers but to raise curiosity of children and make them capable learners who are able to learn on their own later as well. The Yashpal committee had a great impact on the subsequent National Curriculum frameworks. The National Curriculum framework document of 2005 (NCF 2005) unequivocally reiterated the points made by the Yashpal committee and followed up on that with implications for syllabi, textbooks, assessment and teacher preparation. It also laid emphasis on the participation of teachers in the process of curriculum development up to the text book and assessment. It emphasised the need for inclusion of local elements and experiences in the school program and use them as the basis for further learning. This emphasis leads it to also argue for decentralized curricula and text books.

Given the recognition of the concept building in children as the focus and the diversity of backgrounds, experiences, needs and dispositions, the NCF 2005 also emphasized that the teacher should have the space to be flexible in her classrooms and follow her instincts based on the situation in the school and the social and physical environment. It pointed out the role of the teacher is not to teach the text but to bring out the concepts that are at the base of constructing the syllabus and the text book. One implication of this is that the syllabus and text books are a structure that has to be interpreted and developed by the teacher. This development should 'uncover' the underlying concepts and their linkage rather 'cover' the content. This idea also have been elaborated in the NCF 2005 document in the chapter on Learning and Knowledge. The report thus was a challenge to the information and rote based education that was prevalent at that time. It is for us to see and examine how far we are from it yet and how the kind assessments we use stand up to the critique emerging from the report of the committee.

Recognizing the increasing competition the Yashpal Committee flagged that as a danger and also expressed apprehension about the English medium education that was becoming attractive. The NCF 2005 elaborated this far more and pointed out the need for schooling in the home or in one of the neighborhood languages of the children particularly in the elementary classes. In the context of the situation today the committee would have perhaps said a lot about the private schools and the danger they pose by taking children away from the comfort of their own knowledge base, throwing them in to the situations where they feel inferior in many ways besides accentuating competition and all that goes with it. The Yashpal committee however, did not sufficiently dwell on the challenges of inclusion



and diversity. It did not acknowledge the perceptions of the community and the fractures within it. The narrative of curiosity and construction of a ideal democratic society and school as a place to make that possible did not adequately address or rather failed to recognize the challenges emerging from the increasing disparities and hence growing anxieties. It also perhaps did not consider it as a mandate or avoided the challenge of addressing the difference in prevalent ideologies about how societies should be and what should be the place and status different communities, women, castes and even of children in it. The sub-text of the NCF 2005 however, does point to these challenges and recognizes that curriculum is a and will remain a contested terrain that is impinged upon the prevalent geo-political and economic realities. It is this realization that underscores the emphasis on the State participation and major contribution to public education in a democratic country. It must have supportive and guiding role and make the financial and organizational commitment to ensure this. An assessment of the progress since the release of the report leaves a mixed picture. There ate many things that have not happened but there are many that have. We have a lot more dialogue and efforts towards changing the classrooms and making them more participative. There is a greater recognition for the ability and the experience of the children and incorporation of that in all aspects of the discourse on curriculum and curricular choices and taking it up to the classrooms. There is also a greater awareness of need for participation of teachers and children the inclusion of all in the educational process in an equitable manner. We debate the medium of instruction with greater clarity as also the way some of the abstractions and formal knowledge may be developed in the children. The text books show a great progression as also the discussions on assessment. The participation of the larger parent body and the community has increased and while that may have at present, led to a moving away from the recommendations of the committee report and the NCF 2005, the appreciation of some of the elements of these documents may gradually become more democratic. The role of the governments and the educational bodies of state and the nation would be crucial in this growth of understanding. The issue of governance was also raised by the committee and elaborated in the NCF 2005. Many subsequent discussions have drawn attention to the conflict between giving flexibility and freedom to the teacher and the need to guide and educate her. There is also a conflict between assuming the teacher to be self propelled and self directed and monitoring and directing her behavior in the school and the classroom. The need to build an academic ethos in the system has been recognized and emphasized since even the 1968 National education policy. The tensions of managing a large system and allowing for flexibility and exploration to students and hence the teachers and school is yet a challenge that has to be addressed. So in this 25th year of the presentation of the report we look towards the future with hope and apprehension of the serious challenge that we face towards the goal of equitable, meaningful and purposeful education for all.

The current issue of Voices of Teachers and Teacher Educators contains a spectrum of contribution in terms of the background of the authors, the areas they have written about, the nature of the contributions and the styles of writing. Many contributions received extensive feedback and suggestion from the reviewer who were extremely kind and patient with us and with

the contributors. While, we have included some articles in the current issue that is done with a express purpose of encouraging young researchers and practicing teachers to write for VTTE. We do hope that more of you will write and as we have been saying we welcome the contributions that are based on analysis of the overall situation, reflective analysis of experience, new piece of study or research, reviews of books, educational films, drama etc. among other things about schools, education and society with its changing dynamics.

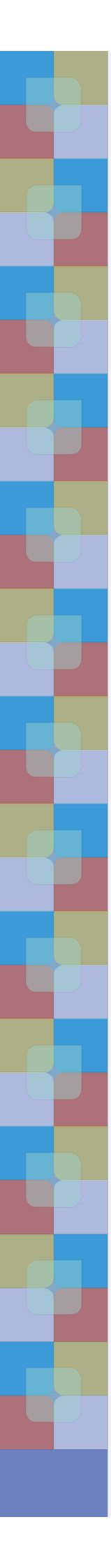
In the following we give a brief overview of the kind of articles that the present issue carries:

The first paper is of Indira Vijaysimha is based on the case study of a program where teacher development program seems to have contributed to the way they held there classes and used new practices that were developed during the process of interaction. It was a process that was not like a training but like a concerted exercise of professional development. The second paper by Nimrat poses a challenge of the present manner of vocational education and the extent of its relevance. She argues that the way forward has to look at this as vocationalisation of education rather than to create systems that prepare students for multiple vocational streams.

The next paper by Ronita is on building teaching learning processes using life and culture experiences in the light of changing understanding of teaching history in the text books of the NCERT brought out in 2006. Using the example of cricket and caste as a case study she points out how social history can be constructed for 9th graders through this. Her experience helps challenge the popular notion of history teaching and suggests that other possibilities may also exist. And the following paper by Madhuri Yerra and Ms Padma Sarangapani is based on the work with a teacher who is exploring the mediation practices of a middle-school science teacher while working with students on science in english. She practice involves bilingual meaning-making of concepts and developing their observation and reasoning, using everyday student contexts.

The article by Sriranjani Ranganathan and Sudha Premnath is based on the experience of a program taken up in 5 rural schools run by an organsiation in Andhra Pradesh. The schools have autonomy and are focussed on an approach that accommodates the diversity of communities whose children were in schools. The approach touches on curriculum, teacher development and engaging with the community. They point out that putting local knowledge formally into the program makes school natural learning places for all children. Following this is the paper by Rajshree, which is based on an empirical study conducted using a questionnaire and interview. It is focussed on the beliefs of pre-service teachers and analyses them in relation to the moral work of teaching using the categories psychological, educational and teaching beliefs and points out how teaching is a moral activity. She suggests that moral and intellectual teaching are inseparable and the teacher educator can help the future teachers identity and learn the qualities of an ideal teacher who, then, acts as the role model for this students.

The article by Rashmi Paliwal examines the experiences of the 30 year work of Eklavya towards the development of curriculum and trainings in the light of researches. She examines the expectations that are generally made from teachers and if they are realistic and whether teachers can work as mush on their capacity development as they are expected to in such efforts. And the article by Hriday



Kant Diwan discusses Distance Education and its importance in a democratic society. Though it is supposed to be a learner centered and a learner driven programmes, the paper laments the fact that it has become merely an exercise in certification. It suggests that improved use of ICT can make for under reach of higher education in a continuing form to sharp skills in the area of work and interest. The next set of articles are based on the experience of work with learners and an analysis of that. The first paper in this is the paper by Parul Malik and Anita Rampal, which suggests through a case study of an intercultural project that it is possible to build a sense of community and the feeling of ownership among teachers and students. They find that this institution using cotton is able to make for a work- based education that is integrated and an alternative to the euro-based western education and seems to be more democratic and gender sensitive. The article by Sunita Rana and Shubra Mishra suggests how science classrooms can be constructed with experiments so that children's formulations and understanding can be brought into the discussion and examined based on their own observations and data. They point out that engaging in this manner is the beginning of science education.

The article by Seema Shukla Ojha also falls in this to some extent. The paper analyses process of assessment in the context of history and the possibilities for an assessment process that is in a continuous and comprehensive framework. She gives a rubric that can be used for analysing the understanding of the primary sources of history as an example for history teaching. The article by Shehnaz a teacher from a rural govt. School shows the immense possibilities that can be explored by the teacher in making teaching of science active and interesting. She points out how children enthusiastically take part in and contribute to classroom being vibrant and experiments becoming possible within the limited facilities generally available in the school. The next article by Jayshankar Chaubey is on developing the ability to write and points out that it is more difficult to write than to speak. It gives reasons why writing is important to acquire for children in the primary classes and how it should not be reduced to copying or to writing 'sulekh' or other such tasks. It suggests taking in to account reasons for making children write and giving them appropriate tasks.

The paper by Preeti Vivek Mishra engages with the issue of teacher ethics while adopting an experiential-investigative tone as a practicing teacher-educator. She points out that while teaching is everywhere emphasised as an moral enterprise it gets challenged by the real situations and hesitations due relationships and accepted norms. She asks whether it should be expected that ethics would be practiced come what may or that is only an utopian dream.

The article by Vikas Kumar Singh comparatively examines the four aspects of religion, vocational studies, curriculum and gender relationships in the curricula of colonial South Africa and India. The paper argues that the colonial state rejected indigenous knowledge and oriented education to the development of people who would be servile and dependent. It reluctantly spread liberal values but the main thrust was to protect and promote the economic interests of the colonial state and promoted a discrimination based system where the lower strata were to fulfil expectations from them and women were to be seen as 'good housewives'. He points out that though largely similar in the the hegemonic character there were some differences in the two colonial curricula.

The paper by Vivek Singh & Ganga Tayeng presents the study of the differential attitudes using a scale developed for this purpose. The attitude investigated is of teacher educators and teacher-students towards the two year B.Ed Program and compares the Govt. & non-govt college students, tribal and non-tribal as well as male and female students finding some of these as significant. This subject requires more and deeper analysis.

The article by Mukesh Malviya a teacher from a govt. Primary school brings out another aspect. The author argues that school should have become a place for learning and building wisdom in children. They should relate to the life and need of what children need to explore and think about and encouraged to develop and test their won ideas to grapple with their lived situations. In this drawing examples from science he brings out. The way in which schools get limited to memorisation of unconnected facts and meaningless idea given in the textbooks. He suggests the science and its classrooms should provoke children to think about cause-effect relationships and how to make things work and in the process develop a rational out look towards events and phenomena.

The paper by Adithi Muralidhar is based on conversation with a student and presents the view of the student, the likes and dislikes. The focus in this is on school, science, technology and society. She suggests that while students are curious, eager to learn, like science and the chance to dabble with the artefacts on their own freely but they have fleeting and changing interests and short attention spans so appropriate interesting activities need to be designed. Following this is the article by Deepa Kiran which is based on her experience of oral story telling. It explores the art form and also articulates the reason and manner of its working. It describes the space it occupies and the possibilities it holds in the multimedia inundated scenario.

The last contribution is the review by Payal Yadav of a book on what is euphemistically called deviance in classrooms. The review presents the essential features of the book and points out the need for thinking about such labels and the way in which such categorization may be examined the excessive biases that exist need to re-examine and consider all this in context and the need for teachers and classrooms to be open about this making a conscious effort to reduce such categories.

Voices editorial team is thankful to the people who reviewed the papers and gave their opinion and comments on them to help us improve the quality of the publication. We are also happy to have got many articles from persons of different backgrounds and experiences. The selections in this issue reflect that variety and we would like your feedback of the choices included in this issue and your contributions for the next issue. We look forward to your contributions at voicesofeducators2016@gmail.com.

For any question please do not hesitate to write to us for clarifications. We look forward to hearing from you and your contributions.