

INTERNSHIP IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an analysis of the experiential understanding of the internship programme of pre-service teacher education programme in India with inputs from a conceptual understanding of the of pre-service teacher education programme in Canada, knitted in solely with insights from literature review. Indian scenario has been built up from the researcher's experience of more than two decades as a teacher educator. The model of internship followed in teacher education programmes in Finland has also been used to broaden and strengthen the global perspective as Finnish teacher education has been praised for its systematic academic structure and high overall quality. This international perspective has been used for suggesting certain points for improvement in the internship programme in India keeping in mind, the differences in the socio cultural and educational contexts of the countries in focus.

KEYWORDS: Collaborative Partnership, Host Teachers, Mentors, Finnish Miracle, Negotiative Dialogue, Step by Step Progress

INTRODUCTION

Internship programmes in general are supposed to facilitate 'the transition from student status in a profession's pre service education programme to the status of a full- fledged member of the profession' (Ratsoy et al., 1987, p.8). This general conceptualisation can aptly apply to the professional preparation of teachers. There is growing emphasis on the need for effective and systematic university/college of Teacher Education (TE) - school partnership which is the crux of internship aimed at facilitating the professional development of pre-service teachers. Globally, the term 'practicum,' though widely used, is in some ways inappropriate since it cements the very 'theory-practice' divide which is one of the chronic problems in all forms of professional education. In fact, the critique of the divide between theory and practice in TE programmes builds up the rationale for arguing for a more effective TE - school partnership and the need for a better understanding by pupil teachers (PTs) that what's at stake is a coherent, workable theory of action.

Research literature suggests that content mastery of teachers in their respective disciplines, and their expertise in the way of transacting this content knowledge to their students is one of the most important factors influencing student learning. Research also suggests that the task of teaching is becoming increasingly complex and that highly competent teachers apply a range of practices for varying purposes, incorporate and integrate different kinds of knowledge, build up a sophisticated pedagogical repertoire, and adapt to, learner diversity and shifting contextual forces. School internship is visualized as situating the practice of teaching in the broader context of holistic development of children visualising teaching as one of the many responsibilities of a teacher in the continuum of sustained engagement with learners and schools. School internship experience allows insight into new perspectives and enhances motivation to continue learning and reflecting, leading to the development of a broad repertoire of perspective, professional capacities, teacher sensibilities

and skills.

Through their closely guided teaching practice the PTs (interns) are expected to acquire a great deal of propositional pedagogical knowledge, as well as pedagogical content knowledge including measurement and evaluation and alternative teaching methods. Based on the feedback obtained on ideology, policies, and practices in the schools, PTs report on their work in the school and discuss actual or anticipated difficulties in their new role as well as issues that pertain to their interpersonal relations with teachers, mentor teachers, and the school administration. Thus interns are assumed to make a gradual transition to full-time professional responsibility.

For many teachers, their desire to become a teacher and the pedagogy they adopt are often embedded in the story of their life and therefore it is important to situate the practice of teaching in the broader context of the vision of the role of the teacher. Personal accounts of teacher development offers a chance to invite engagement and reflection and can identify patterns of thought characteristic of teachers' work within particular contexts (Bullough & Baughman, 1996).

TEACHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Teacher training course in India is designed for aspiring teachers to learn interactive and effective ways of teaching to motivate children and make learning interesting. Teaching methods have to be tailored to match the needs of different age groups, and in correspondence to this, the educational requirement for a primary and secondary teacher is also different. Candidates who wish to teach primary school should minimum pass higher secondary examination with stipulated minimum marks whereas for teaching at secondary school, one needs to be postgraduate in the particular subject with the stipulated minimum marks.

Teacher education is provided by several Universities, affiliated colleges, private and open Universities in India and these offer courses for different levels, from pre primary to higher secondary. Teacher education in India is institution based, along with internship programs in real classroom settings. The curriculum has faced severe criticism over the years and is in the process of a complete revamping.

Teacher Education Courses in India

- Elementary Teacher Education (ETE)- After 12 years of schooling, 2 year Diploma in Teacher Education conducted by District Institutes of Educational Training (DIET s)- prepares teachers to teach in grades 1-5.
- Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)- after graduation, 1 year of Bachelor in Education- prepares teachers to teach in grades 6-10.
- Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)- After post graduation, 1 year of Bachelor in Education- to teach in grades 6-12
- 4 year Integrated Program conducted by Regional Institutes of Education, after 12 years of schooling, prepares to teach in grades 6-10.
- 4 Year Bachelor in Elementary Education (B.El.Ed.) - After 12 years of schooling, prepares to teach in grades 1-8.

In recent years the country has seen a mushrooming of private institutions in the field of teacher education, especially offering B.Ed course. The absence of teacher education programmes in some states of the country, affecting the quality of school education adversely is another side of the scenario.

There have been several national level Committees and Commissions all geared to improving the quality of teacher education in the country. National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2010 was developed by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), a statutory body that came into existence in 1995, with the main objective of achieving planned and coordinated development of the teacher education systems through-out the country. According to NCFTE, a sustained engagement with schools is crucial for professional development. Meaningful internship and school experience are critical in helping the PTs to develop insights into new perspectives and enhance motivation to continue learning and reflecting. School internship should lead them to the development of a broad repertoire of perspective, professional capacities, teacher sensibilities and skills. School internship is visualized by situating the practice of teaching in the broader context of vision and the role of teacher and sustained engagement with learners and schools. The Review Committee constituted by NCTE recommended adoption of the internship model for teacher education involving a brief theoretical orientation followed by a 3 to 5 year period of supervised teaching in a school under mentor teachers, greater emphasis on school internship and emphasis on reflective practice based on perspectives on the learner and her context, contemporary society, basic concepts of education and curricular and pedagogic alternatives.

- School Internship design should include the choice of selecting school subjects to be taught by an intern.
- Four days a week for a minimum period of 12-20 weeks including one week of classroom observation of a regular teacher.
- Visit to Innovative Centres of Pedagogy and Learning.
- Classroom-based Research Projects.

The importance of internship in the teacher education curriculum is adequately clear from the recommendations above and will always remain undebated.

The Model of Internship in B.Ed Programme Generally Followed in India in Most States

Most of the B.Ed programmes are offered for one year with the actual course running to around 9 months. Right from the second/third month, internship programme starts running to 3 / 4 months inclusive of the short breaks in the college/university and schools. The programme takes off with a schedule of 2 or 3 days of school experiences a week interspersed with the theory courses running in the college/ university. The purpose of this interspersing is to ensure the theory practice linkage crucial to the professional preparation of pupil teachers.

Students are grouped into clusters of 6 to 8 according to their place of residence and each cluster is assigned a supervising teacher. Each cluster with the teacher is assigned to a school as per proximity of the school from their place of residence. In some models, only one faculty member supervises the group of students through-out the period of internship. In another model, there is rotation of supervising teachers to enhance objectivity in assessment and to expose the pupil teachers to varied perspectives of the teachers. Regarding the final assessment too there are differences across states. In some states, apart from the internal assessment of teaching by the regular supervisor, the last 2 classes of each pupil teacher of each cluster is assessed by external supervisors and these are the 'test lessons'. Planning of each transaction is initially carried under guidance of the respective subject teacher and also recorded in prescribed file.

Discussions in the group of PTs with supervisor, post-observation of teaching is an essential component of most of the models of internship practiced. The supervisor and each of the peers who observed the particular lesson join in the

discussion of the observed lesson to provide feedback to the respective PT for improving effectiveness in the classroom transaction. In these discussions the PT who carried on with the transaction is given chance to present reflections of his/her classroom experience. Peer observation as a tool of professional development is practised in most of the models, maintaining a record of these observations which is used also for assessment purpose. A record of reflections on a daily or weekly basis is maintained by each PT which also gets included for assessment. The school teachers of the school in which the internship goes on, generally do not take on active role in the whole process of grooming the PTs. In some systems, they do sit in the classes when PT is carrying on with the transactions. Many a times, this act turns out to be an attempt to 'discipline' the students and 'to keep them silent' so as to 'not disturb'. Or else, they are seen to carry on with the routine checking of the class notes or home work of children.

Apart from teaching, PTs are required to participate in co-curricular activities, and also take up a small research project involving the students. In some models, as a part of Psychology practical, PTs are required to take up a small case study of one or a group of students to develop insights into psychological dimensions of learning discussed in the theory course.

Needless to say, internship is a very important component of teacher education programmes which is highly demanding, knitted in with varied tasks to be carried out by PTs for their professional preparation.

The following section presents the challenges faced by most of the teacher education institutions in organizing internship programme effectively.

CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Organising internship in pre service teacher education programme poses an immense challenge to any TE institution due to many factors inherent in the two very different systems, viz: university/college and school.

Mismatch between Perspectives

The philosophy and perspectives on teacher's role in students' learning find no match when it comes to TE institutions and the school system. Teachers on entry to schools, are seen to generally leave behind most of the learnings in the course work of pre service education. Reasons cited are many, right from dearth of time to complete the syllabus to large strength of students in a class. This mismatch between the two systems regarding what is learning and what is the role of teachers, brings in major friction during internship programme in terms of partnership from the teachers of the school. The collaborative and negotiative dialogue between the two systems has become an uphill task due to this mismatch.

It is common experience of most of the supervising teachers to hear their PTs saying, 'my subject teacher told me to go at higher pace as the syllabus cannot be completed otherwise', or, 'my teacher wants me to only write the answers of the questions given at the back of the lesson, and not to go on with discussions and explanations, as I am supposed to do'. So, the principle of constructivist approach to learning or student centred learning or participatory learning, etc., are not easy to be practiced in schools as the perspectives of the school teachers is far removed from these approaches. Hence no support is forthcoming from them generally, leave alone they taking on the role of host teachers!.

School Related Challenges

The annual academic calendar of schools and colleges/universities generally do not match and hence organizing internship is not easy. With this mismatch, managing the stipulated number of 40 internship days (stipulated by NCTE) becomes a difficult task. Selection of schools poses a challenge as there is huge diversity across each state with regard to category of schools, ranging from different types of private schools to different categories of state run schools. The diversity in the school culture and ethos brings in a complex spectrum of internship experiences of the PTs and correspondingly, in the assessment of teaching. So, it poses a major challenge both to the supervisors and the PTs. Moreover, many schools, especially, private schools do not readily give permission and add many clauses related to the group of student teachers and the supervising teacher, like gender of the PTs and the supervisor, the number of PTs, proficiency of PTs in English etc.

Internship Tasks Related

The process of discussion with PTs on the planning of lessons is aimed at guiding them in planning the transactions, organizing the content points as per the set objectives, using matching supportive resources and develop related teaching skills. This significant aspect of internship does pose a major challenge to TE institutions. In the present scenario, sometimes there are as many as 40-45 PTs in a subject group under the supervision of a TE and thus there is dearth of time for going through even the initial 20% of the lesson plans of all PTs in a group. As a consequence, discussion on these plans by the subject method specialist and guidance to the PTs are not carried out to satisfactory levels. This has been emphasized by Naseem and Anas (2011).

Supervisor Related

The subject expertise of respective supervisors poses another challenge. One of the basic principles in teacher preparation is that pedagogy supports and complements the content transacted. Needless to say, a teacher educator may not be an expert in all content areas, apart, perhaps, in the areas from her/his parent discipline. Being a pedagogue, one would be updated on the developments in the concerned subject area. This does not completely hold good for those teacher educators who are not pedagogues. Therefore, while observing lessons, the Teacher Educators are handicapped, atleast, sometimes, if not always, with regard to content that is being transacted.' (Chennat, S., 2014). This issue has been highlighted by Nasseem and Anas (2011): "Supervision during the classroom teaching: It is done by teachers who are not method specialist generally. These supervisors offer descriptive type of criticism, while constructive type is desirable. Their remarks are related to the general personality of the student teachers. The percentage of lessons supervised by the subject method specialist varies from 5 per cent to 25 per cent due to faulty staffing pattern, lack of time, too many lessons to be supervised, defective timetable etc. Here, the school teacher should be assisted by the college supervisor in his work. Frequent conferences and consultations between them will help to relate them to practice and the student teacher will improve the performance in a realistic school setting".

School Teachers Related

Inducting the senior subject teachers of the respective schools into the philosophy and perspective of teacher education of the college/university and involving them in the process of grooming the PTs, poses yet another challenge. With the experience of these subject teachers in teaching learning, their mentoring and support would go a long way into

shaping the professional educational experience of the PTs. Generally, these subject teachers see the internship period as their 'free time' and remain totally detached from the programme.

Time Related

Due to paucity of time, our PTs are forced to start off with classroom transaction in the very first week of internship itself. They do not get time for getting accustomed to the school ethos and the organizational structure or to observe classes of their subject teachers. In general, 40 periods of classroom transaction, 20 periods of peer observation, a mini project, Psychology practical, organizing co-curricular activity etc are all assignments to be completed in the 40 days which makes the whole internship more of a ritual than a learning experience.

Marks Related

The age old issue of inadequate weight given to the internship programme within the curriculum structure of the pre service preparation course cannot go without a mention here. The ratio of marks between theory and practice generally remains 5:2 although internship programme is a cardinal component of the B.Ed curriculum.

Apart from all the above is the attitude of the PTs in many of the institutions across the country to the internship programme. In spite of all kinds of elaborate arrangements regarding internship, it is often seen that student teachers do not adhere to all the tasks in the school seriously enough (Gambir, 2008).

The following section presents an overview of the teacher preparation programmes of Canada, with emphasis on the internship component.

THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT IN CANADA

In Canada, responsibility for education falls at the level of the provincial, not the federal government. Canada spends about 7% of its GDP on education and universal publicly funded schooling is available from Grades 1 through 12 (Statistics Canada, 2003).

Education in Canada is generally divided into Elementary (Primary School, Middle School), followed by Secondary (High School) and Post-Secondary (College, University). Education and instruction are available in both official languages (English and French) in most places across Canada where the population warrants it. The school year usually begins in September and extends to the end of June.

For Canada, the question of linguistic, cultural and racial diversity in the teaching force has particular salience because the demographics of the school system are changing more rapidly than the demographics of the teacher workforce. A rapid increase in immigrant families, in internal migration, and in the Aboriginal population is changing many school systems. More than forty percent report that they do not know either of Canada's official languages, English and French. In this aspect of cultural- linguistic diversity Canada is comparable with India.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Programs and Induction Programs (Adapted from Nuland, S. 2011)

In Canada as a first, foundational stage in the professional development process provides an introduction to critical knowledge bases, skills, and practices that assist prospective teachers to develop a fundamental understanding of high quality student and teacher learning and performance. Most provinces have also introduced induction programs to follow a teacher candidate's first year of preparation that include information sharing and mentoring with a more

experienced colleague. They have been designed to assist beginning teachers make better transitions into the classroom and to support the next stage of their professional development, whether it be identified as meeting the needs of diverse learners, establishing and maintaining effective environments for learning, or negotiating the many non-teaching administrative tasks associated with the role of teaching (OCT, 2006). All ITE programmes in Canada are currently university-based and take place in faculties of education. All these programs, regardless of their length or structure, include a field experience, called a practicum, where teacher candidates engage in supervised evaluated teaching in classrooms under the guidance and direction of qualified *host* teachers of selected schools.

The duration of the practicum varies from 8 – 22 weeks in Canada. The design and structure of these placements range from days or partial days to blocks of weeks in classrooms and schools. The practicum is provincially regulated through faculties and is seen as an important site for synthesizing connections between the theoretical and research-based pedagogical concepts presented in the academic program and the actual practice of teaching. Some programs have also incorporated non-evaluated field experiences in school or community settings with individual learners or groups in recognition of the value of learning about the contexts in which students learn and come from.

The cardinal role of the school teachers or the ‘host teachers’, in the preparation of teachers is very clear from the above description of the system in Canada. It is their role, specifically that of a mentor in initiating and grooming the PTs that is seriously taken up by the University and the school system. It is this aspect that the Indian system has yet to learn from and adopt in the teacher education programme. The senior school teachers have to be inducted into the internship programme and trained to play the role of host teacher to help in the professional preparation of PTs.

Host Teachers

Teachers with extensive experience take on the role of host teachers and are normally recommended by the principals for this role. PTs work intensively with these host teachers, during the practicum. Host teachers are vital to ITE programs and are assigned the duty of observing practice teaching, sharing observations, giving suggestions, introducing resources and supporting the PTs to work through problems of practice. The host teacher may also be the evaluator, although some programs require the faculty advisor, who visits from the university, to conduct the evaluation. The faculty advisor also plays an important role in the provision of feedback and in making the connections between the academic program and the field experience more explicit.

Some programs may provide multiple settings while others may emphasize more focus on a particular school or classroom. Graduate program models often incorporate an extended placement in one school within their design (Ewart & Straw, 2005). The commitment to providing field based experiences as part of ITE is built upon a belief that PTs must have opportunities to practice, take risks and explore their learning in a safe environment that is rich in feedback and support. Factors in a practicum experience that lead to deeper learning are the connections between the field experience and the learning in the academic program, as well as the supervision, feedback and mentoring provided by the host teacher and teacher educator. The host teacher who indicates a willingness to work collaboratively with the PT on planning, instruction and assessment is pivotal to the learning process. Most importantly, the host teacher supports learning by connecting the classroom experience to theory and research, by promoting reflection that helps candidates think about practice through questioning and feedback.

The collaborative working between the PTs, the host teachers and the University faculties as a key to effective

internship programme, can be easily delineated from the Canadian internship programme. It is this connectedness that would cement the theory-practice linkages and provide scaffolding to the PTs to recognize the actual field level issues, think of solutions, try out these and reflect on the outcomes and improvise and improve them and go on with this cycle of activities.

Even with all these good practices, that provide inspiration to countries like India, there are still many areas in the internship programme as recognized by the practitioners and researchers in the field. One of the main issues is the disconnectedness between the university based course work and the school based internship programme. This is an issue shared between both India and Canada and probably many other countries. Efforts are going on in Canada to minimize this divide between these two stages of teacher education. This issue and efforts geared towards improving the system are presented below. (adapted from Falkenberg, 2010, with all citations therein).

In Canada, the pre-service phase is separated into university-based course work and school-based practicum, while the second phase of inservice programme is sometimes separated into the induction (initial teaching) and post-induction phases. The two main phases of the education of teachers are not only chronologically separated, they are also divided with respect to location and responsibility, with university-based responsibility for pre-service education and field-based responsibility for induction and beyond. Also, there is generally very little contact between the university and the field in the different phases of the education of teachers: the university-based course work phase of pre-service education happens with very little influence from the field, while the school-based practicum and in-service phase happen with very little influence from the university.

As a result of this division, the education of teachers marked by disconnectedness and incoherence. While a division of place, time, personnel, and responsibility in the different phases in the education of teachers could reflect different purposes and foci in the overall preparation of teachers, the division of labour that exists in the course work and in the practicum is detrimental to teacher candidates' learning to teach for at least two reasons. First, research indicates a prominent "washing out" effect of the university-based pre-service learning once graduates move into the in-service phase and are socialized into the teaching and learning practices in their respective schools. Second, research points to the importance of linkages and coherence as central features of successful teacher education programs.

Apprenticeship of Observation

The education of teachers begins with what Dan Lortie (1975) has called the Apprenticeship of Observation. When teacher candidates enter a Canadian teacher education program, they have about 15,000 hours of observation of and experience with teaching in schools, as ex-students in the K-12 school system. As Lortie (1975) points out, being a student functions for many people as an apprenticeship for being a teacher: "The interaction [in the classroom] is not passive observation... the student learns to 'take the role' of the classroom teacher, to engage in at least enough empathy to anticipate the teacher's probable reaction to his behaviour. This requires that the student project himself into the teacher's position and imagine how he feels about various student actions" (pp. 61-62).

The apprenticeship of observation affects the subsequent phases of the education of teachers by shaping teacher candidates' beliefs about and attitudes towards teaching and learning when they enter a pre-service teacher education program. The literature on learning to teach suggests, first, that many teacher candidates bring problematic beliefs about

teaching and learning into their pre-service programs and, second, that it is very difficult to change those beliefs in pre-service programs. The reason for those difficulties is that teacher candidates' beliefs about teaching and learning function as their frames of reference or their filters, which they use to make sense (or no sense) of what they experience in their course work and in their practicum teaching.

Next in the education of teachers is the pre-service teacher education phase. The term "teacher education" is generally used to refer to only this phase. The third phase is the induction phase, which encompasses the first three to seven years of teaching, in which a new teacher generally moves from surviving and discovering to experimenting and then consolidating her teaching practices. In the induction phase in the Canadian school system, most teachers are inducted into teaching without any particular support, although a number of school divisions have implemented mentoring programs for beginning teachers.

The last and by far longest phase in the education of teachers is the professional development phase, which encompasses the time of certified teaching that follows the induction phase and ends with retirement. Technically, the induction phase should be part of the professional development phase. However, I have kept the two phases separate, because they are distinct in terms of the specific developmental and structural qualities that they have as phases of the education of teachers.

In Canada, teachers' professional development is very much conceptualized and perceived as a responsibility of the individual teacher, although, some school divisions monitor their teachers' engagement in regular professional development. The last three phases of the continuum of the education of teachers have three elements that are problematic with respect to the non-integration and separation between the ways in which the school system on the one side and university programs on the other side contribute to the education of teachers.

The first element is the division of labour in the education of teachers. This division manifests itself in two ways. First, the pre-service teacher education phase is separated from the two subsequent phases in terms of responsibility and location: in the pre-service phase, the university faculty is responsible for the education of teacher candidates, while in the subsequent two phases the responsibility lies with the teachers themselves and the school divisions; the place of learning during the pre-service phase is primarily in university courses, while the place of learning during the other two phases is primarily in the school system. The second way in which the division of labour manifests itself lies in the pre-service phase itself. In my experience, almost all pre-service programs in Canada separate the university-based coursework from the school-based practicum. In this regard, definitely Canadian and Indian contexts are very much at par, struggling with similar issues.

Non-Integrated Course

The second problematic element of non-integration and separation in the education of teachers is that the cultures of the university and the school system are very distinct, a point that has been made by several authors, in particular by those who argue for school-university partnerships. Teachers in the school system and those at the university are enculturated into and generally sustain different cultures. Schools have different reward and accountability structures (hiring, merit, promotion) than faculties of education, which are part of the university system. In addition to those social-contextual conditions, members of faculties of education and teachers in schools have generally a different orientation toward teaching: school teachers focus on teaching as a practice that helps their students learn, while faculty

members tend to focus more on the learning to teach aspect of teaching. Here again the two countries are at the same position: the mismatch between the ethos and culture of the two systems in India has been discussed in the above sections.

The third issue of non-integration and separation in the education of teachers, which is agreed between the two countries is that generally members of the school systems have quite different perspectives on pre-service teacher education than university faculty: the school system tends to see pre-service teacher education as preparing teacher candidates to fit smoothly into the day-to-day activities of the schools, while many university-based teacher educators are concerned with educational reform, with alternative teaching practices, and with teaching as a transformative practice.

Collaborative Professional Development Centre (Cpdc)

A model for a continuous education of teachers, The that provides a working framework for overcoming these three issues by integrating the education of teachers across university and field contexts and across the different phases of the education of teachers has been proposed by educational scholars in Canada. Professional Development Programmes (PDPs) face many challenges. Establishing and maintaining the collaborative relationship between school teachers and faculty members is one of the big institutional challenges for the PDS model. Two reasons for this challenge lie in what could be called the culture problem and the role problem. The culture problem results from the different cultures that exist in schools and faculties of education and into which faculties at school and the university are enculturated. The role problem results with reference to case studies, from the uncertainty by school teachers and faculty members about what role each is to play in the PDS. The CPDC – is conceptualized in response to these two problems faced by PDSs. The defining difference between the two forms of school-university partnership is that PDSs are centres of on-going professional development organized at the school level, while CPDCs provide the same kind of on-going professional development at the school-divisional level.

On analysis of the presentation above, one can easily see the common thread across India and Canada in this issue of truncatedness of the university based course work and the school based internship programme. The disconnect between the two programmes in terms of space and time and responsibility, in terms of the differences with reference to socio academic culture of the University and the school systems, and thirdly due to the differences in terms of the perspective on internship and teacher education in general, of the university faculty and the school system as a whole, all these reasons explained above are so relevant and much discussed in the Indian context as well.

The following section presents an overview of the teacher education programme in Finland, highlighting the internship programme therein.

TEACHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Since Finland emerged in 2000 as the top scoring Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nation on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), researchers have been actively involved in studying the so called “Finnish Miracle”. The miracle is that a country with an undistinguished education system till 1980 surged to the head of the global class in just a couple of decades! Research and experience suggest that one critical element of the Finnish system trumps all others: excellent teachers and leaders (Sahlberg, 2011).

Finnish teacher training is highly valued internationally. Here, teachers are seen as cornerstones of the society, having always contributed to the development of the society and the welfare of people. Instead of test based accountability,

the Finnish system relies on the expertise and professional accountability of teacher who are knowledgeable and committed to their students and communities.

Eligibility for applying for a teacher education course for primary level and higher, is Master's degree while for kindergarten and pre-primary levels it is graduation. Among young Finns, teaching is consistently the most admired profession in opinion polls of high school graduates. Becoming a high school teacher is a very competitive process. Wages are not the main reason for young Finns to become teachers in Finland. Teachers earn very close to the national average salary level. Interestingly, new teachers, once employed in a school, usually stay on for life, An official estimate suggests that only 10-15% of teachers leave their profession during the course of their career. (Sahlberg, 2011).

Teaching remains a popular and prestigious occupation in Finland, acknowledged for its creativity and famous for students' high scores on achievement tests. Finland's commitment to research based teacher education means that educational theories, research methodologies and practice, all play an important role in professional teacher preparation programmes. (Westbury, Hansen, Kansanen, and Bjorkust, 2005). Teacher education courses run across a long drawn period of 5 years and the curricula are designed to create a systematic pathway from the foundations of educational thinking, to methodologies, and then on, to move towards advanced trends of educational science. Over the 5 year programme, PTs advance from basic teaching practice to advanced practice and then to final practice. During each of these phases, PTs observe lessons by experienced teachers, and carry on with independent classroom transactions to different groups of children while being assessed by the supervising teachers and faculty from the teacher education department. Another highlight of the system of internship is that the schools collaborating in the programme generally have more staff and the subject teachers are well prepared in supervision, teacher development and assessment strategies. Only those who are competent in these functions are chosen for the important role of being supervising teachers. Moreover, these schools take on research and development activities in collaboration with the University department of teacher education and sometimes also with the faculties who have teacher education function. These schools are authorized to introduce sample lessons and alternative curriculum designs to the PTs. With all the above mentioned preparations from the part of the schools and the university departments, the PTs are well prepared to take on the role of a teacher as soon as they complete the certification and get placement.

Highlights

- Educational theories, research methodologies and practice, inform professional teacher education programmes.
- The practicum is organised in the special teacher training schools governed by the universities with curricula and practices similar to other public schools.
- Such schools have higher professional staff requirements which are monitored and fulfilled.
- Here, the supervising teachers have to go through a process of assessment to prove that they are competent to guide and mentor and assess the student teachers.
- These teacher training schools pursue research and development roles in collaboration with university departments. Hence, these institutions can introduce sample lessons and alternative curricular designs to student teachers. (Pasi, S., 2007).

- Schools are authorized in participating in the internship by introducing sample lessons and alternative curriculum designs to PTs.

From the above literature review, the important aspects are that the teacher preparation is informed by field research, the partnering schools pursue research and development roles in collaboration with university departments and that the internship is carried out earnestly with schools selected on the basis of adequate number of staff and the competence of selected teachers to take on the role of host teachers. The level of involvement of schools in the internship is very high to the extent of introducing PTs to sample lessons and varied repertoire of methods and media for effective classroom transaction. These dimensions of teacher education and internship in particular are conspicuously absent in countries like India and still remain the right type of model to be tried out.

From the review of research of the status of internship programme in Canada and Finland, and the experiential understanding of the Indian system of internship gained through the experience of the author in the field for over two decades, attempt has been made to suggest ways of improving the Indian system. Cultural relativists may suggest that each of the three educational systems embedded within its own specific cultural context is so dissimilar that there is little to be gained from studying the other in any detail. However, many educators argue to the contrary, that there is much to be learned from such cross-cultural international studies (Stevenson and Stigler 1992; Shimahara and Sakai 1995; Rohlen and LeTendre 1996; Cummings and Altbach 1997).

INDIAN CONTEXT: SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

Dialogue between Schools and TE Institutions for Reciprocal Partnership

It is an experiential understanding of most of the teacher educators that a more meaningful and reciprocal partnership with schools is inevitable for effective internship to be practised. For this, harmonious dialogues between the navigators of these two systems has to take place and need to be carried on year after year. Generally, the TE institutions approach the schools abruptly to fulfill their requirements. Instead, it has to be a two way dialogue, with each of the 2 actors voicing what their expectations are of each other and evolving an agreeable partnership. More importantly, parity and comparability of school practices and philosophy and perspectives of TE institutions have to be ensured. This is the area of immense concern in our country. The negotiative dialogues play a very important role here, which has to start off right at the outset of the academic programme and continue across years to establish an academic partnership between the two systems.

Selection of Schools

Selection of teachers and senior teachers for internship should be based on set criteria conducive for effective initiation and grooming of the PTs. PTs should be exposed to different school contexts making sure that the assessment of their teaching into consideration, the respective school context. Likewise, selection of senior teachers to take on the challenging role of mentoring should also be based on set criteria. As in the model followed in Finland, ground work at school level in terms of preparing the administrative system and the subject teachers for the partnering relationship with the teacher education departments is critical to effective internship programmes. This involves, initiating the administrative system of the school into the philosophy of teacher preparation so that the school system recognizes their role in the whole process.

Orienting School Teachers

The subject teachers of the school need to be oriented to the process of observing, mentoring, and assessing PTs. In fact, this is one of the areas that need to be worked on intensely as this is the weakest aspect of the internship model followed in the country. The present attitude of the subject teachers - 'these interns have come and now we can get some respite' has to change into 'these interns need a lot of hand holding from me as we know the system, the content transaction and the children much more'.

Step by Step Progression

Internship should start with free and unguided observation of classroom transactions and other school activities followed with guided observations. These observations and discussions are to be followed with unguided teaching by the pupil teachers allowing them time to gain confidence for taking on teaching under supervision by the host teachers, viz, subject teachers of the school and the teacher educator. This phase should be devoid of assessment and followed up with assessment in the last phase of internship.

Subject-wise Grouping

PTs have to be in their respective subject groups tied to a host teacher of the school from the same discipline as mentors, to ensure meaningful scaffolding. PTs are to be supported in their teaching by host teachers by observing their classes, guiding and supporting in all ways including resource management, classroom management, content enrichment and improving pedagogic strategies. Effective preparation of these host-mentor teachers has to be taken up to get them ready to play a very pro-active role. Additionally, incentives in the form of monetary benefits/career advancements have to be included in policy formulations to be implemented smoothly so as to ensure effective discharge of this crucial role by school teachers.

For effective guidance and fair assessment, the TE attached to a group of pupil teachers should also be from the same discipline. Only then observation, feedback and discussion among the TE and PTs be optimally meaningful and holistic.

Coordination, Peer Observation and Reflective Practice

The coordination and teamwork of PTs, TE s and host teachers should be strategically planned for effective outcomes. This again calls for intense, long drawn negotiation between schools and TE institutions.

Peer observation has to be emphasized as a cardinal tool for professional development. Guidelines for observing, recording observations and sharing these with peer group have to be well planned and disseminated to PTs right at the outset of the internship programme.

Greater emphasis on reflective practice based on perspectives on the learner and her context, contemporary society, basic concepts of education and curricular and pedagogic alternatives, crucial to effective internship, has to be in place.

For all the above suggestions to be implemented effectively, internship has to stretch to atleast a year interspersed with theory courses allowing for theorisations to emerge from practice in the field and vice versa.

Research Based Practice

More efforts to take up research based on classroom realities and challenges faced by teachers and students have to be initiated. Research findings have to inform TE curriculum and initiate discussions across TE institutions. These two lines of development can definitely streamline and improve internship programme.

In conclusion, there is immense wealth of experiences of professionals working in the area of teacher education in other countries that we need to learn from. We need to be open to these experiences and expand our mind enough to develop insights from them, and try them out in our contexts, bearing in mind the socio- academic- cultural differences.

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