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REFLECTIVE TEACHING PRACTICES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: The NCF-2005, NCFTE-2009 and the New Education Policy-2020 recommend teachers to be reflective practitioners. The realization of the concept of reflective teaching practice helps us to openly accept the new changes that are brought about by the education system and enables us to progress towards the betterment of the education system. A dedicated teacher always finds it enthusiastic and motivated to overcome these difficulties or problems. But it requires a teacher to be knowledgeable with the content of teacher education. Just knowing the content and theories does not entirely equip the teachers for the profession and solve their problem. A practical experience is said to be better than just conceptual understanding. The teacher has to evolve individualized strategies by applying his intellectual skills. Therefore the teacher education programme is designed in such a way so that it helps the entrant teachers to equip themselves with the skills of teaching as well as the cognitive strategies required for the profession. Such a teacher who uses cognitive strategies to have an evidence informed-practice, who gathers evidences from efficient feedback system according to the changing demands, is a reflective teacher and such a teaching practice is a reflective teaching practice. Being a reflective teacher not only benefits the classrooms but indirectly the institution as well as the society. To become a reflective teacher the reflective teaching practices, which can be concluded as cognitive strategies at teacher education, need to be acquired by the teachers.

Index Terms- Teacher education, reflective teaching practices, cognitive strategies

The world is changing drastically in the knowledge landscape and the requirement of skill sets. With various scientific and technological advances, such as the rise of mobile learning, e-learning and artificial intelligence, many jobs that do not require human interference may be taken over by machines, while the need for a skilled workforce, particularly involving mathematics and computer science in association with multidisciplinary faculties across the sciences and humanities, will be in greater demand. (NEP, 2020)

To cater to the above demands of the changing world, the teacher must be at the centre of the fundamental reforms in the education system. "The purpose of the new education policy is helping re-establish teachers, at all levels, as the most respected and essential members of our society, because they truly shape our next generation of citizens". The policy is formed to empower teachers and help them to do their job as effectively and efficiently as possible. (NEP, 2020)

NCFTE-2009 recommended better utilization of the time available during the two year B.Ed. programme, emphasising on school internship and reflective teaching practice based on perspectives of the learner. The document also advises to give due importance to developing "reflective teachers with positive attitudes, values and perspective, along with skills for teaching" (NCFTE, 2009). This makes reflective practice the prime goal of teacher education in the country right from the year 2005. The NCFTE-2009 recommended practicum of this nature is helping teachers develop a repertoire of cognitive strategies and reflective skills for reflective practice. It advocates transacting a process-based curriculum to develop reflective teachers. Both NCF-2005 and NCFTE-2009 proposes that teachers should be reflective practitioners.

Therefore we must understand why these documents recommend teachers to be reflective practitioners. The realization of the concept of reflective teaching practice helps us to openly accept the new changes that are brought about by the education system and enables us progress towards the betterment of the education system.

Starting from the individual's perspective of learning, the process of learning is universal and continuous. Everyday an individual keeps learning. Learning mostly happens to allow an individual to overcome problems. There have been theories that say problem solving is the highest level of learning, hence making it the sole purpose of education. We learn declarative knowledge also called verbal information. We develop intellectual skills while learning. The intellectual skills are no doubt the core requirement for any individual. They are skills like the ability to discriminate, define, identify concepts and patterns, know the principles etc. intellectual skills are acquired through practice. They form the foundations that lead to problem solving. Intellectual skills do not

directly help in problem solving, but the application of these intellectual skills to problematic situation helps the individual to get through with the problem and arrive at a solution. The intellectual skills form the pre-requisites to the process of forming a strategy to solve the problem. These strategies that are evolved by an individual to arrive at a solution are called cognitive strategies according to Robert Gagne.

Similarly every teacher faces problems, either small or big, during his teaching career. Teaching as a profession, is challenging and dynamic, as a teacher encounters different situations every day throughout his/her career. A dedicated teacher always finds it enthusiastic and motivated to overcome these difficulties or problems. But it requires a teacher to be knowledgeable with the content of teacher education, psychology of the learner, pedagogical skills and management skills to overcome the problems faced. Just knowing the content and theories does not entirely equip the teachers for the profession and solve their problem. A practical experience is said to be better than just conceptual understanding. The practical knowledge is the strategy used to solve the problem whereas the intellectual skills are the conceptual understanding. The strategies, no doubt, cannot be evolved without intellectual skills, but a teacher needs to have the ability to put these learnt intellectual skills into practice.

The teacher has to evolve individualized strategies by applying his intellectual skills. He/she comes with an effective way to implement what he/she has learnt. The process of putting the learnt intellectual skill into practice to solve their problems and find success in overcoming difficulties is called cognitive strategies. Taking an example here, knowing what inductive logic is, is intellectual skill for entrant teachers. But using inductive logic to teach concepts in school classrooms i.e., illustrating it with three similar examples, making students identify the similarities and the process of generalization, is cognitive strategy. Here entrant teachers should definitely know about induction before using it in the classrooms. How and where to use the particular intellectual skill is cognitive strategy. Therefore the teacher education programme is designed in such a way so that it helps the entrant teachers to equip themselves with the skills of teaching as well as the cognitive strategies required for the profession.

The teacher education curriculum has several cognitive strategies that an entrant teacher needs to learn, practice and perfect themselves during the course. Micro-teaching skills, the skill of effective communication, skill of planning a lesson etc. are some examples of the cognitive strategies that the entrant teachers learn during their training course. These cognitive strategies can be called the useful tools that a teacher uses to effectively facilitate learning, design their instruction, manage a classroom and evaluate their instructional process. It also helps the teacher to progress professionally and maintain a conducive working environment in their institutions. The cognitive strategies, to solve individualistic problems, can only be developed by getting a feedback of the situation as the strategy is applied. The feedback system helps the teacher to improve the situation dynamically by changing and manipulating the devised strategies then and there. Certain cognitive strategies support the teacher to get feedback of their actions and hence improve their performance. Such type of cognitive strategies are the reflective teaching practices.

The basic problem all teachers face is how to improve their performance. They all face dilemmas and challenges in the classroom life. A dedicated teacher always wants to raise the standards of their classroom effectiveness as well as develop their career. The complicated nature of educational issues and the practical demands of classroom teaching ensure that a teacher's work is never easy (Pollard, 2006). There is a huge difference in the modern way of teaching with the traditional classrooms. In the earlier decades, the classrooms were driven by routine actions like traditions, habit, authority and expectations. The process was static and unresponsive to changing priorities according to Dewey. Reflective teaching practice, Dewey says, on the other hand, involves a willingness to engage in constant self-appraisal and change accordingly to improve one's classroom practice. Therefore, there is a constant requirement of change in the modern day classrooms, which drives the teachers to evolve new strategies which are efficient in overcoming their problems of effectiveness in their practice.

Being a reflective teacher means to obtain feedback at various stages of teaching like obtaining feedback while organising the curriculum to make it meaningful for the students, taking feedback while planning instruction to make learning more effective, organising classrooms to effectively use resources and overcome barriers, managing behaviours in a class through a regular feedback, obtaining feedback for communicating efficiently to the learners, using teaching strategies and welcoming feedback to refine teaching strategies, assessing the learning to evolve better strategies to improve the learning outcomes. Hence a teacher not only plans for the stages of teaching but also strategizes for the feedback at each level. The intellectual skills of the teacher, which is nothing but his/her ability to understand the class, make judgements based on evidence, the teaching strategies learnt etc. are put to practice in solving the problems as they evolve. Identification of these problems involves application of the intellectual skills to gather feedback, analyse and evolve new strategies as and when required. The strategies are mentally formed and executed with the help of intellectual skill pre-requisites. The strategies that a teacher makes can be called the mental plan of action to overcome the difficulties. Therefore, at every level we can see that a teacher constantly applies his cognitive strategies to overcome the hurdles and become more effective and efficient. Such a teacher who uses cognitive strategies to have an evidence informed-practice, who gathers evidences from efficient feedback system according to the changing demands, is a reflective teacher and such a teaching practice is a reflective teaching practice. Reflective teaching practice takes feedback or reflections at various stages of teaching. The teacher reflects upon his instructional process both during and after the instruction to assess the quality of the learning outcomes. According to Schön, the reflection-on-action is taking reflections of the already completed instructional process while reflection-in-action refers to the reflections taken during an on-going instruction. Schön claimed to derive the notions of "reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, responding to problematic situations, problem framing, problem solving, and the priority of practical knowledge over abstract theory" from the writings of John Dewey. (Shapiro, 2010)

A classroom comprises of many social differences. There are many dimensions for these differences like – disabilities, gender, race, social class, age and sexuality. A reflective teacher has to adapt himself to the arising differences in the class and cater to the demands of the differences. As every student has the right to learn, it is the foremost duty of a teacher to provide for the learning irrespective of his/her differences. A reflective teacher accepts the differences in the students and facilitates instruction according to their individual needs. This can only be possible when there is a strategy devised for taking the reflections on the requirement of the students, the nature of the students' groups. These strategies are also the cognitive strategies that a teacher

constructs to make his teaching more inclusive. Therefore a reflective teacher uses several cognitive strategies to monitor their practices in terms of social consequences and provide for inclusion.

A teacher's responsibility does not end within a classroom. They are accountable for the institutional progress as well as their own professional development. The teachers are held responsible for institution effectiveness indirectly. The evaluation of the institution's progress provides an insight to the teachers and administrators into the improvements that need to be strategized. Hence the teachers contribute to the improvement strategies that are implemented for the progress of the school, which can be termed as cognitive strategies. Coming to the professional development of the individual teachers, self-appraisals help teachers to prioritize their professional growth to improve their efficiency professionally and also contribute to the institutional progress. A reflective teacher plans for his/her professional growth while carrying out the duties of the profession.

Culminating the thoughts, it can be seen that the strategies mentioned above are hence important for the teachers to function effectively and improve their professional efficiency. These strategies of reflection that a teacher incorporates can be called the cognitive strategies. These cognitive strategies need to be taught and practiced during the teacher education so that the entrant teachers are equipped rightly to face the problems of the profession with ease. It not only improves their efficiency but also helps boost the confidence of newly qualified teachers. Hence reflective teaching practices, which are the cognitive strategies for the teachers, need to be implemented in the teacher education system specifically to make teachers reflective practitioners. Both NCF 2005 and National Education Policy 2020 recommend teachers to be reflective practitioners. Being a reflective teacher not only benefits the classrooms but indirectly the institution as well as the society. To become a reflective teacher the reflective teaching practices, which can be concluded as cognitive strategies at teacher education, need to be acquired by the teachers.

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