GLOBAL INITIATIVES AND INNOVATIONS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education and training should no longer be seen as a strictly institutional concern, but one in which the wider community, including the world of work, is closely involved. In the face of globalization, and recognizing the need for countries to develop sustainably, major shifts are required in education. Teachers' professional education is viewed as one of the most important factors in improving students' learning. Keeping this in view many developed and less developed countries pay significant attention to improve the practices of teacher education. In order to develop capable teachers they make conscious efforts to establish and maintain quality teacher education institutions. This is likely to prompt measures for lifelong education, emphasizing the ongoing nature of career development. Educators face major challenges in trying to sustain educational improvement over time, and in spreading improvements beyond individual schools, throughout whole systems and communities. To succeed in a changing and complex world, school communities need to grow, develop, deal with and take charge of change so they can create a future of their own choosing and prepare students to play their own roles as effective agents of change. Leadership of schools cannot just be left to individuals. Research has shown that in order to ensure deep, broad, and long lasting reforms of the type required to achieve the vision expressed by the UN Decade for Sustainable Development, sustainable leadership of schools must be a priority. As sustainable development is a global, regional as well as a national issue, so the urgency for international cooperation and cross referencing grows more strongly. O'Riordan (2004) has argued the need for some form of governance for sustainability, especially from the standpoint of present education practices.   In other words, education systems worldwide are actually promoting in the long run, non-sustainability which emphasizes resource depletion and the runaway use the natural environment. Increasing globalization and the emergence of the knowledge economy are calling into question traditional perspectives on the transformational capacity of education systems and the conceptions o teaching—of teaching as a profession and the roles of teachers. This paper will also discuss new ways of conceiving and operationalsing learning and teaching in the context of curriculum change, pedagogy and training. In short, the importance of quality teacher education cannot be overlooked for improving the quality of teaching-learning in the school.

KEY WORDS: Initiatives, Innovations, Teacher Education

INTRODUCTION

Education is the means by which we thrive, individually and collectively. In recent times, the growing complexity and interconnectedness of our now global society has challenged the effectiveness of traditional education systems, which were designed for the needs of the industrial era. To thrive in the 21st century, however, we need to go beyond that—and teach people how to learn, engage, and create. As Einstein said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." The new model is about the constant creation of knowledge and empowering individuals to participate, communicate, and innovate. Education of teachers needs to strengthen and stress upon the main attributes of a profession, such as, the systematic theory, rigorous training over a specified duration, authority, community sanction, ethical code and culture, generating knowledge through research and specialization. It is acknowledged that formal professional training on continuous basis is necessary for becoming a good teacher as it caters to the development of one's personality and sharpening of communication skills and commitment to a code of conduct. In the context of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, recently passed in Parliament, the right to education of children with disability needs to be assessed. This is an attempt to construct a framework to work this out. It is pertinent, however, that some clarity is obtained on the matter of inclusion; within the Indian context, it is a much abused term and is often rejected too easily without much research. What makes such populist opinions even worse is the confusion that prevails in the understanding and usage of this and related terms, the semantic proximity of the operative terms "integration" and "inclusion" clouding the issue even further. Education and training of teacher educators has to focus its attention on the new role of teacher educators on the problems which reflect the emerging global trends in education and the overall needs and aspirations of the people in India. It has also to deal with specific problems confronting teacher education institutions and to make teacher education more responsible and responsive. It also has to encourage teacher educators' continuing professional growth. In addition, there are certain practical problems as well.

Based upon the issues, the following objectives can be comprehensively identified for the programmes of preparation of teacher educators:

- to develop competencies and skills needed for preparation of teachers and teacher educators
- to enable them to organize competency-based and commitment oriented professional programmes

- to enable them to develop pedagogy relevant to the education of teacher educators

- to acquire an understanding of the needs and problems of teacher educators and teacher education institutions

- to develop skills related to management of teacher education institutions

- to develop competencies of curriculum development and preparation of learning and evaluation materials

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

One of the major inputs towards enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in schools as well as the teacher education institutions would be the extent to which research outputs and the outcomes of innovations are utilized by the system. Researches on teacher education have been and are being conducted in universities, national level institutions and other establishments but their utility for the teacher educator or the classroom teacher remains rather low. Majority of the researches are undertaken to obtain a degree and hence the focus on its possible utility and relevance gets misplaced. The situation is compounded by non-availability of appropriate dissemination mechanisms, like journals, publication of findings in different forms and opportunities to the target group to get an access to these. Institutional capabilities and resources need to be augmented, enabling them to undertake relevant researches.

Innovative strategies imply the development of new ideas which are disseminated and utilized; they usually occur in response to particular problems that exist in the education systems:

Quality. Issues of quality arise at all levels in education systems. They bear on policy making, system management, school organization, the teaching of subjects and how pupils respond to each other. They raise large fundamental questions— such as what education is of most worth, what values should a society promote, and what sort of citizens should education produce. They also raise day-to-day questions— such as how best to teach social studies, what teaching aids will work with handicapped children, and how to make sure school rooms are safe.

Pupil quality. The most important evidence of quality in an education system is to be found in the quality' of the pupils/students produced. The problem, however, is to arrive at satisfactory 'indicators' which will show that better quality education has been achieved.

Efficiency. Within those questions lay two dilemmas. The first relates to deciding where to put the investment of time, money and resources. What would be the best order of priority to achieve the

greatest effect? The second concerns how to best adjust the mixturnputs into the system to increase efficiency—how to get the best balance between curriculum reform, materials production, reorganization of structures, teacher training (in-service, pre-service), introducing new technologies, and improving the educational environment.

Innovation. One of the questions that is being increasingly considered by countries in the region is: How best may innovation improve quality? It is not possible to answer that question in general terms other than to say that, if the current quality needs to be improved, something new will have to be done. Even if the question were rephrased—such as: What innovations are likely to best improve quality? (Whether it be in the schooling system as a whole or teacher education in particular)—the answer is still elusive because it depends on what aspect is under consideration (mathematics achievement, moral behaviour, cognitive capability, skill development, the performance of the disabled) and what is known to work best in the specific aspect (for example, a great deal is known about improving learning to read, but not much about values education or high-level computer-assisted learning). This focus on inclusive education is evident in the approach adopted by the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). At a national workshop organized to discuss the role of inclusive education, the Director of Elementary Education and Literacy argued: Zero rejection policy had to be adopted as every disabled child had to be educated. But multiple options could be used … [these] include inclusive education, distance education, home-based education, itinerant model and even alternative schooling. (DPEP, 2001: 3)

Thomas and O'Hanlon (2001: vii) are even more critical in their reflections and note that the term is often used 'merely (as) a filler in the conversation' and 'people can talk about "inclusion" without really thinking about what they mean'.

PRINCIPLES OF RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO EDUCATION

A rights-based approach to education is informed by seven basic principles of human rights. These principles need to be applied in the development of legislation, policy and practice relating to the right to inclusive education:

Universality and inalienability: Human rights are universal and inalienable, the entitlement of all people everywhere in the world. An individual cannot voluntarily give them up. Nor can others take them away.

Indivisibility: Human rights are indivisible. Whether civil, cultural, economic, political or social, they

are all inherent to the dignity of every person

Interdependence and interrelatedness: The realization of one right often depends, wholly or in part, on the realization of others.

Equality and non-discrimination: All individuals are equal as human beings, and by virtue of the inherent dignity of each person, are entitled to their rights without discrimination of any kind.

Participation and inclusion: Every person and all people are entitled to active, free and meaningful participation in, contribution to and enjoyment of civil, economic, social, cultural and political development.

Empowerment: Empowerment is the process by which people's capabilities to demand and use their human rights grow. The goal is to give people the power and capabilities to claim their rights, in order to change their own lives and improve their communities.

Accountability and respect for the rule of law: A rights-based approach seeks to raise levels of accountability in the development process by identifying 'rights holders' and corresponding 'duty bearers' and to enhance the capacities of those duty bearers to meet their obligations.

EDUCATION POLICIES AND STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THE RIGHT ACCESS OF EDUCATION

Every child has the right to education on the basis of equality of opportunity. Children with disabilities are particularly at risk of being marginalized or discriminated against in the realization of the right.

- **Removing the barriers to inclusive education**

Removing the physical, communication, mobility and sensory barriers to education including investment in development of public spaces that are both safe and inclusive, providing that all education environments have physically accessible features and all the necessary conditions for learning, and introducing accessible transport. Addressing attitudinal barriers by public awareness campaigns, use of appropriate language to challenge negative stereotypes of disability and encouraging the media play a positive role in challenging the barriers to inclusion Addressing socio-economic barriers through provision of appropriate, accessible and non-stigmatizing social protection measures

- **Working with and supporting parents**

Provision of parental education programmes to help parents support their child's learning, for example through parent-to-parent counseling, mother-child clubs, or civil society outreach through house to house visits   Building partnerships between them and local schools, encouraging them to

join school boards and developing programmes which explicitly address their concerns.

- **Ensuring access to and availability of inclusive education**

Introduction of legislation and policies establishing the right to inclusive education which includes a clear definition of inclusion and the specific objectives it is seeking to achieve, as well as guaranteeing children with and without disabilities the same right to access mainstream learning opportunities, with the necessary support services

- **The right to quality education**

Education has to be of the highest possible quality to help every child reach her or his potential, and that quality should be consistent across regions, different populations, and urban and rural settings. Quality in education can only be achieved through the development of child-friendly inclusive learning environments, dedicated to a holistic approach to children's development. All learning environments and educational content, teaching and learning processes should reflect human rights principles.

Developing inclusive curricula, teaching and learning methods

- Promotion of active, participatory and child centred learning and teaching methods to allow children to work at an appropriate pace, in groups or individually, and partnering children with and without disabilities as peer educators to enable mutual learning

- Adopting a curriculum to enable all children to acquire the core academic curriculum and basic cognitive skills, together with essential life skills, including respect for human rights.

- Creative use of assistive technology to make it easier for students with disabilities to learn, including physical resources, computers and use of ICTs

INVESTMENT IN TEACHER TRAINING

- Reviewing the content of teacher training curricula to ensure that it embodies child centred methodology, teaching in inclusive and multi-cultural environments, using individual educational plans to adapt and support children with specific educational needs, human rights, and in particular, recognition of non-discrimination as a human right and positive strategies for promoting tolerance and tackling discriminatory behaviour

- Providing increased levels of opportunity for practical work experience as part of teacher training

- On-going, high quality professional development opportunities for teachers that address inclusive methodologies

SUPPORT WITHIN SCHOOLS FOR TEACHERS

- Ensuring adequate staffing levels to provide teachers with the time and resources needed to achieve effective inclusive education

- Provision of strong support from school leadership, with ownership by the governing body, and all school policies consistent with the goal of inclusive education

- Involvement of family and community as resources in classrooms to support individual learning programmes and increased individual attention that children with disabilities often need.

ESTABLISHING RESOURCES TO PROVIDE SPECIALIST SUPPORT

- Building multi-disciplinary support through a range of different specialist services, organisations and resource centres, and professionals working collaboratively to provide a comprehensive and seamless service to support inclusive education.

- Development of collaborative practice and provision through networks of learning communities

- Utilizing parental expertise as a significant source of support both to other families and to schools.

- Improving teachers' conditions of service to ensure that they are adequately supported, paid and respected.

A CHILD CENTERED, SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

- Establishing close links between health and education services to provide a connection between school, community and the family, revolving around the child's well-being.

- Promoting effective community partnerships to ensure positive interaction between the school and the community

- Developing health and safety standards for the building of schools to reflect the needs of children in inclusive settings.

- Providing safe and stimulating opportunities for play and recreation for all children.

- Ensuring that, in the case of natural and man-made disasters, all children are easily able to evacuate any buildings and routines are in place on how to respond in such situations.

CONCLUSION

Inclusion requires a large vision and specific competencies for all teachers. Now the teachers need to know that diversity is present in the classroom, and that they should attend to learners with a range of diverse needs. In this frame, it is imperative to prepare teachers for inclusion in all curricular plans

for pre-service teachers, also for teachers in services, with the following professional aptitudes:

- **Researcher.** Always searches for explanations about their educative reality, has intellectual skills to propose diverse hypothesis, solve problems, generate innovation, and face challenges in the education field.

- **Strategic.** Is a professional with strong self- regulation, skills for planning, guiding and assessing, not only their own intellectual resources about the learning of curricular issues but also in their performance as a teacher. Always has an attitude to learn and improve. Faces uncertainty with creativity.

- **Resilient.** Always moves towards the future, in spite of their difficult situations, by making healthy adjustments against adversity.

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