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CHIEF EDITOR – PRAMOD PRAKASHRAO TANDALE

“Innovations And Best Practices Towards Quality Education In Teacher Education”

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Abstract:

Education is the most important and power full instrument invented by humankind to shape and mould he in a desirable manner. The history of the world proves that education has been the root cause for any change, which takes place in social, cultural, spiritual, political, and economic aspect of human life. In present, education has become one of the necessities of human life, like food, clothing, and shelter. Therefore, we can say that life is education and education is life. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) remarks, “The destiny of India is being shaped in its classrooms.” No doubt, education plays a significant role in nation's development but the quality of education is greatly determined by the quality of teachers. In this era of globalization and technological revolution, education is considered as a first step for every human activity. It plays a vital role in **Innovations and best practices towards quality education** and the development human capital and is linked with an individual's well-being and opportunities for better living. This article emphasis on Innovations and best practices towards quality education and only two best practices towards quality education teacher education were discussed namely collaborative and reflective practices for teacher empowerment and focuses on 1. Concept of Cooperative Learning, Elements of Cooperative Learning: Special characteristics of a good Co-operative/Collaborative learning team , Learning techniques/ implications of Cooperative learning, 2. Concept of Reflective Teacher Education, Definition of Reflective practices in Teacher Education, Five propositions about nature of reflective practices in teacher educations, Criteria for Reflective practices for Teacher Education, Need and Importance of Reflective practices in Teacher Education, Approaches to Reflective Practice Principles of Reflective practices in Teacher Education and Advantages of Reflective Teacher Education. Teacher Education faces a major challenge of a divide between theory and practice. The quality of teacher development practices has become a major concern in recent educational discourse. There is a great emphasis on collaborative and reflective approaches for teacher empowerment. This article has elaborated upon these approaches that would serve to make teacher development practices more meaningful and holistic

Key words:-Cooperative learning, elective practices, Assumptions, Goals, Tasks, Content, Roles and Discourse.

Introduction:

Problems in education have no fixed answers. No teacher education program can prepare teachers for all the situations they will encounter. Teachers themselves will make the final decisions from among many alternatives. Such judgments may be good or poor. Therefore, it is important for teachers to constantly re-evaluate their decisions. This can be achieved through collaborative and reflective practices in teacher education. Co-operative learning in teacher education can instill in future teachers the value of social interactions. Reflection improves a teacher's ability to make appropriate and sound judgments and, therefore, become an empowered decision-maker.

Co-Operative And Collaborative Practices In Teacher Education:

Concept Of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative or collaborative learning is a team process where members support and rely on each other to achieve an agreed-upon goal. The classroom is an excellent place to develop team-building skills you will need later in life. Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible for not only learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement. Students work through the assignment until all group members successfully understand and complete it.

Cooperative / Collaborative Learning Is Interactive; As A Team Member, The Student Teacher:

- Develops and shares a common goal
- Contributes his/her understanding of the problem: questions; insights and solutions
- Responds to, and works to understand, others' questions, insights and solutions
- Empowers the other to speak and contribute, and to consider their contributions
- Is accountable to others, and they are accountable to him/her Is dependent on others, and they depend on him/her

Elements Of Cooperative Learning: The conditions/elements that will ensure more productive than competitive and individualistic efforts are:

1. Positive Interdependence

- Each group member's efforts are required and indispensable for group success
- Each group member has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort because of his or her resources and/or role and task responsibilities

2. Face-to-Face Interaction

- Checking for understanding
- Connecting present with past learning
- Discussing concepts being learned
- Orally explaining how to solve problems
- Teaching one's knowledge to other

3. Individual and Group Accountability

- Assigning one student in each group the role of checker. The checker asks other group members to explain the reasoning and rationale underlying group answers.
- Giving an individual test to each student.
- Having students teach what they learned to someone else.
- Keeping the size of the group small. The smaller the size of the group, the greater the individual accountability may be.
- Observing each group and recording the frequency with which each member-contributes to the group's work.
- Randomly examining students orally by calling on one student to present his or her group's work to the teacher (in the presence of the group) or to the entire class.

4. Interpersonal and Small-Group Skills

Social skills must be taught:

- Communication
- Conflict-management skills
- Decision-making
- Leadership
- Trust-building

5. Group Processing

- Group members discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships
- Describe what member actions are helpful and not helpful
- Make decisions about what behaviors to continue or change

Special Characteristics Of A Good Co-Operative/Collaborative Learning Team

- Team activities begin with training in, and understanding group processes. An instructor begins by facilitating discussion and suggesting alternatives but does not impose solutions on the team, especially those having difficulty working together
- Three to five people in a team. Larger teams have difficulty in keeping everyone involved.
- Teacher-assigned groups. They function better than self-assigned groups
- Diverse skill levels, backgrounds, experience
 - Each individual brings strengths to a group
 - Each member of the group is responsible to not only contribute his/her strengths, but also to help others understand the source of their strengths
 - Any member who is at a disadvantage or not comfortable with the majority should be encouraged and proactively empowered to contribute
 - Learning is positively influenced with a diversity of perspective and experience increasing options for problem solving expanding the range of details to consider
- Commitment of each member to a goal that is defined and understood by the group
 - Confidential peer ratings are a good way to assess who is and who is not contributing
 - Groups have the right to fire a non-cooperative or non-participating member if all remedies have failed.
 - Individuals can quit if they believe they are doing most of the work with little assistance from the others
- Shared operating principles and responsibilities, defined and agreed to by each member. These include:
 - Commitment to attend, prepare and be on time for meetings
 - Have discussions and disagreements focus on issues, avoiding personal criticism
 - Take responsibility for a share of the tasks and carry them out on time. You may need to perform tasks that you have little experience, feel ill prepared for, or even think others would do better. Accept the challenge, but be comfortable in stating that you may need help, training, a mentor, or have to resign and take on different task.

Learning Techniques/ Implications Of Cooperative Learning

Research has shown that cooperative learning techniques:

- Promote student learning and academic achievement
- Increase student retention
- Enhance student satisfaction with their learning experience
- Help students develop skills in oral communication
- Develop students' social skills
- Promote student self-esteem
- Help to promote positive race relations

Concept Of Reflective Teacher Education

In the past ten years, the terms 'reflection' and 'critical reflection' have increasingly appeared in descriptions of approaches to teacher education. It is clear however that the terms are often ill defined, and have been used rather loosely to embrace a wide range of concepts and strategies. Reflection is a natural process that facilitates the development of future action from the contemplation of past and/or current behavior. Reflection refers to the ongoing process of critically examining and refining practice, taking into careful consideration the personal, pedagogical, and ethical contexts associated with schools, classrooms and the multiple roles of teachers.

Definition Of Reflective Practices In Teacher Education

While Dewey (1933) believed that reflection is an aim of education, others view it as a means to help pre-service teachers become effective.

He believed that reflectivity involves active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of its supporting grounds and its eventual consequences. Dewey implies that two distinct components are involved in reflective thinking: the process and the content. In order to have a better understanding about teachers' reflective thoughts, both the process and the content of reflective thinking must be considered simultaneously.

Five Propositions About Nature Of Reflective Practices In Teacher Educations

Kemmis (1999) presents five propositions about the nature of reflection, that not only clarify what reflective teacher education entails but also indicate that reflective teacher education is a complex approach, not easy to put into practice and even less to evaluate:

1. It is not biologically or psychologically determined, nor is it pure thought; reflection expresses an orientation towards action and is about relation between thought and action in real historical situations.
2. It is not the individualistic working of the mind as a kind of mechanism or speculation; it presupposes and shapes social relations.
3. It is not value-free or neutral as regards values; it expresses and serves concrete human, social, cultural, and political interests.
4. It is not indifferent or passive towards social order, nor does it extend socially accepted values; it either reproduces actively or transforms the practical ideologies that support social order.

5. It is not a mechanical process or a purely creative exercise to construct new ideas; it is a practice that expresses our power to reconstitute social life through participation in communication, decision making social action.

Criteria for Reflective Teacher Education:

The criteria for reflective practices in teacher education are grouped in six broad areas, namely, **Assumptions, Goals, Tasks, Content, Roles, and Discourse:** These areas are essential for the critical regulation of teacher development practices and to plan teacher development programmes.

Assumptions: All teacher development practices are based upon assumptions about the nature of teacher education and school pedagogy. Analyzing these practices requires inquiry into those assumptions;

Goals: An understanding of teacher development practices implies the analysis of its direction. Reflective teacher education aims at primarily the empowerment of student teachers towards the promotion of a pedagogy for autonomy;

Tasks: The nature of teacher development tasks greatly determines the quality of teacher education. This area involves the following criteria;

- **Transparency-** To what extent are teacher development tasks made explicit as regards their assumptions and aims, steps and demands, potential value and limitations and evaluation. It improves awareness and enhances a critical attitude towards practices. It can be promoted directly by the teacher educator/the task instructions (external explicitness), or achieved by student teachers' reflection on tasks (participatory explicitness).
- **Theory-practice integration-** To what extent do the teacher development tasks focus on the integration of private and public theories and practices. Integration implies the activation of student teachers' experiential knowledge and/or practical experimentation. It may be indirect or direct. Indirect experimentation involves tasks other than teaching, aiming at preparing for teaching. Direct experimentation is school based and refers to all the tasks involved in real teaching. Both the types of experimentation should foster pedagogy for autonomy.
- **Consistency-** To what extent do teacher development tasks reveal congruence between aims and processes, as well as between their different steps? Internal consistency increases task meaningfulness, intentionality, and impact. Lack of consistency affects course credibility and student-teacher commitment.
- **Organization-** To what extent is the management of resources, space and time adequate to the assumptions, goals, content and roles of teacher development practices?
- **Content:** The content of teacher development practices highlights the arena of professional reflection and action and it is important to assess their relevance and progression.
- **Relevance-** To what extent is the content of teacher development programme/s relevant considering student teachers' previous knowledge, expectations, interests and needs (meaningfulness); past/recent developments within the area of study (information); contribution to challenging established assumptions and practices towards the development of a pedagogy for autonomy (innovation)?
- **Progression-** To what extent does the content of teacher development practices promote the elaboration of student teachers' theories and practices?

- **Roles:** The roles student teachers assume vary according to the assumptions and goals that orient development practices. Reflectivity, (inter)subjectivity, negotiation and regulation are important qualities of roles in a reflection-oriented approach-
- **Reflectivity-** What kind of reflection does teacher development practices promote? What view of school pedagogy do they encourage? Reflection should be the basis for the definition of the teachers'role. At a **technical level**, reflection aims at the achievement of short term objectives; in order to improve performance At a **practical level**, reflection is centered on the analysis of assumptions, predispositions, values and results of teachers'practice. At a **critical or emancipator level**, reflection includes the ethical, social and political dimensions of teachers'practices. This level includes reflection on teacher education processes (met cognition), from an inquiry-oriented perspective. All three levels of reflection are important in promoting the development of pedagogy for autonomy
- **(Inter) subjectivity-** To what extent do teacher development practices integrate the student teachers'self in interaction with others? The construction of professional knowledge is both a personal and social process, which involves description, interpretation, confrontation, and reconstruction of educational practice. This means that roles are redefined through meaningful interaction that fosters both individual and collective commitment.
- **Negotiation-** To what extent do teacher development practices create opportunities for negotiation? Negotiation can involve various degrees of student teacher autonomy, but it always requires that teacher education curricula are conceived as praxis, not as pre-defined products to be consumed.
- **Regulation-** To what extent do teacher development practices enable the individual and collaborative regulation of development processes. The promotion of student teachers'autonomy requires their critical participation in the supervision of their own learning and of the learning and of the learning contexts.
- **Discourse:** Reflective teacher education assumptions and goals have implications for the discourse of student teachers and teacher educators, especially for the quality of communication, which has a strong influence on the quality of development processes, particularly in terms of relevance and degree of democracy
- **Communication-** To what extent do teacher development practices integrate focused and expressive communication?

Need And Importance Of Reflective Practices In Teacher Education

- Professionalization has become a very important issue in the field of education. Reflection on one's own work is a key component of being a professional (Schon, 1983) and is essential to teacher education. Teachers must examine their beliefs, assumptions and biases regarding teaching and learning, and determine how those beliefs influence classroom practice
- Pre-service teachers should examine any cultural baggage they may carry in order to evaluate its appropriateness in teaching.
- Since teaching is often an uncertain, dynamic and complex practice, teachers must make constant judgments about appropriate goals, teaching methods, and students' learning.
- Recent research on teacher education raises concerns about teacher education programs' tendency to encourage acquiescence and conformity to the status quo of both schooling and society

- Teacher education programs too often espouse utilitarian perspectives in which teaching is separated from its underlying educational, social, or ethical domains and the technical aspects become an end in themselves rather than a means toward some broader educational purpose. Constant re-evaluation of teaching practices allows a teacher to question assumptions about teaching and learning, and prevents teaching from becoming a passive role in schooling.

Approaches To Reflective Practice

Three approaches that support the facilitation of reflective practice are; self and peer assessment, problem-based learning and personal development planning

- **Self and peer assessment:** Both self and peer assessment can be used to support reflective practice, since they involve students thinking about their own learning. Bound, responsible for much of the pioneering work on self and peer assessment, defines it as the "involvement of students in identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgments about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards"
- **Problem Based Learning:** Problem-based learning (PBL) is used in a number of disciplines as a way of engaging students in 'real' problems. Unlike conventional teaching, PBL starts with a problem and requires the student to research, select, analyze, and apply information and theories to solve it. Students work in groups or teams to solve or manage these situations, but they are not expected to acquire a predetermined series of 'right answers'. Instead they are expected to engage with the complex situation presented to them and decide what information they need to learn and what skills they need to gain in order to manage the situation effectively
Characteristics of problem-based learning.
- **Personal Development Planning and Portfolios:** Personal development planning is a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance, and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational, and career development. The educational aim is to provide students with a structure for thinking about and planning their own development. PDP might be seen as a process of evidencing learning and reflection.

Principles Of Reflective Practices In Teacher Education

Following principles need to be considered while deciding the approaches to reflective practices.

- Concern with the development in student teachers of a personal style and philosophy of teaching, including ethical dimensions;
- Use of action research or enquiry-based approaches to investigate and improve teaching in a supportive environment;
- Recognition of the problematic nature of schooling, including classroom and curriculum decision-making;
- Sensitivity to contexts for teaching, and in particular, to the range of school students' backgrounds, abilities, and characteristics;
- Attempts to build in cycles involving preparation for practicum action, data collection about what happened, reflection upon it, and possible (often 'if-then') modifications.
- Ongoing monitoring of program implementation, with careful attempts to provide some evidence of their outcomes and impact; and

- Use of techniques such as microteaching to build a repertoire of skills, journaling to encourage recording, thinking and self-evaluation, and regular dialogues with peers, staff and/or teachers to clarify issues and value positions.

Advantages Of Reflective Teacher Education: Reflective Teacher education-

- Empowers teachers to better influence future directions in education and take a more active role in decision making
- Enables teachers to analyze, discuss, evaluate and change their own practice, adopting an analytical approach towards teaching;
- Enables teachers to appraise the moral and ethical issues implicit in classroom practices, including the critical examination of their own beliefs about good teaching;
- Encourages teachers to take greater responsibility for their own professional growth and to acquire some degree of professional autonomy;
- Facilitates teachers' development of their own theories of educational practice, understanding and developing a principled basis for their own classroom work;
- Fosters teachers' appreciation of the social and political contexts in which they work, helping teachers to recognize that teaching is socially and politically situated and that the teacher's task involves an appreciation and analysis of that context;

Conclusion:

Teacher Education faces a major challenge of a divide between theory and practice. The quality of teacher development practices has become a major concern in recent educational discourse. There is a great emphasis on collaborative and reflective approaches for teacher empowerment. This article has elaborated upon the approaches that would serve to make teacher development practices more meaningful and holistic.

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