

TEACHING PRACTICE FOR STUDENT TEACHERS OF B.ED PROGRAMME Issues, Predicaments & Suggestions

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ABSTRACT

In teacher training programme (B.Ed) period of teaching practice is considered as very demanding, hectic and exhaustive. Yet the essence of teacher training lies in it. Every year student teachers are sent for teaching practice to different schools. This period extends approximately for 21-25 days. On returning to department, as per practice, student teachers share their views, concerns, experiences and gains with their lecturers in evaluation session. This feedback proves beneficial while making plans for next session. For last four years, some problems, experiences, impediments remain same for most of the students. This paper takes into account the various predicaments faced by student teachers and ways to strengthen the teaching practice so that reflective teaching practice can be encouraged.

Keywords: Student teacher; teaching practice; predicaments; lesson Planning; evaluation; reflection; internship.

INTRODUCTION

An effective teacher training programme can be ensured when both the school and the college (department of teacher's training) work in tandem. In the department, students are acknowledged with theoretical concepts of the educational psychology, management of classroom, teacher taught relationship and various philosophies dealing with education. Teaching practice is a time when all these learned concepts have to be applied successfully in real life situations. Before deputing student teachers for teaching practice to different schools, they are equipped with different teaching skills in microteaching session, extending over a week followed by demonstration lessons given by lecturers to make students teachers understand the integration of various skills & styles in a 35-40 minutes period. Later on all the student teachers are made to give one criticism lesson of 35 minutes in their respective method subjects. Feedback by teachers and their classmate are provided for blocking the loopholes. After that student teacher departure from department is ensured to cover 40 lessons (20 in each method subjects).

ANXIETY INDUCING AREAS AND CONCERNS

There are various areas which induce anxiety and cause concern to student teachers. Some of these are as follows:

Lesson Planning

Writing the lesson formally and then proceeding in the classroom accordingly bothers much to student teachers. On paper planning fails to match proceedings in the classroom for first few days. Things that are put down on paper do not always match up with realities of the classroom. Children of the class either know more or less than what has been prepared by student teachers. This is enough to make student teachers nervous as they have to mentally readjust or replan their written lesson plan. Introductory questions or lesson developing questions are not answered as anticipated by student teacher sometimes intentionally or unintentionally by classroom children.

Classroom Management

Maintaining discipline in the classroom and dealing tactfully with the pupils who misbehave pose a challenge to student teacher. In some of the schools visited by student teachers impish behaviour of children cause disturbance in the class and impedes effective classroom management. Another factor which plays a crucial role in classroom management is acceptance by the taught. A study of student teachers at Exeter University by Preece (1979) reported that discipline problems often led to high level of anxiety in student teachers. However he also found evidence that in some cases a high level of anxiety by student teacher at start of Teaching Practice actually appeared to be a cause of discipline problem. The classroom management becomes difficult if student teachers are not able to strike a cord with children, or if the topic to be taught by them is already covered in the class. In most of the schools student teachers are asked to take the same topics which have been already covered by their teachers.

Because of this children lose the interest. Classroom control has to be effective when teaching aids are shown or an activity is conducted by student teacher. Student teachers with low confidence level find difficult to manage 50 – 60 students in the class.

Heavy Work Load

Teaching is multitasking. Student teachers have to spare time for activities like preparing lesson plan and teaching aids, assessment of work given by them as home work in the class. All these activities exhaust them. Some of the students teachers have reported of sleepless nights during Teaching Practice, as they had to prepare lesson plans and teaching aids for three/four periods next morning. Some of the student teachers who are not able to take the mental stress often think to the extent of giving up training. Mental and emotional stress is also felt when not very favorable comments are written on their record books by teacher supervisor or by their own lecturer.

Stephens (1996) has pointed out how student teacher can sometimes be overwhelmed by a feeling of panic when get a feeling that they cannot do a particular task such as unruly class. Preparing charts and models also consume a lot of time of student teachers. Science students can get some help from school laboratory but for others, it is like a heavy home task everyday.

Time Table of School

Uneven distribution of classes among student teachers causes worry. Trainees who have language as their method subject are able to get more classes while students with History, Civics or Geography get only 2–3 per week. Usually schools give classes to student teachers according to their convenience and depending on number of teachers on leave. Most of the schools are not very willing to disturb their schedule according to need of student teachers. Usually VI, VII, VIII classes are provided to them for Teaching Practice. Some school authorities do not prefer more experimental ways of teaching in the classes. Higher classes like IX and X are not given presuming that time of school students would be wasted. Student teachers have to complete 40 lesson plan (20 in each method subject) so their focus remains on completion of task rather than on reflecting on classroom activities. Some student teachers have to teach same topic in different sections of same class, so in spite of taking two different classes, the number of lesson plan covered remains one. It is common practice in schools that teacher discusses the problems given at the end of chapter with pupils before assigning home work which is time consuming. Student teachers have to spend one or two periods on evaluatory work but without counting it as one lesson plan.

Evaluation by Supervisor/Teacher

This is a major issue which causes discomfort to student teachers also called 'evaluation anxiety'. This refers to anxiety induced by being observed by one's lecturer or teacher of school acting as supervisor. A study of Capel (1997) which included using Hart's questionnaire with a group of students in south of England reported that main cause of anxiety for student teacher was to being observed, evaluated and assessed. Student teachers often complain that they forgot the content matter and feel nervous when teacher sits at the end of classroom and observes. The behavior of student teacher changes, comfort level becomes low and they find themselves in artificial situation where their main consideration remains to get good remarks in record files. Pressure of doing things correctly and managing classroom activities properly make them tense and apprehensive while teaching. Some of the student's teachers are able to overcome this within a day or two but for others it acts as a barrier to gain full confidence.

Less Preparatory Time Before Teaching Practice

The teaching practice is a vital aspect of teacher training programme. It serves as an opportunity to be exposed to the realities of teaching and performance of professional activities. Before onset of teaching practice session, if less preparatory time is provided to student teachers, it may lead to difficulty in translating theoretical ideas in practical shape due to lack of time to reflect & improve.

GAINS THROUGH TEACHING PRACTICE

The positive side of this whole exercise of Teaching Practice is that it gives sense of accomplishment to students teachers. They learn to take responsibility, gain confidence and improve upon their classroom management skills. Above all the communication skills gets improved. Most of students' teachers report that after teaching practice they feel lot more confident in speaking before gathering than before. Teaching practice should act as a firm base for student teachers to develop a disposition for effective teaching.

The teachers training programme is not about giving theoretical knowledge of various theories of teaching learning or skills used in the classroom teaching only; rather this should serve as worthwhile experience in making of an inspiring teacher.

CONCERNS OF TEACHING PRACTICE

Some major concerns which have been observed in the teaching practice are as follows:

1. It has been observed that during teaching practice more emphasis remains on use of various teaching skills rather than on integrated impact of teaching. Most of the student teachers imitate the style of their own teachers. But it is felt that student teacher's imitation and direct modeling is damaging to the development of teaching profession (Crozier, Menter and Pollard, 1990).
2. Constable and Norton (1994) have rightly put forth a point that pressure on student teachers to cope with teaching practice can sometimes act as a barrier to their development. The main focus of student teachers remains on finishing the task of 40 lesson plans and maintaining proper written records rather than on developing deep understanding and skills needed for their professional development.
3. Innovative methods are not adopted by student teachers in the classroom. Most of them cover the lesson on dotted lines. They adopt usual ways of introducing the lesson by using questioning skill, interact a little in between, use the conventional teaching aids (like charts & models) and in the end ask few evaluatory questions followed by home task. Some student's teachers start teaching in practice schools as instructed by supervisors and not as they have learnt due to difference of opinion between the two. The trainees accept the suggestions as that is the way supervisors (teachers from schools) want their students to be taught.
4. As far as effective classroom management and discipline are concerned, student teachers fail to understand that a silence in the class is not a signal of remarkable teaching rather for a lively classroom proceedings, a healthy interaction between teachers and taught is must. Questioning skills learnt by them during microteaching sessions becomes effective only when it is a two way process- from teacher to taught and vice versa.

REFLECTION: A MEANS OF GAINING SKILLS

For improving, adding attribute and attaching value to teaching, student teachers have to interpret the classroom situations through exploratory actions and reflect in action. Student teachers need to bring more new ideas rather than just a replica of teachers teaching style. Student teacher need to interrogate with their lecturers and supervisors, theories & practice instead of narrowing their conceptions of teaching to the observation and imitation of workplace skills (Husbands, 1994).

The ability to reflect is often regarded as an important attribute of effective teachers (Borko, Michalee, Timmons and Siddle, 1997; O` Donoghue & Booker, 1996; Posner, 1996). Reflection helps to attain expertise to student teachers, so has to be integrated & embedded in the training programme of teachers.

Reflective teaching practice consists of collection of detailed information regarding events of the classroom, children behaviours , student teachers own level of satisfaction in managing & planning instructions, overall impact of lessons etc. A fair evaluation of all this is required.

The reflective process involves continuous self observation and evaluation of trainee to understand individual actions and reactions of learners (Brookfield 1995, Theil 1999). The process was conceptualized by Comb (1984) as an action research model where by people learn and create knowledge by critically reflecting upon their action and experiences, forming abstract concepts and testing the implications of these concepts in new situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, certain amendments are needed in ongoing practice. Following recommendations can embolden student teachers to put into practice pedagogy and interactive skills that has been learnt theoretically.

1. More time should be devoted in the college/ department by student teachers in learning and applying skills under mock conditions where feedback can be provided by their own classmates and lecturers. It has been observed that batch of students which had more practice in department performed confidently and in better way in comparison to group which had less preparatory time.
2. Lesson planning can be made flexible. Student teachers can be encouraged to adopt new methods of teaching instead of adopting the most common lecture cum demonstration or simple lecturing with the help of teaching aids.
3. Teaching aids an important element in classroom proceeding most of time are prepared or arranged by student teacher. Some changes can be made by encouraging children of class to prepare charts / models in the classroom, either individually or in small groups. This practice can help in developing psychomotor skills as well as increases interaction level of student teacher and taught.
4. Before student teachers leave for practice schools a workshop can be held by faculty members of college for supervising teachers of the school. This can give insight to supervising teachers as what they have to keep in mind while observing student teachers in the class. It has been observed that comments of supervising teachers remain limited to use of various skills like Black board writing, way of introducing the chapter, the general behavior of students in the class, whether teaching aid is used or not and less emphasis is given on gradual improvement of student teachers, new approaches adopted and stimulus variation whether being effectively used in class or not.
5. At the end of lesson plan, along with one supervisor's observation sheet, one more sheet should be included where student teacher can record his own observations, experiences, classroom environment, his extempore activities, improvisations of that particular day to reflect and for further improvement.
6. The teaching practice session should not have binding of completing the 40 lesson plans, rather emphasis should be on quality teaching, where student teacher has chance to reflect and improve.
7. First two days of teaching practice should be kept for interaction of student teachers with children of class, so that acceptance and comfort level increases between student teacher and pupils of the class.

8. Supervisor teachers of school should do a continuous evaluation of student teacher. Formative and summative both types of evaluation should be done. Every school should follow this practice. In some of the schools, teachers do not bother to record observations. Supervisor teacher should don the mantle of a mentor.
9. In teaching practice session which lasts to 3-4 weeks approximately, student teachers learn to develop the lesson, to be more confident to face a class of 50-60 students, create conducive environment and way to proceed in the classroom, but remain short in creativity, experimentation and initiatives. This trait can be cultivated if more time is given for practice, to think through situations and make decisions based on what they consider is best for children they are teaching. For that one novel suggestion is that at the end of their nine months training programme (B.Ed) after writing final exams, student teachers should go for two months internship to schools, where they work in close association and under guidance of senior teachers acting as mentors. In this period trainee teacher will be performing all the duties of a regular teacher which they are unable to do due to shortage of time and their other hectic engagements. After two months they can submit a certificate of successful completion of internship to college authorities, which can be attached to Marks card (result) of B.Ed.

This practice will give ample time to teacher trainee to act as a regular teacher without fear of being observed, get acceptance from children and at the same time multitasking like a teacher whose duties extend beyond classroom in play ground or in organizing co curricular activities. At every weekend feedback from mentor teacher and children can be taken through open discussion or informal conversation in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers deal with the most dynamic resource i.e. human beings. Teacher training programmes require continuous innovations to respond to changing needs. Conversations will help student teachers to reflect on shared personal concerns, to ask questions, to seek answers from others and this becomes a vehicle for articulating, examining and changing beliefs. (Schectr & Parknusst, 1993).Teacher training should not appear as apprenticeship, where only imitation of their lecturers / supervising teachers is done by student teacher rather it should be flexible, challenging and reflective. Student teacher should be given empowerment in the classroom / school so that he can actualize his responsibility in a better and competent way.

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