

Critical Reflection of the Pre- Service Teachers for the School Internship under the Revised Guidelines of NCTE 2014

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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 respect to the understanding about the psychological aspect of learner and learning. Field engagement is an essential component of any teacher education programme. The sustained engagement with the school over a period is known as 'school internship' which prepares the prospective teacher to build a repertoire of professional understandings, competencies and skills, and positive attitude to schooling and teaching. In fact, it is this component of the teacher education curriculum which facilitates transformation of a student-teacher from being learners in the art and science of teaching to adequately-equipped teachers to accomplish the responsibilities of a teacher in actual school settings. The present day educational discourse centres around the concepts of self-learning, self-knowledge, and constructivist approach to teaching and learning which infers the students need to be facilitated to graduate from being mere recipients of knowledge to become assimilators and generators of knowledge. The internship programme provides an opportunity to the prospective teachers to link the educational theory and pedagogical concepts with their practice on the one hand, and on the other to test the validity of theoretical propositions in actual school settings. The past few years have witnessed a paradigm shift in the concept of school internship courses in India. The earlier stipulation of practice-teaching involved teaching of a pre-specified number of lessons in the subjects offered by a student-teacher as teaching or methods subjects. The *NCTE Regulations, 2009* tried to broaden the scope of practice-teaching by emphasising the importance of providing experience of all activities and programmes of the school to the student-teachers. The NCTE Regulation 2014 have stipulated further strengthening of component of 'Field Engagement' by prescribing a longer duration of 20 weeks for it in the elementary and secondary teacher education programmes. The internship programme provides an opportunity to the prospective teachers to link the educational theory and pedagogical concepts with their practice on the one hand, and on the other to test the validity of theoretical propositions in actual school settings.

Key Words: Pre-service teachers, internship programme, NCTE Regulation 2014,

Introduction

Internship programmes in general are supposed to facilitate 'the transition from student status in a profession's preservice education programme to the status of a full-fledged member of the profession' (Ratsoy et al., 1987, p.8). The sustained engagement with the school over a period is known as 'school internship' which equips the prospective teacher to build a repertoire of professional understandings, competencies and skills, and positive attitude to schooling and teaching. The student-teachers/intern-teacher should be called upon to work as full-time teachers in assigned schools during internship under the guidance and supervision of school principal and mentor teachers. In other words, they should be required to assume all such tasks that are performed by regular teachers of the school. In addition, they ought to be provided opportunities to observe participate and contribute in all activities of the school both in school curricular and co-curricular activities and out of school activities. Most teachers are generally called upon to work during their professional career in diverse contexts, such as Govt/Private schools in urban and rural areas. It would be desirable to provide opportunities to the student-teachers to gain experience of working in diverse contexts by completing internship in schools located in urban, rural and tribal areas. It has been proposed to earmark 80% of time for Internship in Government and 20% of time in Private Schools. The teacher education faculty and school mentor teachers may design a few need-based and

locally-relevant activities, such as survey of historical monuments in the school neighbourhood, interview with local artists and artisans, meetings with retired award-winning soldiers and teachers, visits to places of cultural importance assessment of the mechanism of neighbourhood cleanliness, etc.

During Internship, the student-teachers are required to undertake a variety of activities relating to classroom teaching, classroom management, and organisation of school-based and community-based activities other than teaching. However, for undertaking the activities, the student-teachers are required to develop a repertoire of understandings, competencies, and skills. They must undertake some activities in the first part of the internship and some other in the second part. A few such activities are suggested below:

- a) Understanding the Internship School and the community around.
- b) Analysis of school syllabus and textbooks.
- c) Observing the classroom teaching of regular teachers.
- d) Observation of classroom teaching of peer student-teachers.
- e) Preparation of case study of the internship school and the innovative activities that the school undertakes.
- f) Preparation of Lesson Plans and Unit Plans.
- g) Teaching the units of the prescribed syllabus in two subjects currently being taught in the school.
- h) Teaching as a substitute teacher.
- i) Mobilisation and development of teaching-learning resources.
- j) Preparation of a question papers and other assessment tools.
- k) Preparation of a diagnostic tests and organisation of remedial teaching.
- l) Undertake case study of a child.
- m) Undertake action research project on at least one problem area of schooling.
- n) Community work, community survey etc.
- o) Maintenance of a reflective diary or journal to record day to day happenings and reflections thereon.
- p) Writing a term paper on a selected theme.

The TEIs and Internship Schools may devise additional activities based on local specific needs. While selecting the units of the syllabus, the student-teachers shall follow the annual instructional plan drawn by the host school. 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 - 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 teacher education programmes builds up the rationale for arguing for a more effective teacher education - school partnership and the need for a better understanding by pupil teachers 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 pupil teachers (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, pupil teachers 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 offer a chance to invite engagement and reflection and can identify patterns of thought characteristic of teachers' work within contexts (Bullough & Baughman, 1996).

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 must 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 subject with the stipulated minimum marks.

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.

During the Internship, a student-teacher shall work as a regular teacher and participate in all the school activities, including planning, teaching and assessment, interacting with school teachers, community members and children. Before teaching in a classroom, the student-teachers will observe the school and its classrooms for a week, to understand the school in totality, its philosophy and aims, organisation and management; the life of a teacher; needs of the physical, mental, emotional development of children; aspects of curriculum and its transaction; quality, transaction, and assessment of teaching-learning.

School Internship shall be designed to lead to the development of a broad repertoire of perspectives, professional capacities, teacher dispositions, sensibilities and skills. Student teachers shall be equipped to cater to diverse needs of learners in schools. Student-teachers are to be actively engaged in teaching at two levels, namely, upper primary and secondary. They should be provided opportunities to teach in government and private schools with systematic supervisory support and feedback from faculty. Internship in schools is to be done for a minimum duration of 15 weeks. This should include an initial phase of one week for observing a regular classroom with a regular teacher and would also include peer observations, teacher observations and observations of interns' lessons by faculty. It is important that the student-teachers consolidate and reflect on their teaching experience during and after the school internship. Therefore, along with writing reflective journals during the internship programme, there shall be space for extended discussions and presentations on different aspects of the teaching experience after the internship. For each student-teacher, internship should be conducted preferably in one school for the entire 15 weeks. However, if the institute wants to provide an opportunity to understand the context of teaching in a government and private school or the dynamics of teaching at elementary and senior secondary levels, this period can be divided into two blocks. Internship may be arranged in two blocks in such a way that teaching in one school at a particular level (for example elementary or senior secondary) during one block, is followed by the teaching in another school or the same school at another level during the second block. Under any circumstances, the student-teacher should not be sent to more than two schools during her/his internship period. Internship should not be reduced to the 'delivery' of a certain number of lesson plans, but should aim for meaningful and holistic engagement with learners and the school.

The course should bring together perspectives from many other courses and draws upon theoretical frames from psychology, philosophy, sociology, and language learning. It offers a site for prospective teachers to reflect on and critique notions of learning and teaching that they have formed from their own experience, and to move beyond them (Olson & Bruner, 1996). Learning encompasses many dimensions: knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, attitudes and habits. Student-teachers will understand theories of learning as conceptualized currently within psychology and cognitive science (Mukunda, 2009; Piaget, 1997; Vygotsky, 1997). They will engage critically with theories that reduce learning to behavioural and testable components, which have been influential in education, but which narrowly limit the perspective on education (Erlwanger, 1973).

The centrality of curiosity, interest, active engagement and inquiry in learning at all levels will be emphasized. Student-teachers will engage theoretically and through observation with the notion of learning as construction of knowledge (NCERT, 2005; Phillips, 1995).

They will also investigate the differences and connections between learning in school and learning outside school (Rampal, 2003; Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacasa, & Goldsmith, 1995). Finally, they will form strong images of what powerful learning in a classroom can be, its relationship with learners' motivation, and develop analytical tools to understand such learning.

Reflection on learning will therefore have the following broad components:

1. Understanding learning: socio-cultural and cognitive processes
2. Understanding the learner

3. Learning in and out of school

Student-teachers will appreciate that all teaching is directed at learning, and that the learner is at the heart of teaching (Holt, 1964). They will critically question the widespread belief that teaching is telling (informing/demonstrating), and understand culturally responsive teaching approaches that support learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Plato, 2009). They will explore the activity of teaching in a formal setting, and appreciate it as a contextually located, highly complex enterprise, that cannot be reduced to techniques (Carr, 2005 Chapter 2; Lampert, 2001). Values, personal relationships between teacher and learners, relationships among the learners themselves, autonomy, self-esteem and freedom experienced by learners, all shape and are shaped by the work of teaching. Student-teachers will analyse teaching as a profession, reflect on their beliefs and practices, multiple responsibilities located in an institutionalized setting, and the need and opportunities for professional growth (Shulman, 1986; Kosnick and Beck, 2009). Reflection on teaching will hence have the following broad components:

1. Teaching as a complex activity
2. Analysing teaching in diverse classrooms
3. Teaching as a profession

The course should involve students integrating the study of academic texts with visits to schools and other field sites, and the analysis of a variety of records of learning and teaching. These should include videos of lessons, examples of children's work, records that capture a variety of images of learning and teaching. Student participation will be in an inquiry mode, involving planning exploration, sharing and reflecting, analytical writing, and studying teachers' diaries (Badheka, 2006; Bhatt, n.d.). reductionist approach of 'microteaching' of isolated 'skills' and simulated lessons.

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