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Short Discussion Paper

Current Challenges for Teacher Education and ICT

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Current Challenges for Teacher Education and ICT

Impact of School Reform

- While educational reform since the 1980s was strongly focused on providing access to education and creating a teaching-learning environment, the late 1990s brought the role of the curriculum into national focus. The critical link that binds these critical elements together – the ‘agency’ of the teacher continues to be cast aside.

*This stands even in the discourse on ICT-Education interface where the dominant perspective of ICT intervention is driven by the concern to improve the **delivery** of education.*

- As a consequence, for the last two decades the schoolteacher, a legitimate centerpiece of processes of social change, is reduced to a mere object of educational reform.

The ICT-Education perspective seems to be driven by a similar line of thought.

Practice of Teacher education

- Teacher education continues to happen in insular environments even within the university system where many are located. This precludes the larger academic debates on education related to right to education, issues of equity, gender and community to enter the day-to-day discourse of teacher educators.
- The training of teachers happens in insular, intellectually impoverished environments that are as much severed from ground realities as from the lofty aims of education they espouse.
- Such intellectual isolation actively discourages educational theorisation and the growth of interdisciplinary enquiry.
- It also actively dissuades teachers from developing a culture of interaction, dampens the need for continued professional development leading to a vacuum in capacity building
- Schoolteachers, (particularly those in elementary schools) continue to remain severed from centers of higher learning and are typically intellectually isolated. As a result, mechanisms from within the teacher community to participate in debates about school reform do not exist.

- The vision of curriculum reform needs necessarily to be seen in the light of the current conditions within which our children are being “educated”, namely, within folk pedagogic practices and the behaviourist frame of conventional teacher education.
- Teachers are the crucial mediating agents through which ‘textbooks’ are transacted. Therefore the hidden assumption that texts by themselves can help develop secular values and social sensitivity needs to be questioned.
- Neither the ‘textbook’ nor the teacher is a sufficient condition for curriculum renewal in India.
- Large-scale recruitment of para-teachers within the formal school system and a creeping attitude of resignation towards pre-service programs have become an integral part of state provisioning for elementary education. ‘The underlying view is that elementary education does not require a fully qualified and trained teacher.’
- New discourse in education is bereft of any theoretical engagement either amongst master trainers or the teachers themselves. The view of teacher as ‘facilitator’ promotes the thinking the teacher is merely redundant if the role of facilitator can be assumed by new technologies.

The need is to engage teachers with a larger socio-political context in which education is situated, with children in real contexts, critically question their own assumptions and beliefs about knowledge, the learner and learning and positions in society vis-à-vis gender, caste, class, equity and justice. Such processes, unfolded within the frame of critical pedagogy, are likely to promote habits of independent thinking, collaborative learning and develop the capacity of the educational system to adapt to the changing learning needs of children and society.

The question therefore is: How can ICT enable such processes?

Developing Discourse on Education

- ‘The purpose of education is to produce responsible, thoughtful and *enterprising citizens* in a society’
- ‘While quality education must factor in a society’s history, culture, moral and political values, and outlook, *at the same time* it must preserve spaces for individual creativity, self-reflection and enhance individual agency’
- ‘The goals of education should blend these seemingly dichotomous goals of inculcating secular values, building moral character, psychological development and creative capacity leading to self-fulfillment, as well as equipping individuals with skills and capabilities enabling them to *contribute to society and fulfill their material needs*’

- Lives of those not mainstreamed in technology are perceived as inferior. There is constant reference to the need to bridge digital divides. Therefore the focus is on developing computer literacy amongst learners and teachers.

Counter- perspective

- The purpose of education is linked to issues of equity, social justice and social change
- Quality education does not necessarily perceive a conflict between individual and social goals of education
- The use of ICT needs to be defined in terms of enabling the aims of education. ICT cannot become the goal of education. For instance, if current education is severing children from their lives, culture and society, ICT can be used to bridge such gaps through widening and deepening reach to learners and teachers.

Dominant Perspective of ICT and its use in School education

- Improve delivery of education; create an ‘efficient work force’ towards a global knowledge economy
- Implement strategies that strike a balance between investments in *new technologies versus investments in more traditional activities such as teacher training, teaching and learning materials, and basic infrastructure.*
- Technology is to be viewed not only a means to *assist traditional education* and *its delivery*, but it has also become *an end itself.*
- Redefining the role of traditional teachers in a technology-based learning environment and in government school classrooms. Shift from teacher-centric classrooms to learner-centric classrooms.
- Pre-service and in-service teachers will undergo courses in ICT which would be assessed on line. This suggests the need for teachers to develop *technological fluency* in order for them to become co-creators of knowledge and not mere *deliverers* of knowledge.

Counter-perspective

- Education is not an information package to be delivered and transmitted.

- With an increasing emphasis on ICT skill development, teachers are likely to be further entrenched in the frame of delivering education.
- New technologies need to be viewed as aids in the process of enabling equity and quality in education. They cannot become substitutes, to be used in place of teacher training and curriculum development. Therefore these are not economic choices to be made.
- Technology needs to be viewed as a tool towards re-establishing the link between education and society.
- ICT needs to be used to take best practices, frontier disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical discourse to teachers and create communities of practice.
- Technological fluency by itself cannot make teachers co-constructors of knowledge. They will need to be engaged in a discourse through active teacher/practitioner groups through the use of ICT.

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