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Innovative Approach in Teacher Education

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Abstract

During the last few decades, large number of seminars have been organised at the national and international level with the express purpose of innovation in the field of teacher education. One of the most fundamental problems in education-today is that people do not have a clear, rational sense of meaning about what educational innovation is for, what it is, and how it proceeds. Thus, there is much faddism, superficiality, muddle, failure of change programs, unwarranted and misguided resistance, and misunderstood reform. For the implementation of successful innovation a teacher requires gathering support for an innovation, the motivation for undertaking an innovation, the importance of participation and sustained efforts. Most of the teachers adopt the methods like discussions, seminars, library-reading and many more. As an alternative to lectures the programmed learning method has been tried and some institutions have institutionalised it. The paper focuses on the importance of innovative teaching-learning pedagogy that should be practiced in education to sustain interest among teacher trainees. Teaching through instructional strategies is an outcome of such a trend. The innovation of teaching through instructional strategies has introduced several changes in the instructional practices at the teacher education level, which are: Shift of emphasis from unstructured methods of teaching to structured methods, use of more than one medium of instruction, objective based assessment of entry and terminal behaviours by providing appropriate learning experiences, individual based instruction instead of normative based instruction and role of a teacher educator akin to that of a facilitator.

Key Words: Innovation, Instructional Strategies, Sustained Efforts, Programmed Learning

Introduction

Recent moves towards professionalization in the field of Teacher Education imply increased responsibility for both proposing and carrying out innovations on the part of teacher educator and teacher trainees. To accomplish lasting reform, awareness of the meaning of innovation and how best to proceed is critical. However, the nature and process of innovation in Teacher Education programs has as yet received little attention. In this paper we refer to general principles in the mainstream education literature on innovation. One of the most fundamental problems in education-today is that people do not have a clear, rational sense of meaning about what educational innovation is for, what it is, and how it proceeds. Thus, there is much faddism, superficiality, failure of change programs, unwarranted and misguided resistance, and misunderstood reform.

This paper is designed in terms of the following questions: (1) what is educational innovation? (2) What are the duties of a teacher in bringing about innovation? Our hope is that by gaining a thorough understanding of what is involved, conceptually, in innovation, teacher educator will be better able both to innovate in their programs and to see the results of their efforts set firmly in place.

Role of a teacher in bringing about innovation

The term innovation has been defined in extremely varied ways throughout the mainstream educational literature on educational innovation. Most definitions seem to make use of a least one of four key terms to characterize innovation: change, development, novelty or improvement. For the implementation of successful innovation a teacher requires the following:

Gathering Support for an Innovation

It is essential to gather support from all members of an educational culture in order to ensure the success of an innovation. This point is of specific significance in teacher-initiated innovations since schools are hierarchically structured where the power remains with the administrators and not with the teachers. It is important to recollect that the various members of an educational culture will surely have dissimilar and differing outlook, perspectives and motivations with respect to the advantages and disadvantages of a particular proposal for change. Administrations can be quite removed from the classroom level concerns which can drive a teacher's desire to implement an innovation. It

can be quite useful to provide an opportunity for administrators to see things from the teacher's point of view, though this is not always emphasized in the literature.

The Motive or stimulus for Undertaking an Innovation

One of the driving forces behind the proposals for change from teachers can be the desire to gain professional recognition through implementing an innovation. In addition to gathering support for the innovation on an administrative level, it is essential to provide a stimulus or incentive for one's colleagues to support the innovation. In order to generate a desire for change on the part of teachers, it is helpful to appeal to values and ideals which one's fellow teachers hold. For example, key issues which can motivate teachers to seek change include not only a wish to encourage better learning for their students, but also the demand for equity, identification and respect. In other words, innovation can encourage professional development as well as development in classrooms. Teacher development is a complex process whose success depends upon a suitable context for learning, practical and engaging activities. Availability of resources, adaptable working conditions, assistance, and recognition can make a great difference in the desire of teachers to refine their practice. Although innovations can represent professional development for teachers, this benefit comes at a high cost, primarily in terms of hard work. More time and endeavour is required for teachers involved in the starting phases of an innovation, then, it is important to build in incentives and rewards in order to motivate participants and promote cooperation.

The Importance of Participation

It is essential that all teachers fully participate in an innovation. As Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) note, "intensification – type reforms focusing on narrowly defined and imposed curriculum and teacher competencies repel good people from entering and/or staying" (p. 332) whereas "... staff development experiences that build on participation, collegiality, cooperation, discovery, and solving real problems of teaching and learning summon the strength within a staff, instead of just challenging them to measure up to somebody else's standard" (Loucks-Horsely et al., 1987: p.7, in Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991:p. 318). For this reason, provisions should be made for all interested parties to be involved in the innovation. Innovation can be viewed as a vehicle through which teachers can explore their interest in the field of Teacher Education, recognize the opportunities within the profession, and act on their wish to develop their mastery in knowledge and experience in the field.

Sustained Effort

Those interested in initiating innovation need to recognize the amount of commitment necessary to creating change. Persistent efforts for change over a long period are necessary. Development, whether it is curriculum development, program development or teachers' development, is not something which is accomplished in a moment, but rather involves an ongoing dedication. It is helpful to consider this on-going nature of innovation as a cyclical process. Initial attempts almost always demands successive cycles of revision. For this reason, administration or implementation of a successful innovation requires long-term involvement and commitment of teachers.

Methodology and Expected Innovations:

Teaching through Instructional Strategies

Teaching at teacher education level is no longer restricted to unidirectional and unrestricted lecturing. Several institutions have adopted other methods like discussions, seminars, library-reading and so on. As an alternative to lectures the programmed learning method has been tried and some institutions have institutionalised it. Teaching through instructional strategies is an outcome of such a trend.

Focus- It is an attempt at structuring instructional practices of teacher education with an aim of effective and efficient achievement of instructional objectives. For doing so a teacher educator utilizes several methods and media, depending upon the objectives framed and the availability of expertise and resources, for teaching a given course in teacher education.

Rationale- It is largely accepted that a single method of instruction, whatsoever is the method, cannot achieve all the instructional objectives set for a course. In an attempt to achieve all instructional objectives, a teacher educator is required to make use of more than one method of instruction. Thus selected methods of instructions are arranged in a

sequential order based on the content they purport to teach and the objectives they are meant to achieve. Thus, selected and sequenced methods constitute an instructional strategy.

Purpose – The aims behind this innovation are as follows:

- a) To make instruction at the teacher education level a structured process.
- b) To comprehensively achieve the terminal behaviours set for teaching at the teacher education level.
- c) To establish the feasibility and efficiency of teaching through instructional strategies.

Changes Introduced: The innovation of teaching through instructional strategies has introduced several changes in the instructional practices at the teacher education level. A few changes are:

1. Shift of emphasis from unstructured methods of teaching to structured methods.
2. Use of more than one medium of instruction.
3. Objective based assessment of entry and terminal behaviours by providing appropriate learning experiences.
4. Individual based instruction instead of normative based instruction.
5. Role of a teacher educator akin to that of a facilitator.

Procedure of Implementation:

While teaching through an instructional strategy, a teacher educator adopts the system approach to teaching a given course of study. To begin with, the objectives for the course are specified as terminal behaviours. Then criterion referenced tests are developed for evaluating the achievement of terminal behaviours. Appropriate methods and media are selected based on the criteria mentioned earlier and are sequenced in the form of an instructional strategy. The entry behaviours of the trainees are tested and exposed to the learning experiences identified under the instructional strategy. Formative evaluation of objective to provide alternative/remedial learning experiences. The achievement of the terminal behaviours is tested through a summative criterion tests.

Evaluation- Evaluation of the outcomes of an instructional strategy is done through both formative and summative evaluation. Both these tests are objectives test that help a teacher educator assess the achievement of criteria. The tests are objectives as they are in specific behavioural terms. If an instructional strategy is used with a mastery learning perspective then the teacher educator decides, before the commencement of teaching, the criteria for mastery. Evaluation in an instructional strategy not only provides knowledge of the extent of achievement of behavioural objectives but also provides feedback to the teacher educator as to what modifications in the strategy are needed for a greater achievement of objectives.

Outcome- The innovation of teaching through instructional strategies has made the instructional process at the teacher education level a structures endeavour. It has not only paved a way of practising and subsequent institutionalisation of different methods and media available to a teacher educator, but has made it possible to enhance the efficacy of teaching at the teacher education level. While practising teaching through an instructional strategy, the teacher educator attempts a comprehensive attainment of objective. If, on the one hand, the innovation has made the goals of teacher education more realistic by defining them in behavioural terms, on the other hand it has ensured that the instructional experience is in line with the entry behaviours of learners of learners and the resources and facilities available in a teacher education institution.

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