

Neoliberal Pedagogy: Redefining the Teacher and Quality Debates in Teacher Education

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Abstract : *While debating the quality issues in teacher education, nowadays, we need to take cognizance of the neoliberal framework wherein the role of teacher and the concept of quality in education has been redefined. This framework is based on a pedagogy which focuses on rote learning, memorization and standardized testing and is oriented towards imparting skills necessary for the functioning of market economy. This neoliberal pedagogy intends to stifle critical thought, promote conformity and to prepare students for a market-oriented culture and a 'spectator democracy'. In this context, there has been a redefinition of the role of teacher, as this pedagogy encourages teaching for predictable outcomes. Such a situation leads to impinge on teachers' pedagogic role in the classroom. Further, in the neoliberal parlance teacher is often viewed as a service provider and not as a 'public intellectual'. Such neoliberal notions are posing serious challenges to teacher education as these are in contradiction with the role of teacher in a democratic society and the aims of teacher education as envisaged by the NCF (2005) and NCFTE (2009).*

Keywords: *Neoliberal Framework, Pedagogy, Constructivism.*

Introduction

Quality has long been viewed as an intrinsic feature of education. In educational debates, there have been different conceptions of quality. In a democratic society, quality of education is ascertained by its capacity to bring the marginalized sections of society within its ambit. Another conception, which is associated with viewing education as a public good, demands that the quality of educational transactions between the provider and the students must be ensured by a third party. The establishment of various statutory bodies for ensuring quality of higher and professional education can be viewed in this regard. The psychological perspective views the quality of education in terms of its capacity to respond to individual differences among learners. Educational quality has also been conceptualized in terms of the quality of curriculum and pedagogic practices and ensuring an active role of learner in the teaching-learning process.

The National Curriculum Framework- 2005 argues that quality in education includes a concern for quality of life in all its dimensions. This is why a concern for peace, protection of the environment and a predisposition towards social change must be viewed as core components of quality (NCERT, 2005:9). However, in the contemporary era of neoliberalism, the temptation to judge the quality of

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Singh

education as we might judge the quality of a factory, a hotel, or a car is strong (Kumar, 2009: 156). Besides, with the increasing pressure of the market forces to orient education to the needs of the capital or of so-called 'knowledge economy', quality control is also being viewed as a mechanism to control different aspects of education by imposing a framework for the working of education system.

Framework for Quality in Teacher Education

In recent years, the framework for quality of teacher education in India has been constituted by two documents, viz. National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 brought out by NCERT and National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education brought out by NCTE (2010). The NCF 2005 recognizes the availability of qualified and motivated teachers who perceive teaching as a career option as a necessary precondition for quality. It recognizes the following major shifts in formulation of curriculum framework (NCERT, 2005:108-109):

- The learner is seen as an active participant rather than a passive recipient in the process of learning.
- The role of teacher as a supporter in enhancing learning through multiple exposures, encouraging the learner to continuously achieve his/her educational goals.
- Knowledge is to be taken as a continuum, as generated from experiences in the actual field through observation, verification, and so on (Ibid.: 109).

In this context, the NCF articulates the need for developing teacher who could enable the learners to reflect, analyse and interpret in the process of knowledge construction. The NCF envisages that teacher education must become more sensitive to the emerging demands from the school system. For this, it must prepare the teacher for the roles of being an:

- Encouraging, supportive and humane facilitator in teaching-learning situations to enable learners (students) to discover their talents, realize their physical and intellectual potentialities to the fullest, and to develop character and desirable social and human values to function as responsible citizens; and
- active member of a group of persons who makes a conscious effort for curricular renewal so that it is relevant to changing societal needs and the personal needs of learners (NCERT, 2005:107).

Further, National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE)-2009 formulated by National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), envisages the development of a professionally developed and a humane teacher. The Framework while recognizing the increased demand for teachers in the present era laments that the proliferation of sub-standard private teacher education institutions and the current state of teacher education programmes are both serious impediments to fulfilling the objectives of the NCF and the Right to Free and Compulsory Education. Against this backdrop, NCFTE states:

- i. Teachers need to be prepared to care for children, enjoy to be with them, seek knowledge, own responsibility towards society and work to build a better world, develop sensitivity to the problems of the learners, commitment to justice and zeal for social reconstruction.
- ii. Teachers need to view learners as active participants in their own learning and not as mere recipients of knowledge; need to encourage their capacity to construct knowledge; ensure that learning shifts away from rote methods.

- iii. Teacher education must engage with theory along with field experiences to help trainees to view knowledge not as external to the learner but as something that is actively constructed during learning.
- iv. Teachers need to be trained in organizing learner-centred, activity-based, participatory learning experiences-play, projects, discussion, dialogue, observation, visits, integrating academic learning with productive work.
- v. Teacher education should engage teachers with the curriculum, syllabi and textbooks to critically examine them rather than taking them as 'given' and accepted without question.
- vi. Teacher education should provide opportunity to student-teachers for reflection and independent study without packing the training schedule with teacher-directed activities alone.
- vii. Teacher education programme should help teachers or potential teachers to develop social sensitivity and consciousness and finer human sensibilities.
- viii. Teachers need to re-conceptualize citizenship education in terms of human rights and approaches of critical pedagogy; emphasize environment and its protection, living in harmony within oneself and with natural and social environment; promote peace, democratic way of life, constitutional values of equality, justice, liberty, fraternity and secularism, and caring values (NCTE, 2010).

Educational Agenda of Neoliberalism

With neoliberalism as a policy framework gaining ground after the adoption of structural adjustment programme in India, its agendas are also unfolding in the field of education. One of such agendas has been to redefine education in the terms commensurate with the needs of capital. Neoliberalism does not only affect the institutions, moulding them to its own end, but also radically alters the way even welfarist, social-democratic forces understand education (Kumar, 2010). There has been a redefining of the purpose of education and what it means to teach, learn, and participate in schooling (Lipman, 2011).

In the neoliberal framework, education is increasingly viewed as an investment one makes in one's child or oneself to "add value" in order better to compete in the labour market. It is no longer seen as part of the larger end of promoting individual and social development, but is merely the means to rise above others.

In fact, education has been transmuted as a commodity and the students are largely looked upon as consumers of educational commodity and human capital for the labour market. Students on their part, choose such courses which prepare them for the labour market and provide them avenues for maximum financial returns on their completion. Globally, nations are restructuring their education systems for "human capital" development to prepare students for new types of work and labor relations (ibid.). Education has been more oriented to mould it to cater to the labour needs of the emerging capitalist economy by defining it in the terms of skill development and lesser emphasis has been on its role in the knowledge-generation, development of democratic ethos and citizenship. Such a scenario has been viewed by Glenn Rikowski as an outcome of process of capitalization of the 'human' (Rikowski, 2002:136).

In the face of the widening of inequalities in the society, neoliberalism is also facing a crisis of legitimacy as such a system would be seen as unfair and inhumane. Neoliberalism needs to persuade

Singh

the people that privatization, widening inequalities between rich and poor, poorer standards of public services are legitimate. Education as an ideological apparatus has been put in the service of neoliberal forces. To stop de-legitimation and to ensure that the majority of the population consider the government and the economic system of private monopoly ownership as legitimate, the state uses the ideological apparatuses such as schools and universities to 'naturalize' capitalism-to make the existing status quo seem 'only natural', to hegemonize its 'common sense' (ibid.)

Neoliberal Pedagogy

Under the neoliberal order, whereby students are trained to become "compliant workers, spectral consumers, and passive citizens", it necessarily has to create educational structures that anesthetize students' critical abilities, in order to domesticate social order for its self-preservation (Macedo, 2000: 4). Therefore, Neoliberalism will seek to destroy any forms of pedagogy that attempt to educate students regarding their real predicament (Hill, 2004). Rikowsky suggests that the neoliberal State tries to ensure that modes of pedagogy that are antithetical to labour-power production do not and cannot exist.

There have been conscious efforts to evolve a pedagogy which focuses on rote learning, memorization and standardized testing and oriented towards imparting skills considered necessary for the smooth functioning of market-based economy. This pedagogy is tied to models of accountability driven by the need to "teach to the test". In this paradigm, students are educated primarily to acquire market-oriented skills in order to compete favorably in the global economy. This type of pedagogy "produces an atmosphere of student passivity and teacher routinization" (Giroux, 2011, 9). In such pedagogy, the pupils do not participate actively in the process of learning for construction of knowledge and giving meaning to reality. Rather they are taught simply to achieve the already set performance targets. By using the expression of Henry Giroux, such pedagogy can be termed as neoliberal pedagogy. In this neoliberal pedagogy, teaching is driven by standardized tests and performance outcomes and learning equals performance on the tests with teachers, students, and parents held responsible for "failure" (Lipman, 2011).

In India, such pedagogy finds its earlier expression in the setting up of Minimum Levels of Learning by the National Policy on Education (1986) and has gained further credence in the subsequent policy documents in the era of neoliberal globalization. The declaration of World Conference on Education for All held at Jomtien in March, 1990 states: "Whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development-for an individual or for society-depends ultimately on whether people actually learn as a result of those opportunities i.e. whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills and values. The focus of basic education must, therefore, be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrolment, continued participation in organized programmes and completion of certification requirements.....It is therefore, necessary to define acceptable levels of learning acquisition for educational programmes and to improve and apply systems of assessing learning achievements (UNESCO, 1990: 5). Such definition of role of education in terms of acquisition of pre-determined outcomes leads to its reduction to mere literacy, numeracy and life skills.

In the programmes for universalizing elementary education initiated in the aftermath of the Jomtien Conference neoliberal pedagogy is taking shape in our school education scenario. Different policy documents have recommended setting up of learning outcomes beforehand which are to be realized through educational programmes. Pratham, a Non-Governmental Organization, through its subsequent

Annual Status of Education Reports (ASERs), is playing a leading role in institutionalizing the setting up of learning outcomes and evaluating the performance of educational programmes on the basis of achievement scores of students. It has also initiated a number of projects in different states for improving reading skills of students through a target-based approach. The Parrho Punjab (Read Punjab) programme run by Pratham in collaboration with the Government of Punjab for improving the reading skills of the children at primary level was one such initiative.

Now, the Twelfth Five Year Plan has provided a framework for full scale practicing of a pre-determined learning outcomes-based pedagogy. The plan document views a focus on learning outcomes as a unifying theme of the Twelfth Plan for addressing the problems confronting Indian school education. It states: Clear articulation of learning goals is the critical first step in this process. National learning standards must be developed on the basis of which States should be encouraged to define, in simple terms, meaningful learning goals to be achieved at the end of each class or set of classes. (ibid.: 54). It further states: Once basic goals are clearly articulated, all aspects of the elementary education system (e.g. methods of teaching-learning, use of materials, grouping for effective instruction, optimal use of time) will need to be strongly aligned to the achievement of the learning goals. System-level administrators at various levels need to ensure that the activities of the system at every level are aligned to the stated goals (ibid.: 55). Through the setting up of learning outcomes the plan document has envisaged to evolve a mechanism for improving the quality of school education by governing the every component of the system especially the working of teachers. In this context of favouring the practice of neoliberal pedagogy as a step towards ensuring quality education, it would be quite relevant to refer to Prof. James Tooley, who on the basis of a number of studies in different developing countries, including India, has been persistently arguing that the unrecognized schools in these countries though are deficient in infrastructural facilities and qualified teachers, yet in terms of achievement scores these are performing better than the government schools.

Thus, the conception of quality in education is now-a-days also being reduced to merely achieving these learning outcomes. In this regard, the eminent educationist Prof. Krishna Kumar points out: Far from showing concern for any essential attributes of education, much of the current usage of the term 'quality' focuses on the relatively more instrumentalist features of education. Whereas one might expect 'quality' to refer to a comprehensive or holistic view of education, contemporary debates on quality often stick to the limited view of learning which became synonymous with behavioristic educational theory and pedagogy. According to this theory and the pedagogic advice it offers, learning is something that can be planned, predicted and accurately measured once it has occurred (Kumar, 2010:10).

Redefining the Role of Teacher

In the scenario characterized by pervasive practice of neoliberal pedagogy, there has also been a redefinition of the role of teacher. Teachers are intimately connected with the social production of labour-power, equipping students with skills, competences, abilities, knowledge and the attitudes and personal qualities that can be expressed and expanded in the capitalist labour process. Teachers are guardians of the quality of labour-power (Hill, 2004). The realization of such a significant role of teacher in shaping the nature of future man power has resulted in redefinition of his/her role. As in the neoliberal parlance education is being viewed as a commodity or a commercial service, there has been a tendency to view teacher merely as a service provider and not as a 'public intellectual'. Such a conception of teacher has provided a rationale for the widespread casualization of teaching faculty

Singh

in our country especially under different education for all projects like DPEP and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, wherein even untrained teachers have been appointed. The recruitment of para-teachers within the formal school system and an attitude of resignation towards pre-service programmes have become an integral part of state provisioning for elementary education. Such measures threaten to ensure that inequity of access and quality is institutionalized. In many cases, even the minimum qualification stipulated for the recruitment of school teachers has been lowered to induct para-teachers. This trend has diluted the identity of the teacher as a professional and has led to a considerable erosion of faith in the agency of the teacher in bringing about change within the government school system and communities (NCERT, 2005b: 6).

Secondly, in the context of neoliberal pedagogy, the teacher has to teach only to achieve already determined learning outcomes. Teachers are required to deliver results according to the learning targets set by the state. This pedagogy encourages teaching for predictable outcomes as teachers are assessed on the basis that how far they have been able to ensure the achievement of learning targets among students. Such a situation leads to impinging on teachers' pedagogic role in the classroom.

In such a pedagogical process, teachers emphasize the mechanical learning and memorization of facts while sacrificing the critical analysis of the social and political order that generates the need for education in the first place. Seldom do teachers require students to analyze the social and political structures that inform their realities. Rarely are students allowed to engage in discovery and to find the truth for themselves. Instead, students are expected to learn (and this never happens) by a mere transfer of knowledge, consumed through rote memorization and later regurgitated (Macedo, 2000:4). This comes out to be a banking type of education in Freirean terms and contradictory to the paradigm of constructivism which forms the very basis of our national curriculum framework. In fact, the view of teaching as an outcome-oriented activity could squander the hard work done over decades in certain countries to popularize the constructivist paradigm of education (Kumar, 2009:156).

Thirdly, in order to further control the teacher, the education system is bureaucratized by handing over the whims of the system in the hands of a bureaucrat instead of an educationist. The creation of post of Director General of School Education (DGSE) should be looked in this context. Besides, in the name of making teacher accountable, a rigorous system of inspection and supervision is installed. Introduction of bio-metric attendance system in schools, installation of CCTV cameras in classrooms for surveillance over teachers, attempting to depoliticizing teachers by discouraging them to articulate their views through books and newspapers are the measures with a clear intention to control teachers. In fact, the bureaucratic education system do keep him (the teacher) responsive not to children or to the community but to the system itself wherein he is expected to cater to every survey, every census and every abhiyan! (George, 2008:291).

Conclusion

The developments taking place in the field of education in the era of neoliberalism have serious implications for teacher education. In accordance with these developments when teacher education becomes more oriented to skill development then its quality as envisaged by the NCF (2005) and NCFTE (2009) is seriously affected. Such teacher education programmes tend to train teachers to adjust to a system in which education is seen as merely the transmission of market-worthy information and has nothing to do with the endeavor to realize the constitutional ideals of democracy, equality and social justice.

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