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Achieving Teacher Education Objectives through Service Learning Strategies

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Abstract

Teacher education has wide varied scope and objectives. The prospective teachers have to be service minded and work dedicated to attain the broad end goals and objectives of teaching. The 21st century teaching demands the selfless service of teachers towards the noble profession of teaching. Hence the service learning strategies are to be studied and worked upon. The paper examines the service learning strategies which can be applied in the 21st century teacher education practices. It also highlights the importance of community service in teacher education. The service learning potentialities are to be explored by the prospective teachers deeply as a part of their curriculum. The prospective teachers are to be made aware of the relationship which service learning plays in the professional life of a teacher. Thus the paper broadly discusses the service learning strategies that can be followed and practiced by the prospective teachers during their teacher education course.

Keywords: Service learning, prospective teachers

Introduction

Teacher education is an integral part of every economy, be it a developed, developing or developed nation. Hence the teachers play a very important part and in fact they are the powerful voice behind each and every nation's progress. The Right to Education Act demands the need of well qualified, dedicated and hardworking teachers. This leads to the development of the entire nation and thus the progress. Thus teacher education is such an area where the teacher can work towards the progress and development of the entire society. The service learning strategies can be rightly blended with the teacher education so as to increase the societal commitment of the teachers. The teachers can thus extend their valuable service to the society and transfer the light of knowledge from one generation to the other. Hence the service learning strategies can be aptly included in the curriculum of the prospective teachers so that the training which they get during their course can be meaningfully clubbed with the societal interaction during their practice period.

Literature Review

Current concerns of teacher education as mentioned by NCF 2005 ^[5]

- Experiences in the practice of teacher education indicate that knowledge is treated as 'given', embedded in the curriculum and accepted without question; there is no engagement with the curriculum. Curriculum, syllabi and textbooks are never critically examined by the student teacher or the regular teacher.
- Language proficiency of the teacher needs to be enhanced, but existing programmes do not recognize the centrality of language in the curriculum.
- Teacher education programmes provide little scope for student teachers to reflect on their experiences.
- Repeated 'practice' in the teaching of a specified number of isolated lessons is considered a sufficient condition for professional development.
- Theory courses have no clear link with practical work and ground realities.

Service Learning and Student Sense of Civic Responsibility

Rebecca. A. Denby (2008) ^[3] in her paper entitled 'The impact of service-learning on students' sense of civic responsibility' concludes that service learning is a strong predictor of civic engagement. Therefore, institutions responsible for education play a critical role in preparing students for active engagement in political life. The results found that service-learning does have a positive and significant impact on students' sense of civic responsibility. Specifically service-

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Learning has a positive influence on: 1) students' awareness of, and empathy toward, individuals in the community and their needs; 2) their sense of personal responsibility; 3) their interest in Taking action; and 4) their understanding of the political and social issues that affect the community. Results also justified that a social justice approach to service-learning was more effective in influencing students' sense of civic responsibility than a charitable view.

Social Development Theory by Lev Vygotsky

Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. In contrast to Jean Piaget's understanding of child development (in which development necessarily precedes learning), Vygotsky felt social learning precedes development. He states: "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter - psychological) and then inside the child (intra - psychological)." (Vygotsky, 1978) [6].

Defining Service Learning

Service learning has its roots in John Dewey's theory of experience which stresses the importance of experience in learning. It combines the knowledge and skills with practical experience. A new philosophy of inquiry is proposed by Dewey that integrates community service and societal engagement with the cognitive domain of the individuals. Dewey spoke of five specific areas that give relevance to service learning. They are linking education to experience, democratic community, social service, reflective inquiry and education for social transformation.

Service learning can hence be defined as an opportunity given to students in order to engage themselves with their community and society and thus gain practical knowledge of the services that they can offer to the society in their profession. Service learning is different from the traditional pedagogy in several areas such as it emphasizes on societal commitment and individual responsibility with their knowledge and skills. It allows the students to gain knowledge from the community and society.

Such a reflection encourages the students to think beyond the traditional compartmentalized knowledge and allow societal interaction which make the students aware of the critical thinking possibilities. Thus service learning offers great possibilities in the present teaching learning situation of 21st century. It is an important tool which must be thus included in the curriculum of the students so as to attain the actual true meaning of education.

Hence it is the need of the hour to investigate the service learning possibilities that can be clubbed in the present teacher education curriculum.

Service Learning Typologies

Service learning happens when there is a proper linkage between learning goals and service outcomes. Through various methods and techniques this can be established. They are as follows:-

1. Volunteerism

It is a type of selfless help or service offered to the society by an individual. The involvement of the individual is without any compulsion or bias. The type of service expects no reward and just it is done to achieve the ultimate completion of the individual's learning goal. It is a help rendered to the society by the individual solely

because of his or her own personal intention. This increases the societal commitment of the individual and hence his responsibility. The individual whom he or she wishes to serve are the main beneficiaries. This type of service offers happiness and peace of mind to the doers.

2. Community Service

It is quite same as volunteerism but it has some differences too. This type of service is more structured. It is generally practiced as a part of the curriculum or course completion. This includes a group of students and their engagement with the community in a more structured and in a planned manner. The program coordinator or program guide explains the strategy to the students and the students act accordingly. The programs may extend from 15 days to 45 days. Many organizations like National Service Scheme offer this kind of community serving programmes. All the programmes that these organizations do, is for the societal good and societal progress. This kind of programmes thus increases the civic engagement and thus the civic responsibility of the future generation.

3. Internships

This kind of service learning approach is extended over a period of time say six months to one year. It is different from the other two on the basis that it is offering a greater period of time to understand the elements required for societal progress and development. Students benefit in such a way that they get ample opportunity to explore and understand the learning objectives of their course curriculum. The internship program is usually practiced as a compulsory programme for the course completion. This is necessary that the programmes, specially the professional courses require the proper understanding of the theory and the practical application of these acquired theories. Hence internships are often considered as a great and an able technique to develop the service learning possibilities. Thus it gains a more measurable return than the other two strategies.

4. Field Education

It provides the children to explore and discuss the surrounding issues and hence develop a concern towards these issues of their society. Field education offers the greatest possibility of exploring the different objectives laid down in the curriculum of the students. Every learning become perfect and clear if proper understanding of the course objectives are achieved along with a practical experience of these laid down course objectives. Thus in the present curriculum the academic stream is always strengthened by such proper and judicious field education programmes. It is much more materially beneficial to the students since it provides students with ample and adequate co-curricular opportunities related to their area of study.

Hence the service learning strategies or approaches warrants the high end perfection and clarity in the prescribed areas. The 21st century teacher education programmes are to thus follow the service learning typologies which will help them in acquiring the aforesaid teacher education objectives.

Thus the possibilities of the service learning must be followed so as to gain practical knowledge rather than just an analytical knowledge.

Value of Education

Through service learning and by following any one of the typologies of it, the value of education can be understood. The service of the teachers can be extended to those areas where there is scarcity of resourceful teachers. Thus the community and hence the society benefits from these teachers. The teachers can thus be an element of change and provide the light of knowledge to many little children around them.

Thus if such a thought is adopted among the pre service teacher education curriculum, the prospective teachers can realize the meaning and objectives of the noble profession deeply both in theory and practice.

Effective Teaching

Effective teaching practices can be developed among the prospective teachers through the service learning strategies. The service learning enhances the teaching proficiency of teachers and thus their skill in teaching. The service they offer to the society enhances their societal commitment and hence their responsibility in providing education for the needed. Thus by including such a concept in the pre service teacher education curriculum, the prospective teachers get an opportunity to understand the real objective of teacher education.

Conclusion

The service learning and teacher education objectives thus bear a linear relationship towards effective teaching and morale educational system. Hence the teaching learning situations of the prospective teachers get more involvement with the community and society. These increase the societal commitment of the prospective teachers and also help them understand the important responsibility that a teacher has to bear in the society. Thus by including the service learning as a part of the pre service teacher education curriculum, the teacher education objectives and the value and meaning of education can be clearly comprehended by the prospective teacher trainees.

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