



# Demonstrating a situated learning approach for in-service teacher education in rural India: The Quality Education Programme in Rajasthan

Anju Saigal

ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth, Centre for Elementary Education, Videocon Towers, Block E-1, Jhandawalan Extension, New Delhi 110055, India

## HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Two cases presented of teacher professional support processes in Indian schools.
- ▶ Paper discusses dialogic interactions and modeling as pedagogic support strategies.
- ▶ Highlights situated, collaborative learning potential for teacher education reform.

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 14 October 2011

Received in revised form

24 May 2012

Accepted 28 May 2012

### Keywords:

In-service teacher education

Situated learning

Teacher support

Rural government schools

Education reform

India

## ABSTRACT

Recent educational policy in India has repositioned elementary school teachers as active, reflective practitioners, not just 'deliverers' of syllabus material. This article examines innovations in teacher support in Rajasthan's government schools through the 'Quality Education Program.' Drawing on qualitative research of collaborative learning processes, the paper discusses two support strategies used by the program: professional dialogic interactions and modeling of pedagogic strategies, which paralleled introductory or developmental phases within a 'collaborative apprenticeship model' of teacher professional development. In doing so, the paper outlines the potential of situated, collaborative approaches for Indian in-service teacher education and education development reform, more broadly.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Since the mid 2000s, educational reform efforts in India have deepened the focus on issues of schooling quality. Such efforts in the policy and practice domain have primarily concerned themselves with challenging and redefining traditional curriculum and teaching methods toward a more constructivist orientation and a focus on children's conceptual learning (cf. NCF, 2005; NCFTE, 2009; RTE, 2009). In 2009, the passage of the Right to Education Act made it mandatory for the entire school system to adopt and implement curricular and pedagogic reform along this orientation. This fundamental shift in school education has repositioned teachers from mere 'deliverers' of syllabus material to active and reflective, professional practitioners and has necessitated aligning teacher professional development toward preparing and supporting teachers in bringing change in their everyday pedagogic practice. Against this backdrop, this paper examines situated learning as

a means to support teachers make the expected pedagogic shift as envisaged through the teacher education reform effort in India.

Through reflecting on the case of the *Quality Education Program* (QEP), this paper considers ways in which in-service teacher education can be re-conceptualized in Indian rural government elementary schools. Implemented from 2007 to 2011 in Baran district, Rajasthan (a north-western Indian state), the QEP was a public–private partnership with the Government of Rajasthan, which intended to present an alternative model of in-service teacher education for teachers across the district based on in-situ, in-school learning opportunities. As part of the program, 'shiksha samarthaks' (referred as 'Educational Resource Intermediaries' (ERIs) in this paper) were to work closely with primary school teachers<sup>1</sup> to develop resources, model teaching activities, bounce ideas, and help plan lessons. This paper shares the findings from

<sup>1</sup> Primary school teaching qualification in India usually involves 2 years of initial teacher training with a minimum prerequisite of 12 years of schooling. Unlike many other countries, teaching certification for the primary grades in India is not a post-graduate course.

E-mail address: [anju.saigal@gmail.com](mailto:anju.saigal@gmail.com).

a qualitative school-based study to discuss the dynamics of the QEP teacher education process involving teachers and ERIs in Baran.

The analysis examines the situated learning processes that emerged through the engagement of the ERIs with primary school teachers. It shows how the ERIs drew on support strategies that attempted to respond to the contextual realities of the schools in which they worked. Located in a resource-poor environment in a remote, largely tribal district in the country, the educational processes in the Baran schools mirrored those of the majority of schools across the country. Predominantly acculturated in 'behaviorist' modes of instruction, the teachers emphasized syllabus completion and 'knowledge delivery,' to children, largely through rote memorization. Student–teacher relationships were rigidly hierarchical and the school environment and processes reflected these hierarchies in various ways. Working within this schooling context, the QEP attempted to support teachers toward building more participatory, student-centered schooling processes and environment.

The school-based strategies initiated by the QEP, parallel what Glazer and Hannifin (2006) describe as the 'introductory' or 'developmental' phases of a 'collaborative apprenticeship model.' In this model, an expert or mentor 'initially lead(s) a community of teachers towards the design and development of learning activities' (Glazer & Hannifin, 2006: 191). While the professional learning experiences were gradual and modest, the interactions between ERIs and teachers demonstrate an alternative to the rigidly hierarchical 'transmission' approach of teacher education that is dominant in the Indian context. The ERIs' attempt to recognize and respond to teachers' 'local knowledge' in the learning processes reflects broader national ideals of repositioning the Indian teacher as an active learner. The significance of this recognition of teachers' existing knowledge cannot be understated in this research context – it represents a step, however small, toward imagining new approaches to in-service teacher education in rural India.

### 1.1. *Re-envisioning in-service teacher education in India*

Centrally sponsored schemes for in-service education of Indian teachers in the nineteen eighties and nineties followed a top–down approach (cf. MHRD, 2009), with syllabus and material developed and disseminated by a national-level government agency. The training paradigm followed a 'cascade' transmission of knowledge model in which key concepts and examples of 'quality' teaching were passed down to 'master trainers', then to trainers at regional levels, and finally to government school teachers. In such models, 'knowledge' was assumed to be a given, independent of context or experience, and easily transferrable. Teachers were positioned as recipients of knowledge, rather than professionals who were co-constructing and negotiating knowledge about their teaching practices. The 'cascade' training model has been critiqued for not integrating teacher-development into teachers' daily work practices, for failing to acknowledge and build on teachers' existing professional knowledge, and for using material disconnected to the contexts of rural poverty in which many teachers work.

Major initiatives for Indian education development – the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs, established in response to the National Policy on Education, 1986), the District Primary Education Program (DPEP, 1997–2001) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, from 2001) – have emphasized the need for more contextual and sustained in-service support for teachers. Decentralized mechanisms for teacher education were seen as key to this move. Across the country, Resource Centers were set up across village 'clusters' to provide academic resources and support for teachers. Teacher educators at the DIETs and extension functionaries at the cluster levels were employed by state governments

to support teachers and organize professional development programs.

However, 'cascade' models of teacher education continued to characterize many of the ensuing decentralized in-service programs, and research suggests these initiatives have had limited success in engaging with teachers' local needs and supporting sustained change in teachers' practices (Clarke, 2003; Dyer et al., 2004; Mukhopadhyay, 2009). For example, Clarke's (2003) empirical study of teacher-training mechanisms in the 1990s showed how the delivery of in-service training failed to work with teachers' existing and often competing frameworks for learning. It was thus difficult for new pedagogic ideals to gain traction in teachers' practices. Furthermore, the decentralization of in-service teacher education did not always result in contextualized, on-going academic support as envisaged by program ideals. As Mukhopadhyay (2009) argues, the administrative duties of extension functionaries employed by state governments to work in schools often superseded their primary responsibility of providing teachers with academic support.

Such observations highlight that while past reform efforts achieved a measure of success in bringing support structures closer to the teachers' context, the underlying de-professionalized view of the teacher as a deliverer of curriculum material, continued to guide frameworks for teacher professional development practice. In a significant departure, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (2005) and later, the Right to Education (RtE) Act (2009) and the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) (2009) challenged the behaviorist underpinnings of school and teacher education, calling for a constructivist perspective and approach. In line with this, these policy documents re-envision the role of the teacher as an active facilitator of children's learning. They present learning as a continuously evolving process and position the teacher as an active, reflective learner, gaining not only from the knowledge of experts but also from their own experiences. The teacher is expected to engage critically with the curriculum, syllabus and textbooks, and develop skills in facilitating learner-centered classroom interactions (NCF, 2005; NCFTE, 2009). This reconfiguration of the teacher's role significantly challenges established practices of Indian teacher education and urges new approaches to develop and support reflective practitioners in schools. It is this context that frames the discussion that follows of the QEP's innovations toward teacher support.

The principles of in-service teacher education and support, which the QEP demonstrated, are now embedded in the more recent and ambitious statewide, system-wide School and Teacher Education Reform Program of Rajasthan state. Though the QEP officially concluded in 2011, the study of this program provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on how situated learning approaches can offer a viable alternative for teacher support as part of education development reform. By exploring such approaches in the rural Indian setting, the paper argues that collaborative, situated models must themselves be instantiated in ways that are sensitive to the contexts in which they are being introduced. It is hoped that the insights generated from the reflections on the QEP will inform reflexive thinking about the transfer and translation of educational ideas across international settings and also underline the importance of applying similar contextual and cultural sensitivities when engaging teachers in professional learning in socio-culturally diverse communities within any national-context.

## 2. *Situated learning in the contexts of Indian teachers' work*

The situated learning perspective sees learning not merely as a cognitive process of knowledge acquisition, but as socially mediated and situated in a specific context. Numerous empirical

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/374190>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/374190>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)