



Revisualizing School Internship in Teacher Education Programmes

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Abstract

School internship is a crucial component of teacher education programmes. It helps interns to forge connections between the theoretical and practical areas of their course. They learn the art of praxis and gain confidence for their future role as school teachers. In this context, the intricacies of the period of internship are examined with a focus on the nature of experiences that interns have during this time. Avenues of revisualizing school internship are also explored.

Key Words: School internship; teacher education programmes; interns; stakeholders.

Importance of School Internship in Teacher Education Programmes

School internship not only gives interns an opportunity to translate their knowledge of pedagogical, philosophical and psychological theories into reflective practice at the school level, but also enables them to implement innovative ideas which they have come across during the course of the teacher education programme. The internship programme is designed to give interns a flavor of real-world classroom situations. They participate in the classroom and beyond. In fact, they imbibe the entire ethos of the school, whether it is morning assemblies or examinations.

The structure of the internship programme lends itself to three phases, namely, the pre-internship, internship and post-internship phase. During the pre-internship phase, the interns are familiarized with pedagogic practices and simulation exercises. Unit and lesson planning is a critical part of this exercise. Time management, constructing teaching-learning materials and classroom management are other important activities. The actual internship gives interns to apply this learning in the assigned schools. Post-internship consists of reflecting on the entire process and consolidating the learning through active discussions with faculty members and peers. Let us now look at some of the ground realities of the internship experience, along with the possibilities of change.

Field Realities

This section elaborates the issues and concerns that are prevalent in the field. When students go to schools for their internship, they encounter a work community, probably for the first time in their lives. Navigating this arena, along with the rigorous demands of the professional course which they are doing, is a challenging task.

Inclusion in the School Culture

Interns make a tentative entry into the domain of the school. As they step into the school, it is an exciting time for them. They look forward to the new environment with enthusiasm and trepidation. All the stakeholders at the school level have a responsibility to facilitate their transition from college to work life. The experiences shared by interns are largely positive. There is a welcoming attitude on the part of the teachers and administrators. The interns are also encouraged to participate in school functions like, sports day and annual day. They play an active role during parent-teacher meetings as well. School teachers, at times, also assist interns in coping with the dual workload of college and school tasks.

Classroom Experiences

Interacting with school students is universally cited by interns as the most creatively satisfying part of the internship programme. There might be hiccups during the initial phase but once the ice is broken, interns usually have a good rapport with most of the students. In the beginning of the internship, interns report nervousness in terms of their ability to complete the plan on time, being able to perform the activities as planned and getting the desired results etc. Classroom management is another area of concern, with students sometimes indulging in indiscipline. Because the interns are not their 'regular' teachers, a few students take advantage of the friendly nature of the interaction. Establishing clear boundaries and rules in the classroom help interns to tide over such situations. The constructive pedagogy used is appreciated by students. The activity based and child-centric ethos of the classroom serves to build long lasting bonds between interns and the school students.

Infrastructural Issues

Having adequate space to prepare for classes, as well as, construct teaching-learning material is important for effective translation of plans into practice. Often, interns are not provided this basic requirement. Since most rooms in schools are allocated for specific purposes and many times there is a space crunch also, accommodating additional persons becomes a challenge. As a result, interns have to sit in cramped staff rooms or corridors, which is not conducive for engaging in the multiple tasks and projects that they are expected to undertake during the period of their internship.

Interaction with Regular Teachers

The regular teachers of the school are in a position to mentor interns and offer guidance about the day-to-day functioning of the classroom. At the same time, interns should be receptive to suggestions regarding lesson planning and pedagogic strategies. Mutual respect and consideration are the hallmarks of their interaction in many schools. Unfortunately, interns also report the existence of a hierarchical relationship with the teachers

of the school. The interns are seen as meek subordinates who can be dominated. Assignment of excessive work, such as, paper checking, making bulletin boards and charts for school decoration and administrative tasks, is common. This naturally detracts from the time and focus needed to efficiently complete their internship.

Institutional Continuity

School internship is a regular part of the teacher education curriculum. Since colleges have to send their students for internship on a regular basis, it is beneficial that the same schools be chosen, so as to have a continuity of experience. If the school and college teachers develop a rapport with each other, they would be in a better position to understand each other's concerns. The procedure of granting permission for internship, particularly in the government schools, does not allow for a continuity of institutions across years. The teacher education programme has certain requirements, such as, lesson planning, writing reflections and action research. However, the school has its own schedule and routines, which make it difficult to accommodate these components in a manner that the course requires. As a result, there is an extended period of negotiation which takes place every time a new batch of interns start their internship. In case institutional continuity is maintained, the teething problems in the initial period can be reduced because both the school and college systems would be better attuned to each other.

School and University Linkages

School internship should go beyond simply being a mandatory requirement of the teacher education course. It can open the doors of schools and colleges for interacting with each other about the contemporary issues facing the world of teaching-learning. Teachers from both institutions can do projects on shared concerns, conduct workshops and engage in co-teaching with an emphasis on understanding the educational needs of both the systems.

The internship programme is a bridge between the school and university. It should be visualized as a creative partnership between these institutions. There are various opportunities for mutual exchange of ideas among the stakeholders in order to enrich the process of education in a holistic manner. For this to happen, both teachers and university professors need to come out of their silos and collaborate with each other to unleash the true potential of the internship component of teacher education programmes.

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