CERTIFICATE PROGRAMME

IN

FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

Brief Report

Workshop IV
(May 01-10, 2008)

DIGANTAR

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The fourth workshop in the third series of the Certificate Programme in Foundations of Education conducted by *Digantar* was held from May 1 to May 10, 2008 – the venue and the participants being the same as in the third workshop. The **Resource Persons** for this workshop were Dr. A.B.Phatak (Principal Retd.,S.G.K. Teachers' College, Jodhpur), Mr. D.D.Karopady (Research and Documentation Wing, Azim Premji Foundation) and Mr. Rohit Dhankar (Digantar).

The **first three workshops** had covered a mix of areas : on the one hand, broad, larger concerns that give a grounding in Education - like the philosophical and sociological perspectives, and the perspective on learning – and, human understanding and curriculum; on the other hand an area that, in spite of its broad sweep, is specific and intensive - the nature and pedagogy of various disciplines. This, **the final workshop**, took up matters related to *Teacher Education*, *Issues in Education*, and *Research and Assessment*.

TEACHER-EDUCATION and ISSUES IN EDUCATION
Resource Persons : Mr. Rohit Dhankar and Dr. A.B.Phatak

In the *concluding session of the third workshop*, some issues that, according to the participants, needed to be addressed in the last workshop had been identified. These were all issues in education, some of which were - (i) a detailed discussion on the National Curriculum Framework 2005;(ii) issues centring round assessment and evaluation;(iii) the need for systemic change in education; (iv) the inter-disciplinary and integrated approaches to curriculum;(v) the role of NGOs in the arena of education;(vi) Privatisation and Public-Private Partnership;(vii) the objectives of language teaching; Forms of Knowledge and Language. An attempt was made in the concluding workshop to address these issues in adequate measure.

In consonance with the practice in these workshops, **issues related to teacher-education were identified in a participatory mode**, the participants themselves coming forth to enumerate such issues that needed to be discussed:

- (i) Curriculum for Teacher-Education (Pre-service and In-service).
- (ii) Position Paper on Teacher Education (prepared under the National Curriculum Framework 2005).
- (iii) Teacher-evaluation.
- (iv) Reasons for the decline in respect for the teacher.
- (v) Teacher-motivation.
- (vi) Possibilities of teacher-assessment by students.
- (vii) Effectiveness of teacher-education in the prevailing scenario.

All these issues were discussed at some length. Considerable time was spent on discussing the *causes of decline in respect for teachers* and how they could be motivated to play their due role in the prevailing environment – the demotivating factors and how they could be overcome was a major concern of participatory discussions. Views were openly expressed in an inter-active session on the *role of the teacher* as facilitator, as transmitter of knowledge, as initiator into human inheritance, as a critical mediator of knowledge, and as a role-model – and, if one were to make a choice, which of these roles would be the most appropriate? The *role that NGOs can play* in the wider context of affecting betterment in the educational scenario was also taken up for consideration – especially in terms of interaction with teachers and playing a "hand-holding" role. The question of *pre and in-service education of teachers* was thoroughly explored – with

views being expressed on the scope for improvement in the present scheme of things in this context.

The issue of the **State of Teacher-Education in India** was exclusively taken up by a Resource Person with a wide-ranging experience in this field – **Dr. A.B.Phatak**, Principal (Retd.), S.G.K.Teachers' College, Jodhpur. Dr.Phatak, who has also had an enduring association with Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur, an institution working in the field of education for more than sixty years, gave a detailed account of the **structural details related to teacher education** and the **curriculum for teacher- education** that is generally followed in institutions of teacher-education. This account carried within it a critical analysis of the present state of teacher-education, and the expectations thereof – steps that need to be taken for improvement.

The participants were able to get a comprehensive picture of the multi-layered framework of teacher-education structures in India today: teacher-education institutions at nursery, elementary and secondary levels; the regulatory agencies like the National Council of Technical Education, the universities, the University Grants Commission and the State Departments of Education; the support system for teachers in the form of CRCs, BRCs, DIETs, SIERTs, CTEs etc. The curriculum of teacher-education at the secondary level was discussed in detail, its strengths and weaknesses, lacunae and steps needed for improvement brought into sharp focus.

Group-Work on two tasks was undertaken. Three groups discussed and came up with their suggestions on

(i) requisites of a good teacher-education institution; and

(ii) what would be the qualities of a good, efficient teacher?

Two more issues that were discussed in detail were those of *Public-Private Partnership*, and *Education and Management.* The inroads being made into the domain of education by the private sector with the approval of the government and the larger ramifications of this process were actively deliberated upon; in the course of these deliberations the past history of such partnerships, their nature and results also came into focus. In the light of the private players' increasing role in education, the impingement of concepts of management in this arena, their suitability or otherwise too came up for discussion.

Questions related to Language : It was intriguing for the participants that Language had not been included in the Forms of Understanding by the educational philosopher R.F.Dearden. This was discussed in quite a bit of detail, as also the issue of the objectives of language-teaching (both the first and second language). Certain related concerns came up for consideration – like the issue of introduction of English from Standard I, the role of multilingualism and of grammar in language teaching, and how the relationship of Language with Forms of Understanding is viewed by philosophers of education other than R.F.Dearden.

Discussing the National Curriculum Framework 2005 : The *National Curriculum Framework 2005* prepared under the aegis of and published by National Council of Educational Research and Training is an important document meant to give a direction to curricular reform. The **five chapters** of this document were read and prepared in groups (for presentation), followed by extensive discussions in open sessions. There was an appreciation of the issues raised by this document in the first four chapters but the *chapter on systemic reforms* came in for much critical analysis – the participants felt that the chapter did not come up to expectations and the problem of systemic reform could have been addressed in a much more effective manner. The functioning of important institutions like the SCERTs, the DIETs, the BRCs and CRCs, for instance, could have been discussed in the document, and steps for structural changes and inter-institutional relationships suggested. The role of NGOs in systemic reforms was dwelt upon at some length during the discussions on this chapter. Issues like academic planning, monitoring for quality, and academic leadership that seemed to have been scantily addressed in the document were also touched upon. The role of social sciences in the emerging educational scenario also came up for consideration – how it seems to be sidelined in the era of liberalisation, and how this is likely to affect the society at large.

Getting A First-Hand Account From An Initiative in the Field

Efforts for bringing about a change for the better in pedagogical practices in government schools *can* bear fruit : the experiences of the **Shikhsa Samarthan Programme being run in the Phagi Block in Rajasthan** were shared with the participants by this Programme's Co-ordinator, Mr. Ashok. The programme, initiated by *Digantar* in 75 government schools in July 2006, is working at three levels : (i) in the school, where the support group from *Digantar*, volunteers called 'Shiksha Samarthak', work in collaboration with the teachers in trying to improve the quality of education in classrooms;(ii) at the level of the academic structures at the block level, the Cluster Resource Centres;(iii) at the level of the community, by trying to create a dialogue with the people about education in schools. The first-hand account gave a comprehensive outline of the programme – the situation in schools as it prevailed at the outset of the programme; the challenges for the volunteers in striking a dialogue with the authorities and the teachers in school; the struggle to gain the confidence of both the teachers and the students; the constant endeavour to exemplify the efficacy of alternative methods of teaching-learning; the problems encountered in this whole process, especially in terms of changing mindsets ; and the gradual success in creating a space for themselves. This account was of great significance for the participants, for it addressed the issue of the role of NGOs in bringing about a change in school education – an issue that had been taken up for discussion earlier too: the recounting of the Phagi experience was proof of what could actually be done on the ground in spite of all the odds.

ASSESSMENT : Assessment is a very significant factor in the scheme of things as they exist in the contemporary scenario in education, and issues related to assessment that needed to be dealt with were pinpointed by the participants themselves. Twelve points came to the fore :

(i) Competency as a basis for Assessment.
(ii) Assessment of whom – the teacher or the student? (Assessment of teaching or of learning?)
(iii) Assessment of, for, and as learning.
(iv) Assessment of non-cognitive areas – for instance, in terms of the aims of education, and of certain values.
(v) Why Assessment? The need for Assessment.
(vi) Government's policy on Assessment.
(vii) If not Assessment, then what? Alternatives to Assessment.
(viii) The role of Assessment in improving the quality of education.

(ix)   How to differentiate between conceptual and mechanical learning?

(x)   Difference between Assessment and Examination.

(xi)   Assessment at the schools run by *Digantar*.

(xii)   Methods and Types of Assessment.

These issues were sought to be understood in the light of **three readings** undertaken in three groups :

(i)   Parts of Chapter 3 (*Curricular Areas, School Stages and Assessment*) of the National Curriculum Framework 2005 document, dealing with Assessment.

(ii) Parts of *Position Paper* (for the National Curriculum Framework 2005) *on Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks.*

(iii)   The website www.qca.uk.org was to be consulted to form an opinion on the issue of Assessment.

Some of the points from the readings were problematized and discussed – for instance, the issue of setting targets for learning in certain subjects *with* children, as was suggested by the website in its view on assessment : how far can a learning-target be shared with children? The issue of *competency* – what it means, the various ways in which it is understood, its relationship with knowledge, its role in assessment - was discussed in detail as was the concept of *MLL (Minimum Levels of Learning)* as it has been known in its various *avataras* in India. Also brought into focus was the basic question of 'why assessment?'.

Getting a Feel of Enquiry into Research

The *Introduction (The Nature of Enquiry)* of a book (**Research Methods in Education**: by Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison) was read individually by the participants and some of the features of this chapter were opened up for collective understanding and discussion. The basic point made by the chapter is that we would be better researchers if we have a philosophical grounding, and hence it goes into the ontological and epistemological assumptions in research, its methodological considerations and the issues of instrumentation and data collection. The subjectivist and objectivist approach of enquiry into social reality (that would include school education) was looked into. The three means of the search for truth – experience, reason and research – were touched upon and there was some discussion on the issue of educational research. The chapter could not be covered in its entirety but it gave the participants a sense of what it would mean to link up the nature of enquiry to the arena of research and assessment.

RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

Resource Person : Mr. D.D. Karopady (Research and Documentation Wing, Azim Premji Foundation)

This segment of the workshop was of major significance, for the issues involved relate to aspects that can help in the evaluation of a given situation in the arena of education at the grassroots, and assist in choosing a desired path for remedial measures.

I. **Monitoring and Evaluation** was the first major issue taken up for consideration. These terms were defined, compared and contrasted, and how these mechanisms could be efficaciously used during on-going processes was discussed. **Impact Assessment** (for instance, in terms of assessing the learning-levels of children) was taken up as a separate issue, in terms of larger objectives being involved in this exercise. Attention was paid to the various factors that are involved in this process, especially the variables, and how they are to be taken into account while reaching conclusions; also, the aspects to be kept in mind while undertaking this task – the objectives, the expected outcomes, the parameters for measurement. The difference between **random and randomised evaluation** was underlined and the ethical issues involved in this process were also highlighted – and ways of addressing these concerns sought out.

II.Observation-Research – Theory and Practice : This was a major concern that was taken up during the workshop in the context of classroom observation, not just on the theoretical plane but also in practice. The various issues involved in this type of research were brought into the limelight – the fact that there could be two types of observation – involved and uninvolved; the advantages and disadvantages of observation-research; the ethical issues that might be of importance; the element of observer-bias or subjectivity, and how this could be overcome; the various "levels" or "layers" of such research – observation, interpretation, evaluation.

The participants were to **visit schools of Digantar and use the tools of observation-research in practice**. The "instruments" to be worked on before embarking on an observation research were, therefore, brought into focus. Working on the "instruments" would involve, say, deciding as to what will be observed – (a) infrastructure (b) teacher's behaviour (c) children's behaviour (d) interaction between child and child, between teacher and child (e) other players like the Panchayat and the Parents-Teachers Association.

Preparing the constructs : In the context of these instruments, the participants were required to *prepare the constructs* that would help them in their observation-research – for instance, help in measuring certain things on the basis of observation (for example, assessing whether or not the teacher has planned for the class he has to take). This was done in groups. Each group, before embarking on the visit to the schools, decided upon the parameters within which the observation-research would be conducted : one group, for example, decided to observe the classroom situation, the levels of participation in the classroom and the process of teaching – and decided upon the details that would be worked upon within each of these (for instance, for classroom situation – provision of blackboard, teaching-learning material, teaching plan, provision for lighting, noise, attendance and enrolment, seating arrangement etc.). It was also decided that each of the groups would make their observations time-based - in a one-hour observation, for instance, what happened at what point of time – and reach conclusions on the basis of these minute observations.

Visiting the Schools : The four groups visited four schools of *Digantar*, each group going to a different school. Eleven pairs of participants were supposed to observe eleven "houses" in the schools and then make their presentations in research mode.

Documenting the observations : This task was done in two phases – first, each of the pairs worked on the observations and notes they had taken, finalising it on paper; then, the pairs sat in their respective larger groups to discuss issues and finalise everything for the group-presentation. They were to collate information at three levels : there could be aspects on which there was no information, aspects that could be clubbed into a "yes/no" category, and reason-based observations that could be rated on a five-point scale.

Rounding Up : On the basis of the presentations by the groups, certain conclusions about such an exercise in observation-research were reached; notes of caution were sounded, precautions to be taken pointed out; and the point was made that the exercise undertaken was more of the order of *qualitative* than quantitative research. The domain of understanding was also sought to be enlarged – for instance, can such observation-research based on classroom as a unit be helpful in drawing general conclusions for a school as a whole?

III.Addressing other Miscellaneous Issues : Some of the issues raised by the participants were sought to be addressed in a separate session. These issues included :

(i)   Difference between qualitative and quantitative research.

(ii)   The Case-Study Method of research.

(iii)   The nature and significance of ethnographic studies.

(iv)   Evaluating and assessing existing work-practices.

(v)   Action Research – how it differs from regular research.

(vi)   Quantitative Research – its limitations, and ways to overcome them.

(vii)   PERT – Programme Evaluation and Research Technique.

All these issues were dilated upon and doubts of the participants clarified. The issue of quantitative research was especially dealt with in great detail, given the pitfalls involved in such research in terms of sample size, sampling and non-sampling errors, designing of response sheets, and analysis of data.

The Final Feedback Session

This final workshop in the third series of the Certificate Programme was rounded off with a Valedictory Feedback Session. **Some observations of participants** that reflected their experience :

\# The workshops brought about a change in the way of looking at Education. Permanent solutions to problems may not have been provided but a new vision on issues in education was amply developed, and a direction given in terms of how to establish the agenda of education in society.

\# The course has done justice to the word 'foundation'. One can now be confident of building floors on this foundation.

\# This new experience, for some participants, developed the habits of reading, thinking much more deeply and with a critical eye, looking at things in a broader perspective; and brought about the realisation of the significance of asking "why?" – of the importance of being a *rational* human being.

\# One of the participants commented that he came like a skeleton without Knowledge; the skeleton now has a respiratory system infused with blood thanks to the pedagogical insights gained during the workshops.

\# The workshops helped better understand the interface between educational technology and academics.

This experience made one realise that several perspectives may exist on various issues, and that practical solutions have to be searched for on one's own – there are no readymade solutions to problems.

The process of trying to decode matters in the field will now be replaced by an exercise in meaning-making in order to understand issues and reach solutions through a sharing of vision.

This should be followed by some refresher or feedback for experiential sharing.

There was all-round appreciation for the hosts and the environment – the campus with its natural surroundings - the trees, the greenery and the wildlife (especially the birds); the ever-at-hand, willing to help and efficient *Digantar* staff; the people working in the mess with round-the-clock efficiency, not one meal late in being served, catering to the varied needs of the participants; and, the badminton court that was alive and abuzz with activity in the evening, the shuttle-cock in the air making an arc or hurtling down all "adive", waiting to be shuttled back and forth in accompaniment to the players' cock-a-hoop responses.

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Report Writing and Documentation:

Dr.Ramneek Mohan
Lecturer
Department of English
All India Jat Heroes' Memorial College, Rohtak