

# Going beyond teach

By Dr Shahid

**T**HERE is a general observation that most of our teacher education colleges/institutes are producing the 'routine' kind of teachers who are least effective in bringing a significant change in the classroom or the school. And because of that we do not see any sign of change at the societal level.

What are the reasons that hamper the process of change and slow it down? One can count a number of legitimate factors responsible for stopping educational change from taking place at the individual and organizational levels. They include schools following wrong policies, having no support system for teachers, relying on an external examination system or teaching an unrealistic curriculum.

All these factors are important and do play a significant part in making change happen or in opposing it. In most of our teacher education programmes, the trainers take the central position and bombard the participants with fashionable buzzwords and newly-imported learning theories. Ironically, their own practices are just the opposite of what they profess in the classroom. For instance, a teacher advocating a more communicative approach might be using a non-communicative style. Similarly notions such as collaborative learning, collegiality, reflection, or a participatory approach all fall flat on participants as they see their own teachers (in this case the ones giving them the training) doing just the opposite.

The teacher trainers occupy a central position of power and impose grand theories on the participants. Little attention is given to the views of participants or to their experiences. Since the main teaching stance, in most of teacher education programmes, is that of transmission, there are few chances of meaningful learning taking place in the classroom. Not much attention is given to creating a congenial atmosphere for developing the thinking skills of participants. The teacher trainers tend to ignore a very important principle: that a good teacher trainer, just like a good teacher, has to be a good learner as well.

The outcome is a trained teacher whose teaching will be routine and ordinary and who uses a teacher education degree to get a job or a salary increment. To break the monotony of this 'routine-ized' teaching it is important that the teacher start reflecting in a systematic manner about his or her educational beliefs, classroom practices, objectives of education, and relationship with peers, stu-



dents and the community. The reflection process may encompass socio-political and ethical aspects, going beyond pedagogical questions. How can we facilitate a teacher to become a thinking teacher or a reflective practitioner? A number of recipes can be prescribed including changes in the above mentioned factors. One useful device, however, is the use of reflective journals in teacher training classes. I personally used this tool in a number of teacher education sessions and always got a positive response.

In this article, I shall now focus on the rationale of using reflective journals and their dynamics in a teacher education programme. I shall also deal with potential problems in using reflective journals and how to cope with them.

The purpose of using reflective journals in a teacher-training programme is to allow participants to think critically and analyze their thinking and actions. This is important for making the necessary modifications in their teaching behaviour which are required for improving the quality of education they impart. Learning about how to teach effectively is a demanding and complex task since it relates to both thought and action. There seems to be no single right approach for learning to teach. In the past, several in-service teacher education programmes emphasized making teachers more competent rather than taking a closer look at the process involved in their professional development.

Generally speaking, teacher-training institutes and colleges offer quantitatively more theory-driven courses compared to those that focus on practical learning. This widens the gap between what is taught in the teacher education institutes and what is practiced in schools. Few attempts have been made to underline the need for strengthening the link between theory and practice.

Reflective journals help to bridge this gap by raising issues critical for teachers. The journals help participants seeking personal and professional growth. They also allow an individual to review his or her own thinking and actions allowing for the development of better teaching practices and a deeper understanding of what it takes to become an effective teacher.

Reflective journals are a good source of revisiting the journey of professional development for those who write them. The use of reflective journals in educating teachers is an attempt to facilitate participants to think critically and look at all possible ways of doing things. The process of writing itself helps trigger insight about teaching and that teaching serves as a discovery process.

Besides, teacher trainers can not only keep track of the professional development of participants over the period of the course but can also get useful feedback in order to make changes in the content and pedagogy of the course.

Reflective journals are different from diaries because they