

Training of functionaries in Adult Education: An Indian Perspective

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My attempt in this paper is:

- i) to study and analyse the evolving character of adult education in India ;
- ii) to examine the nature of adult education programmes in order to understand the perspective in which literacy education is situated within the government sponsored programmes;
- iii) to discern the implications arising out of the above for (a) understanding the larger context and purpose of literacy (b) and inferring a suitable pedagogy for training the functionaries in adult education, considering their role in socio-economic transformation of Indian society;
- iv) to explore the nature and possibilities of developing critical pedagogy for training in adult education through the Open Distance Learning System.

I wish to explore the above with the help of understandings offered by critical perspectives and conflict theories regarding the function of education and its relationship with society. Critical theories contend that education reproduces the dominant interests and values both in an economic and cultural sense (Bowles and Gintis, 1976 : 98) (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 : 89) (Willis, 1981) Central to conflict theories is the argument that mechanisms of economic and cultural reproduction are never complete, met as they are, with elements of contestation. (Apple, 1983) (Giroux, 1985) According to this perspective, dominant values and interests are resisted, rejected and redefined by the sets of meanings brought out by teachers and students. Therefore, there is a need for utilizing forms of pedagogy that treat student as critical agents, problematizes knowledge, utilizes dialogue and makes knowledge meaningful, critical and ultimately emancipatory. (Giroux, 1985:37)

Methodology:

The paper draws upon some of the primary and secondary sources available in the field of adult education and open and distance learning (ODL).

Amongst the primary sources used, are reports of expert groups set up by government of India on adult education, education commission reports, documents on national policy on education and handbooks on the training of functionaries developed by the Directorate of Adult Education, (MHRD, govt. of India)

The secondary sources that have been used drawn upon is the recent literature that has emerged in the field of adult education in India. This mostly consists of impact and evaluation studies and historical studies which have seen the development of adult education over the last one hundred and fifty years. These sources have been set against the primary literature to understand the nature and objectives of adult education programmes, the reasons for their success or otherwise in the Indian context.

Amongst the secondary sources, the paper also draws upon some of the literature in the ODL that has emphasised critical and reflective learning and demonstrated its use in teaching learning materials.

The paper is divided into three sections, the first one attempts to locate literacy programmes in a historical context, the second examines the trends that emerge out of the different programmes and the third part discusses the possibilities of developing an appropriate pedagogy for professional knowledge and development of functionaries, especially in the ODL system.

It is the contention in the paper that if the trainers have to help fulfil the larger objectives of adult education programmes, then the teaching learning materials will have to emphasise development of knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for an effective change agent... with a deeper understanding of the process of changing society. (Rogers, 1993:5). Here, training is not reducible to mere pre-planned techniques, simulations and role plays without any contribution to critical thinking and generation of understanding and awareness.(Acharya, Verma, 1996:358)

The concept of 'reflection', reflective practice, and critical reflective learning has been and continues to be an important aspect of professional development in education. Research has shown (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985, Kolb, 1984; Burnard, 1995) that reflection on experience can help learning occur. Mezirow reminds us that "reflection is generally used as a synonym for higher order mental

processes. However, it demands more than drawing on what one already knows in order to act, it requires a critical thinking aimed at justifying one's beliefs" (1992 :5) suggesting that for both personal and professional growth, critical reflection on practice is central to learning.

Dewey's definition of critical reflection is useful to move ahead, which he says is ' active persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusion to which it tends (1933:9)

In the sections that follow, we will attempt an analysis of adult education programmes in the light of the discussion above.

Section I

Adult education in India : the historical context

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, European missionaries and educationists set up schools in some parts of the country. Apart from missionaries, there were a few British officials in the East India Company, who believed that the 'healing touch' of Christianity and the 'white man's burden' to educate the Indians was necessary for the upliftment and the transformation of Indian society. The task of educating the mass of Indians was undoubtedly tremendous and the lack of political will and financial constraints forced the British to adopt the theory of "downward filtration" and later on, suggest the expansion of primary education as a measure to curb the growing numbers of illiterates. Adult education, however, suffered a set back in all this.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nationalist leaders and leaders of social, political and religious reform organizations constantly articulated the need for making education accessible to the masses. They not only opposed the idea of restricting access to knowledge to the upper and middle strata of society, but also pleaded for the promotion of mass education through vernacular languages (Pannickar, 1975:10)

Any attempt, by the British rulers, and the aspirations of the nationalists to expand the base of education, were eroded by the middle class interests which had become intertwined with those of the ruling class (Acharya, 1988:1124), (Mazumdar, 1972:86), (Joseph, 1988:125). The curriculum included simple lessons in 3 R's,

stories of historical importance, elementary lessons in health hygiene and first aid. (Govt. of India 1940:49). The growth of adult education was slow and remained confined to basic literacy in night schools. To get an idea of the literacy situation in India let us take a glimpse at what prevailed in Calcutta during the 1870s. According to the 1876 Census figures, of the total population of 429335, those who could read and write numbered 110,565. Of Hindu males, 42 percent were literate as against 2.2 percent of Hindu females. Among the Muslim citizens, while literate males constituted 16.5%, only 324 or less than 1 percent females could read and write (Govt. of India 1876:28).

After independence, the emergence of India as a democratic nation necessitated a certain preparedness amongst its people. The concept of adult education defined as mere literacy seemed inadequate. It was therefore broadened to “social education” and some of the objectives of social education were i) to instill a consciousness of the rights and duties of citizenship and foster a spirit of service to the community; ii) to develop a love for democracy and impart an understanding of the way in which democracy functions in short, social education was defined as a “course of study directed towards the production of consciousness of citizenship among the people and promotion of social solidarity among them” (Govt. of India, 1951: 113)

Notwithstanding the well-meaning concept of social education and its integration with community development programmes subsequently, the literacy rate crawled from 16.07% in 1951 to 31.11% in 1961 hiding the enormous inter-state, rural-urban, social and gender disparities. Kerala with 55% and Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh with 20-22% literacy rates represented the two extremes. Even within this unenviable scene, female literacy, generally one-third of the total, tended to be lower in the Hindi states (Athreya and Chunkat, 1996: 52-53).

In the 1960s ‘modernization’ which meant economic development emerged as the dominant paradigm for development in the third world. Education was perceived as the prime instrument for this development. In India, this was evident from the title of the national report on education which was called ‘Education and National Development’ (Education Commission Report 1964-66). Problems that stalled development were identified and remedies sought. The Education Commission Report (ECR) listed out lack of self-sufficiency in food as a major problem.

In this linkage between self sufficiency in food and development, literacy assumed the significant role of educating and informing the illiterate farmers about the high yielding varieties (HYV) of seeds and the details of improved agricultural practices.

The Farmers Functional Literacy Programme (FFLP) was launched in 1968-69. A combination of methods was used in curriculum transaction–demonstration, practical training, oral instruction and audio-visual communications and discussions for the first time, on an extensive basis. During the fourth plan nearly 30 lakh farmers joined the functional literacy classes as against the target of 100 lakhs and an expenditure of Rs. 80 lakhs was incurred as against the proposed outlay of Rs. 200 lakhs. (Dutta, 1986: 67).

The FFLP was a part of Green Revolution strategy, which indeed achieved self-sufficiency in some areas (e.g. cereals), but exacerbated the stratification of rural society, concentrating on big landowners. The Programme in its outreach touched only the fringe of the problem and left the mass of the illiterates–marginal farmers and landless agricultural workers outside its scope (UNDP, 1976: 48-54). The programme subsequently became the Rural Literacy Programme (RFLP) in the fifth Plan, before petering out finally.

The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP), which was in a sense, an extension of the National Policy Resolution (1968), and a consolidation of earlier efforts in this direction was launched on 2 October, 1978. The objective of the programme was to cover, within a period of about 5 years (1979-80 to 1983-84), the entire illiterate population in the 15-35 age-group of about 100 million.

The programme had three components: literacy, functionality and awareness. Besides literacy which meant reading, writing and numeracy; functionality meant improvement of skills related to the vocation and awareness included consciousness about the manner in which the poor are deprived of the benefits of the various laws and policies intended for them. (Shah 1980: 85) The intended goal was education, not just literacy and literacy was seen as a tool in a larger effort to create awareness. (Ramachandran, 1999: 877). The NAEP was preceded by extensive preparations, delineating all the details of its implementation, training of personnel, preparation of teaching, learning materials, etc. (Mathew, A 1990: 50-51). Unlike in FFLP, the NAEP consciously tried to move away from being identified as a government programme, and provided for greater participation of

voluntary agencies in a host of activities ranging from running the centres, developing learning materials, providing training and taking up research and evaluation. (Bordia and Kaul 1992; 57) The Committee set up to evaluate the NAEP observed that despite the encouraging response the programme had evoked, the feasibility of the programme and the tangible benefits from it were not clear. It was also observed that more emphasis needed to be given to the participation of women, scheduled castes and tribes at all levels. (MOE&C, 1980: 86-87).

In the 1980s, literacy was once again emphasised as an essential precondition for meaningful participation of masses in the process of political decision making and national reconstruction (MOE, 1985: 41). The NPE's Programme of Action (MHRD, 1986 : 130) proposed that eradication of illiteracy (63.77% of the total population) be treated with a sense of urgency, and therefore to be made a "mission". The National Literacy Mission (NLM) was launched in 1988 as one of the missions of the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Some of its stated objectives were functional literacy for the illiterates; awareness of the causes of their deprivation and moving towards amelioration of their condition through organisation and participation in the process of development; acquiring skills to improve the economic status and general well-being; and imbibing values of national integration, conservation of the environment, women's equality-observance of small family, norm. etc. (DAE, MHRD 1999:23)

The campaign adopted some very novel strategies of mobilization and environment building to create a favourable public opinion (with support from all section of the community) and generate volunteers or 'instructors'. The campaign also worked at decentralization with the aim of transferring the initiative to the community. Structures like the Zilla Saksharta Samities (ZSS) and Village Education Committees (VEC) which blended well with the new role of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) were created. A marked shift from the government controlled, inspectorial system to a more people friendly, community based system was gradually taking shape. (Ghosh, 2000:7)

Amongst the successes of the campaign was also the increased participation of women and under privileged communities, an increase in the enrolment in primary schools, and a growing desire for literacy in areas by the people where the literacy campaigns were implemented effectively. (Banerjee, 1993: 1274) The Literacy Campaigns covered a total of 100.16 million persons identified in the survey,

(based on the 1991 census) of an estimated 110 million non-literate in the country in the age group 15-35 years. It was estimated that 62% of the learners were females, and SCs and STs constituted 22% and 12% of the coverage respectively. (Saldanha, 1999: 2029)

Section-II

Challenges and issues: towards a perspective for literacy training

The key issues and challenges that emerge out of the Indian experience with adult education are significant and critical for an understanding and any future initiatives in the direction. Let us see what kind of education and presumptions were at work in the programmes? What contributed to their success and failure? What kind of teaching-learning materials are required for any effective change?

Sumanta Banerjee (1998) examines the ideas and activities of the middle class social reformers in the 19th century Bengal engaged in educating the labouring poor. Banerjee regards these experiments as pioneering attempts to introduce functional literacy and a limited kind of education which could function only as “socializing mechanism” with essential emphasis on deference and loyalty to superiors and individual enterprise instead of helping them to deal critically with reality and alter the existing circumstances. (41-53). Education was also used as an important weapon to change the habits, living–style, customs and behaviour patterns of the uneducated people to socialize them to what was considered a better set of norms and to socialize their consciousness to new tasks and responsibilities demanded of them for the smooth running of society in that period (Ibid :41). The model that dominated adult education in this period was thus a hierarchical model- that authorized a privileged minority of ‘superior minded’ western-educated Indians to transfer a type of knowledge (according to their own newly acquired norms and behavioural pattern), to the indigent majority of Indians whom they regarded as illiterate (Ibid: 43). Banerjee’s conclusion that Indian adult education programmes in post-independence India continue to suffer from the same problems and biases of the middle class pedagogies is also reiterated by Dighe.(Ibid: 56) (Dighe, 1995: 1559-61)

In the context of the NAEP, Bhan challenges the position of the Programme that the illiterate and the poor can rise to their own liberation through literacy, dialogue and action. (1980: 120). According to her, it ignores the clear evidence that the

entire process of adult education in pre and post independence India has contributed to the reproduction of the existing polity, and the social dilemmas that have originated from the latter are not amenable to solution through its programmes. (Ibid : 121) a position that has been emphasized above by Banerjee (1998, op.cit) and Dighe (195, op.cit). For her, it is therefore important that the adult educator is proficient in the theory and practice on which the 'consentization' process rests for any change to take place (Bhan, op.cit, 129).

Evaluation studies related to education and the ensuing pedagogical considerations point to the fact that in the complex Indian situation, literacy cannot just mean the ability to read and write. It needs to be interpreted as an enabling process to critique the iniquitous political economic processes with a view to bringing about change. The recourse to literacy and to its symbolic systems is based on increasing felt needs in this process. (Saldanha, 2000: 219-20) (Saldanha, 1995: 1220) (Banerjee, 1993: 1274-78) (Saxena, 1993:664) (Rao, 1993: 782) (Shatrugna, 1998: 242-264) Empirically, too, as shown by Saldanha's study. (1995), national level data suggests that states that had a history of social reform movements, peasant organisations and working class struggles such as Kerala and West Bengal, responded effectively to the campaign approach (2027).

The need for literacy has to be integrated with the other daily concerns and interests of the poor-the need for minimum wages, better health and employment (Banerjee, Ip. Op.cit, 1278) Literacy programmes need to be imaginatively adapted to the rationality of the learner and interventions have necessarily to be specific to context. (Saldanha, 1999: 2032).

What should the teaching-learning materials interpret and incorporate as the role of volunteers/functionaries?

A programme intending to motivate the learners into effective engagement with literacy should help the volunteer to reach out to the learners as a first step. The challenge for the volunteer is to break the hierarchy and build the confidence and self-esteem of the learner. The "culture of silence" which prevails amongst the learners has to be broken. As demonstrated during the NLM, anti-arrack movement launched by rural women in Nellore district (A.P.) became possible because the literacy centres provided for the first time, on such a large scale, a forum for participation and dialogue, discussion, learning and sharing among volunteers

(agents of change) and learners (those desirous of change). (Ghosh, 1997: 826). This possibility has hardly been thought out in the training materials where terse, impersonal and didactic approaches to teaching-learning methodology dominate (DAE, 1999).

An important role of the volunteer is to challenge the learners and provoke them to think and articulate their and assumptions their knowledge. Most of the training packages believe in passing on information and knowledge. (DAE: Ibid). A series of discussion based workshops elicited a good response when the workbooks entitled 'Oru Mudiva Eduppom' or ' Let us decide' were used during the post, literacy phase in the Virudunagar district of Tamil Nadu. In these discussions, real life problems and dilemmas were posed to the readers and they were provoked to discuss their own responses. The volunteer teachers consciously provided no solutions or 'correct' answers challenging the readers to come to some kind of a consensual answer (Rampal, 2000:35). In this context, an example of how to sensitively deal with peoples' own explanatory frameworks is also reflected through books developed by Bharat Gyan Vigyan Sanstha (BGVS). These indicate how to use communication methods incorporating peoples' own beliefs and legends while presenting new knowledge. For instance, the poem, 'Bhahu Sundar Lagega Surya' by Arun Kamal describes the amazing beauty of the sun during the total eclipse while provoking peple to observe the fascinating phenomenon (Ibid:36).

In the adult education programmes, the NLM experience clearly shows that some very innovative teaching-learning materials have been created when the learners were able to pitch in with their own voices, needs, preferences and experiences. In the Mahila Samakhya (MS) Programme in the Banda district (UP), the women trainers not only articulated their own needs to decide the content of the materials but also took part in issues of language editing, forms of writing, content lay-out, etc. giving them a full sense of participation in the process and ownership in the final outcome. Here the MS also responded to the issues of caste, class and gender faced by the women by incorporating them as part of the training itself. Role-plays and other exercises were employed to help the women open out and feel comfortable in each other's presence. The idea was to help women achieve a gender perspective in their own lives which could subsequently be shared with others (Nirantar, 1997: 45), an aspect almost missing in most of the training

materials where patriarchy and gender differences have been reinforced (DAE: Ibid).

Section III

Critical and reflective practices in the ODL: possibilities and nature

The discussions above point to the fact that approaches and methods involving learner participation, taking into account their learning preferences, styles and their own concerns bring results as they are reflected in the teaching-learning methods subsequently. Didactic, impersonal and unfriendly approaches, on the other hand assume the role of the functionary/volunteer as mere 'knowledge and information givers' reducing the programme objectives to acquisition of skills related to 'functional literacy' only. Such programmes, more often than not fail to make an impact among the people for whom they are meant and stand out as short-term interventions from the top.

Given the logic and structure of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is it possible to develop a programme that can develop the competencies of analysis and reflection in the volunteer/functionary so that it can be reflected in her own pedagogical practice? The question becomes especially pertinent in the midst of a growing discomfort about the current practices in the system. It is useful to recall here ODL's critique regarding 'decontextualising' (Harris, 1987: 96) (Burge, 1988, ix) and 'disembedding' the learner (Jarvis 1993: 170) and its emphasis on 'instructional industrialism' founded upon treatment of learners and teachers as 'objects', passive receivers of advice and knowledge (Evans and Nation, 1989:315). Another criticism points to the dangers of the ODL working as a force for domination and disciplining persons into particular forms of subjecthood (Edwards, 1998: 36) especially where there are not adequate interactive and mediating systems (Tait, 1988). Elsewhere others have suggested that ODL is hastening the process of the co modification of knowledge and considering the learner as a consumer (Jarvis, 1993: 168-9) (Noble, 2002:26) .

A survey of the ODL literature reveals distance education's engagement with critical reflection (Evans :1990: Evans and King, 1991; and Evans and Nation, 1989), in general, and in the context of adult education (Burge, 1988; Burge and Lensky, 1990; Haughey, 1989, 1991; Taylor and Kaye, 1986, Modra, 1989;

Thorpe, 1993; 2000). While developing courses for the ODL, Terry Evans reiterates this imperative for a teacher in the system, suggesting the pedagogical approach for it in an auto-biographical note. What is the critical project underlying my teaching? My teaching has often taken me along paths where a curriculum contains aspects which enable me to focus on the structures and process of inequality and the pedagogical approaches employ are usually the ones which require the students to think it out/ work it out for themselves... This latter process is very important because people are provided with opportunities through their learning to achieve what Mezirow(1981) calls 'perspective transformation'(1993:40-41). Let us see what can be done while designing a programme, to achieve this objective.

1. **Creating spaces for dialogue and participation** Evans and Nation (1989) and Thorpe (1979) suggest the integral importance of students becoming collaborative developers of their own course for dialogue in the learning process. For them it is important to ensure that dialogue sustains a critical edge. That through reflection, it folds back on itself, requiring re-examination of the taken-for-granted assumptions in knowledge. In other words, dialogue that allows for the emergence of meaning is the medium for learning (Burge and Haughey, 1993: 104-6)

David Harris (1993) identifies three levels of learner interface with the text that can generate critical meanings. First, the text, 'itself tries to construct subject positions' for learners which readers are encouraged to occupy so that they can be addressed and taught something. Second, there is a 'context' in which texts are both produced and read and which serves as a reservoir of meanings and alternative or additional subject positions. Finally, there is 'pretext'—an emergent network of meanings and subject positions into which the text is interwoven when it is discussed in places like counselling and tutorials. (56). Multi-media distance education courses provide a variety of opportunities for dialogue. In his sociology course Nation (1989) asked his students to write a sociological autobiography in which they discuss their experiences with regard to major sociological concepts. The idea was to place objectivity on subjective experiences. Thorpe's (1993) students most of whom worked in adult education were offered the opportunity to interview their own adult students on their approaches to learning. Here, dialogue enabled placing new forms of

direct experience against theoretical ideas. According to Burge and Haughey(1993), these opportunities for general and individual conversation can be partly voiced and mostly interval also (104). A programme for adult education should therefore ensure enabling competencies to generate a dialogue at the following levels:

- i. **dialogue of each learner with the context** specific to the socio-economic conditions of the learners, their learning preferences, styles of how they learn, of the available range of frameworks and new understandings. All this will have to be ensured through the text and different forms of activities.
 - ii. **dialogue of learners with facilitators** - the programme should provide opportunities for 'pretext' (Harris, op.cit) so that confidence-building, enhancement of self-esteem and participation can occur.
 - iii. **dialogue of learners with other learners** - peer-group interaction to reflect, corporate and derive meanings together is important.
 - iv. **dialogue of learners with text** as perhaps 'subject positions'(Harris, Op.cit) to address concerns related to the specific content can be visualized here.
2. **Enabling learners to make connection between theory and their own personal contexts** In courses especially where learners have their own experiences as practitioners, this aspect becomes extremely significant. Functionaries of adult education being one such group who have been working in the field for sometime, it is pertinent to structure the subject content so as to allow the learner to work from her own previous knowledge and from that gain transferable insights with the aid of her newly acquired tools of analysis. According to Harris, (1993) in the context of assignments 'experience' and 'theory' could be linked in the following ways (65).
- i) Via 'recognition' a process of simply recognizing somehow, a link between one's own account of situations/problems and those presented in the text;
 - ii) Via 'explanation' a hunt for implications, after the initial stage of recognition do any of the more general implications apply back to experience?

iii) Via a 'critical discussion' openly comparing experience and theory to see if the presented work needs to be modified in the light of personal professional experiences, (65)

The objectives for such exercises however need to be carefully worked out otherwise they might serve a very limited purpose. (Thorpe, 2000: 79-92)

3. Developing a community of learners Borrowed from Taylor and Dekkers (2002) this term can be explained as community development based on individual growth, within a framework of shared learning, sharing experience across cultural and geographic boundaries and interpreting information from within a community context to create applicable knowledge (288) Although used in the context of informatics, the concept helps us to understand the role of a learning community in any pedagogic process. Structured as part of the adult education programme, the learning community (of counselors and volunteers functionaries) could provide opportunities to involve in practice-related activities and to reflect on professional work thereby generating agendas for a process of continuing professional development. Skill-sharing and skill-development, problem-solving, group-work, developing communication skills and participatory decision-making with the help of case studies built on actual learners' practice are some of the concrete experiences envisaged during such interaction opportunities. As Burge and Haughey (Op cit., 108) have remarked, community building is possible in distance courses where there is enough pacing of progress to enable peer learning and teaching. The fundamental issue is the extent to which the model of learner goals and action used in course design helps learners to share responsibility for a challenging learning community (Burge and Haughey, Op.cit., 109)

4. Preparing learners for reflection One of the key issue is how to prepare learners for reflection related to the content of their own practice. Thorpe (1993) gives a detailed account of her experience of the Diploma course for practitioners in continuing education and training. The course content focused on learning about learning and in-text activities were so designed as to prompt students to reflect on their learning and juxtapose it against the explanations and discussions in the text. The learners were also asked to recall events that lead to change in their behaviours, relate the sequence of the critical event and

its actors and make an objective assessment of the stimulus for change.(111-120). This becomes an important objective for the volunteers/functionaries whose role in adult education is to prepare people for changing their own beliefs and knowledge frameworks. While designing the programme, it is important to consider what Evans has argued (1994) the quality of reflection is a function of the time allowed for it and the context in which it is conducted (21)

5. **Technology use** Warning about the over-emphasis and overbearing nature of technology in distance education, Noble (2002) argues that in the face of such a seemingly inexorable technology driven destiny that ODL seems to profess and project and the seductive enchantment of technological transcendence, skeptics are silenced and all questions are begged (26). It is feared that uncritical adoption of technology can produce more stress and dependence for learners. A number of experiments point to the importance of participation of learners at different levels in the technology enabled programme design to ensure a familiarity, motivation and success. Not only that, technology-use has to have explicit objectives of developing critical abilities to question rather than accept assumptions, beliefs and expectations about one's role in the world. A few experiences are instructive to recall here. In Jhabua, a district in Madhya Pradesh, the use of television for literacy was planned in coordination with the Development and Educational Communication Unit (DECU) of ISRO, Ahmedabad. Some of the lessons of this experiment indicate that a top-down, technology and management driven project with no direct benefit perceived by the viewers is not likely to succeed. Involving the people and the functionaries in the planning process is equally important. (Ghosh, 2000 : 24) In another experiment using satellite communication for teacher training in India, Karnataka District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) developed a set of films to be used as a part of Satellite-based training design. The films were made in a participatory mode involving teachers, children and members of the Village Education Committee (VEC). The workshops generated an environment enabling the participation and autonomy in curriculum formulation, designing teaching-learning material, creation of a teaching methodology and developing evaluation techniques. Similarly, community members discussed the values inherent in the school system and how these alienated children from the rural environment. The films were subsequently

used in the interactive satellite-based training programme with viewing and talk-back facility and discussed issues like access, drop-out, joyful learning problems in language learning, aspects of micro-planning, social issues like caste, gender, etc from the point of view of teachers, children and the village community members. The objectives of using this particular format was to provoke teachers to speak out and to begin their own pedagogic inquiry. In the discussion sessions there were more than 50 questions in each session indicating the interest that had been generated (DPEP Karnataka, 1999)

It is also important to explore some of the emerging approaches to developing online learning communities, facilitating critical reflection Bonk and King (1998), for example, suggest a pedagogy applicable to online and technology-supported environment that can enable students to work in groups to present diverse views and challenge each other's perspective in order to stimulate debate and critical analysis of ideas.

The use of a single medium or a multi-media approach, however, in all the cases has to ensure that intended curriculum goals, learning activities and assessment is consistent with the broad objective of moving away from measuring the reproduction of knowledge to emphasizing the development of critical thinking, analysis and synthesis of ideas all designed in a participatory approach.

Borrowing from Brockbank and McGill (1998:102), it is important for the volunteer functionary to know what is being assessed and how in terms of outcome and process in the following framework:

- The way critical reflective learning in terms of outcomes within the discipline is identified;
- The way that reflective dialogue has taken place and been ascertained (with peers and colleagues);
- The way evidence of the learner's participation in the dialogue is established;
- The way evidence of a developmental process over time, regardless of the start or end-point is identified;
- The way evidence of the review system is used, which should enable an understanding of the learning process that has taken place and should be recorded.

Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to understand and examine the range of initiatives undertaken by the Indian state to promote literacy. Despite framing policies and programmes with laudable objectives, efforts towards this end remained caged within quantitative concerns doing little to alter the condition of the poor. The policies and programmes transmitted the preferences, biases and perceptions of the middle-class pedagogues and policy-makers rather of those who were the 'receivers' of this knowledge. This 'top-down approach' therefore had limited acceptability demonstrating simultaneously, that it could work where there was an integration with concerns of the "illiterates" and as part of the larger struggle for socio-economic transformation, incorporating a pedagogy emanating from this perspective.

In the complex socio-economic situation that prevails in India, literacy cannot mean the ability to read and write only but has to enable the learner to acquire the competencies to question her reality and act upon it rather than internalize, whatever is handed down to her. The volunteer or the functionary has to enable this process. A package for training of functionaries in adult education will have to grapple with the elements of and perceive different forms facilitating critical reflection.

As Evans and Nation (1989) have pointed out, for many distance educators the process of critical reflection in the teaching-learning process may seem fanciful. Indeed, Friere himself, who constructed his forms of adult education in difficult circumstances, argues that his ideas about teaching are utopian. He declared that, 'if we are not utopian we will easily become bureaucratic and dehumanizing. In Friere's terms we need to make distance education 'liberating' not 'dominating' (252).

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