

REPORT

FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION COURSE, 2019

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March 2020

Introduction

Foundations of Education (FoE) is a course offered annually to the practitioners in the field of Education or whoever is interested to engage with the theory of education. It explores fundamental principles of philosophy, sociology and psychology which form the basis of education and is at the core of any thoughtful practice in this field. The course intends to sensitize people towards the framework of principles which operate, often unarticulated, behind any practice in education, be it teaching, curriculum development, material creation or teacher education. FoE encourages participants to think about the the necessity of the educational practice to be guided by these foundational principles and also critically engage with the frameworks to be able to work with them consciously.

The FoE course in the year 2019 consisted of 14 modules. Out of these fourteen modules, eight modules formed a group which was called the Core Modules. The rest six were the Pedagogy Modules. The Core modules consisted of themes which are at the centre of educational theory. The Pedagogy Modules consisted of subject specific modules in which the understanding developed in the core modules would find application in the light of respective subject specific teaching practices. Although the FoE course is designed with internal cohesiveness and inter-dependent modules such that a complete picture will emerge for a person who participates in the entire course, the modules are also seen at somewhat stand-alone parts of the whole so that individuals can attend specific modules as well.

While selecting the themes and content of the modules is selected, it is kept in mind that it should be general and fundamental to education and applicable in any context and time period of the society. In addition, space is kept to analyse the contemporary trends and developments in education. The understanding is that these need to be scrutinized carefully using the framework of principles before adopting or rejecting them. Hence, while the modules introduce the participants with the multiple essential domains within education, which is a multi-disciplinary space, they also demonstrate how thinking and analysis happens in the respective domains.

Objectives of FoE¹

The following were the objectives of the courses as they were articulated:

1. Initiate the participants into serious educational thinking through as wide a theoretical framework as possible.
2. Make every attempt to convince people that education is a serious business and every action needs to be thought through.
3. Acquaint people with most fundamental concepts, ideas (that includes theories) and ways of thinking in education.
4. Convince people that educational practice necessarily requires theories, articulated or assumed in unawareness. Along with it, also that it is better to be functioning with this articulation rather than unawareness.
5. Awaken the desire and the courage in people to think and take their own thinking seriously.

FOE course in 2019

The structure of the course

In the past year, 2019, Digantar offered two cycles of FoE course. One had started in January and the other one did in April. These were the twelfth and the thirteenth cycle of FoE. The fourteen modules which were included in last year's cycles are mentioned in the table below. The fourteen modules were originally divided in five workshops of three modules each except the third one which had only two. As compared to the earlier FoE cycles, this year the number of modules were more because of addition of a few new modules which were considered as necessary in accordance with the contemporary discussions and needs of educational discourse. These were Introduction to education, Assessment in education and Reflective practice and Action Research.

The reading material and other resources

An essential aspect of the course is for the participants to read the original writings by the authors and thinkers who have clearly articulated sound educational concepts and theories. In addition, it also becomes important for the practitioners to read flat, technical policy and government documents which are created at the central or state departments of the country. The course and the facilitators emphasize on building the capacity to read these kinds of written pieces, engage with them critically by interpreting them in the light of the history of development of education and the Indian context.

These readings can be tough for the ones who are new to them. Hence, those reading materials are selected which will be challenging but not inaccessible to the participants. Often, these are also created keeping in mind that the participants are not active readers of dense academic texts. The reading material for the year 2019 was planned to be developed and compiled in both Hindi and English language so that participants can choose according to their own comfort with the language. But, it had been a challenge to find all the readings in Hindi language and make them available to

¹ Taken from the concept note of FoE created by Rohit Dhankar

the participants. For most of the articles either translated texts were made available or a summary was created in Hindi. But there were also a few instances in which because of unavailability of the text in Hindi the participants had faced challenges to understand the text.

All of the reading material is given as a printed compendium to all the participants. For the immediate explorations the Digantar library also used to stay open in the evenings for the participants.

In addition, there was also a Wordpress page made for the FoE course. This was a place imagined as an online resource portal for the course's participants to find in addition to the core reading material the other articles, books, websites, video links etc. to refer to or read in their own time post the course as well. The page was created during the FoE13 cycle and then later shared with the participants of FoE12 cycle as well. The page kept getting populated with each module.

Another medium which was used this year to disseminate information and discuss was a WhatsApp group of the participants. During the course, people found this a place for quick sharing of links of videos or articles on the themes that were discussed within the sessions. They also became a place for people to share their field experiences which were influenced by the course within their teams after they went back to their respective places.

The Pedagogy of the modules and session work

The pedagogy of the modules although was dependent on various facilitators of respective modules, a common emphasis was laid on dialogue and everyday reading. Often, the facilitators assigned group work to the participants which involved reading, analysing text, presenting their research on some topic etc. Almost every day would end with some task or assignment for the next day. And every day started with on average an hour devoted to feedback which comprised the previous day's confusions, queries and furthering discussion on that.

At various points the participants were expected to read through terse texts which turned out to be a novel experience for several people. Participants recounted the challenge that they faced and the value they found in reading slowly and consciously. There were people who found it difficult to navigate the texts. In such cases, either the Digantar team members or the participants themselves organised group reading. At times, the text was also read collectively in the sessions for as much the content as to develop ability to read critically.

The Participant Diversity and culture of learning

The participants of FoE in the year 2019 belonged to diverse parts of the country and were engaged in the educational practice in all kinds of different ways. While a pair travelled to work in as remote a place as Majuli, Assam, another would travel from a village near Lucknow. If some people were top level employees in Piramal's Kaivalya Education Foundation, there were others who had just started their journey of working in the primary schools of their own villages through their Musht Samaj Seva Samiti. If there were people addressing the conventional concerns of reading and number sense of children, there were also people keen in understanding and working on creating an appropriate space for physical education for children in their curriculum while also addressing the gender stereotypes related to that in our society.

The diversity of the participants in terms of geography, social class, experiences, educational practice, interests, etc not just enriched the discussions in the sessions, but also created the possibility for the participants to know of initiatives and perspectives different from their own. While at several points during the session discussions these differences would emerge in the form of experience sharing, questions etc, a common central perspective of education also started taking shape in the people.

There were also several topics and themes which emerged during the discussions within the sessions which were of interest to the participants but not directly related to the session theme. In such a case, time was taken out for evening discussion forums where ideas on politics, current affairs and themes on fundamental national interests were raised with the facilitator. As educators working within the society, it seemed only given that engagements with themes beyond education will find significance and space.

Besides the course sessions, this diversity also helped in people later continuing the conversations and knowing about their respective journeys of work. The different interests brought out different kinds of cultural engagements within the group. It involved going for an early morning walks and trek to late night sharing of music and poetry from different languages among other things.

Workshop and Participation details

The FoE12 batch was as small as eight people and for their third workshop scheduled in May only four or five had sent their confirmation to attend. Hence, after asking the participants of the batch, it was decided that they will join the FoE13 group for third workshop which will happen in August and from henceforth the two batches will run together. This decision was taken on the basis of the understanding that a larger group will have richer discussions which will be better for the FoE12 batch's participants' overall learning.

Most of the participants in the two cycles of this year were WIPRO fellows. WIPRO supported this course by sending the people who are enrolled in their fellowship for the first three workshops, i.e. the core modules. Four of all of the participants also attended the fourth workshop at their own expense. However, the number was too less to be called a healthy group number. Hence, it was decided that only if a minimum of 10 people register for the fifth workshop then it will be held. Otherwise it will have to be cancelled, which was the case finally. Due to the interest of the participants, the modules in the fifth workshop were changed to include Social Studies Pedagogy, Art Pedagogy and Reflective Practice and Action Research. The module by the name of Digantar Vidyalay was dropped. But due to the lack of enough number of participants, it was cancelled. The fourth workshop was hence the last one and effectively nobody completed the whole course.

Information about the two batches regarding dates, the resource persons and no. of participants is given in the tables below:

FOE 12 Batch 2019 (Workshops 1 and 2)				
S. no.	Module	Dates	Resource Persons	No. of participants
1	Introduction to Education	17-19 th January	Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>)	8

2	Philosophy of Education	20-22 nd January	Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>)	8
3	Sociology of Education	24-26 th January	a) Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>) b) Amman Madan (<i>Azim Premji University</i>) c) Manoj Kumar (<i>Azim Premji University</i>)	8
4	Perspectives of Learning	4-6 th March	Shipra Suneja (<i>Azim Premji University</i>)	6
5	Human Understanding and Curriculum	7-10 th March	Varadarajan Narayanan (<i>Azim Premji University</i>)	6
6	Assessments in Education	12-14 th March	Rishikesh (<i>Azim Premji University</i>)	6

FOE 13 Batch 2019 (Workshops 1 and 2)

S. no.	Module	Dates	Resource Persons	No. of Participants
1	Introduction to Education	22-24 th April	Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>)	23
2	Sociology of Education	25-27 th April	Amman Madan (<i>Azim Premji University</i>)	23
3	Philosophy of Education	29 th April-1 st May	Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>)	23
4	Perspectives of Learning	17-19 th June	Shipra Suneja (<i>Azim Premji University</i>)	20+9=29*
5	Human Understanding and Curriculum	20-23 rd June	Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>)	20+9=29*
6	Assessments in Education	25-27 th June	Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>)	20+9=29*

FOE 12+13 Batch 2019 (Workshops 3 and 4)

S. no.	Module	Dates	Resource Persons	No. of Participants
1	Ideas in Education	5-7 th August	Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>)	24
2	Teacher Education	8-10 th August	Rajashree (<i>Azim Premji University</i>)	24
3	Science Pedagogy	14-16 th October	a) Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>) b) Ridhima Garg (<i>Digantar</i>) c) Vikas Saini (<i>Joy of learning, New Delhi</i>)	4
4	Language Pedagogy	17-19 th October	Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>)	4

5	Mathematics Pedagogy	21-23 rd October	Rohit Dhankar (<i>Digantar</i>)	5

*In the second workshop of FoE13 batch, which happened in June, apart from the registered participants of the course the students from Ambedkar University, Delhi also participated. This was part of their summer internship fieldwork. Out of these nine students, five were studying MA Education and four were part of the MA Early Childhood Care and Development programme.

Inputs for the 2020 FoE cycle

1. It was decided that there will again be two cycles, same as the year before. This time the two batches are announced to have different medium of instruction. The first one will have Hindi and the second one English as their language media. This was done based on the experiences of the participants and the facilitators during the sessions.
2. The course will continue with Art pedagogy as one module and will not have Digantar Vidyalay.
3. The Issues in education has been re-imagined as Contemporary Ideas in education. The focus will be to pick up a couple of popular trends and narratives which can be analyzed for the value they hold in educational practice.

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