



## TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY IN TEACHER EDUCATION: PROPOSING THE RCA-MODEL FOR SYSTEMATIC REFORM

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### ABSTRACT:

Teacher education in India is undergoing reforms under NEP 2020, but ongoing pedagogical and structural challenges hinder its effectiveness. Many approaches prioritise procedural training and content knowledge over reflective inquiry, critical engagement, and action. This article advocates shifting towards transformative pedagogy through the Reflective–Critical–Action (RCA) Model—an iterative framework that combines reflective practice, critical consciousness, and transformative action to cultivate socially responsible educators. It provides a roadmap for curriculum, culture, assessment, and policy reforms, connecting philosophical principles with practical strategies to improve teacher education in India.

### KEYWORDS:

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### INTRODUCTION

*“Transformation is not a destination: it is a journey of continuous growth and self-discovery.”*

*-Tony Robbins-*

The evolving pedagogy emphasises experiential, holistic, inquiry-driven, and engaging learning. The curriculum should include arts, crafts, humanities, sports, language, literature, culture and values alongside science and math to develop well-rounded learners. Education must also focus on character, ethics, empathy and career preparation (NEP 2020).

Pedagogy is not just about teaching or training students but also about creating a suitable learning environment that fosters active engagement, understanding, practice, and application in a needy situation. Both the teacher and the students are the focus of the learning process. In academic settings, teacher education programmes prepare and strengthen the teachers to perform better in all aspects during their in-service and pre-service periods.

Teacher education is a key part of education, linked to who will teach, how to teach, and how to practice. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises that teachers play a vital role in fostering critical thinking, inclusivity, and democracy (Srivastava & Agnihotri, 2019). Training often remains focused on procedural, exam-oriented

methods. There is a weak link between theory and practice. This indicates that teacher education tends to focus more on skill development than on professional growth. Pre-service teachers mainly learn lesson planning, assessments, and classroom management. They devote little time to reflection, critical analysis, or hands-on experimentation (Barik, Sharma, Sutar, 2026). As a result, their professional identity remains superficial, limiting their ability to respond creatively and ethically to complex situations. Transformative pedagogy offers a strong alternative. It is grounded in *reflective inquiry, critical awareness, and transformative learning*. This approach sees education as continuous self-examination, social awareness, and action (Dorji, Tshering, Wangchuk, Jatsho, 2020). In discussions within India, these methods are often presented in isolation rather than as components of a comprehensive reform framework.

This article argues that productive change requires more than just curriculum updates. It needs an ideal model that integrates *reflection, critique, and action* into a continuous process of professional growth. The study introduces the Reflective, Critical, Action (RCA) Model as a circular framework for transforming teacher education from vision to practice.

This article aims to enrich the ongoing conversation on teacher education reform by introducing a well-structured

yet adaptable model. This model is designed to nurture reflective teachers, socially conscious educators, and masters of meaningful educational change.

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY**

Transformative pedagogy encompasses more than merely a teaching method; it fosters the development of reflective, critical, and socially responsible practitioners. Grounded in progressive educational principles, it aligns with three primary traditions: reflective inquiry, critical consciousness, and transformative practice learning.

#### **1. REFLECTIVE INQUIRY AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

The foundation of reflective pedagogy comes from John Dewey's educational philosophy. He saw education as a process of transforming experience through reflective thought (Muller et al., 2025). Dewey argued that meaningful learning occurs when individuals critically analyse their experiences rather than just absorbing information. For Dewey, teaching is more than passing on existing knowledge; it involves encouraging inquiry (Simpson et al., 2005).

Donald Schön's reflective pedagogy emphasises reflection-in-action. In this approach, professionals think critically while working in uncertain situations. He believes that knowledge stems from experience, intuition, and self-reflection, rather than from following strict technical rules. Learning occurs through reflective practice, including coaching, experimentation, and linking theory with practice (Schön, 1983).

#### **2. CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

Transformative pedagogy, heavily influenced by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Freire, 1968), rejects the 'banking model' in which students passively receive knowledge. Instead, it promotes dialogical education that fosters conscientization—critical awareness of social, political, and cultural realities. Freire's ideas shift the teacher's role from simply conveying information to becoming a transformative intellectual, encouraging students to question systems of inequality and injustice, and advocating for teachers as public intellectuals shaping a democratic culture (Chalaune, 2021).

In teacher education, this theoretical foundation underscores the need to prepare educators who are aware of equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice. Consequently, transformative pedagogy goes beyond mere instructional skills; it emphasises ethical and civic principles of responsibility.

#### **3. TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION**

American sociologist Jack Mezirow developed the foundational theory of transformative learning in the late 1970s. He highlights in his 1978 publication, \*Education for Perspective Transformation: Women's re-entry programs in community colleges\* (Barnett & Botes, 2022).

This process allows us to change our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, selective, open, and thoughtful (Mezirow, 1978). He noted that transformation happens through critical reflection, especially when adults encounter a "disorienting dilemma" that questions their current beliefs. Transformative learning is the process of changing our frame of reference through critical reflection and rational dialogue (Mezirow, 1991).

He also explained that transformative learning involves:

- Critically examining one's assumptions
- Engaging in rational discussions
- Revising beliefs to become more inclusive, open, and thoughtful

### **CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS**

The ideas of Dewey, Freire, and Mezirow offer a strong theoretical basis for the Reflective-Critical-Action (RCA) Model suggested in this study. Dewey provides the foundation for reflective inquiry. Freire contributes to the social and political aspect of critical consciousness. Mezirow describes the psychological process of perspective change. The overlap of these approaches supports transformative teaching as an effective framework for changing teacher education in modern India. It views teachers not just as technical instructors, but as reflective practitioners, critical thinkers, and agents of social change.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This article aims to:

1. To propose the Reflective-Critical-Action (RCA) Model as a conceptual framework for systemic reform aligned with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020.

### **METHOD OF THIS STUDY:**

This study adopts a **conceptual and normative research approach** to develop a theoretically grounded framework for reform in teacher education.

### **ANALYSIS OF OBJECTIVE:**

The Reflective-Critical-Action (RCA) Model: A Cyclical Framework for Transformative Teacher Education.

#### **1. CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW**

The Reflective-Critical-Action (RCA) Model is a continuous approach transforming teacher education into meaningful professional development. It views preparation as an active cycle of reflection, critical engagement, and action, with each stage influencing the others. Reflection builds awareness, leading to action, which creates new experiences for further reflection. Transformation is an ongoing journey, not a final goal.

#### **2. THE REFLECTIVE DIMENSION**

The first RCA Model dimension emphasises reflective inquiry as crucial for teacher growth, based on Dewey and Schön's contributions to education. It suggests that

meaningful development begins with examining experience.

In teacher education, reflective practice involves:

- Questioning teaching assumptions
- Analysing classroom decisions
- Considering ethical responsibilities
- Linking theory with real-life practice

Reflection prevents teaching from becoming a mechanical routine. It fosters professional judgement, adaptable skills, and intellectual humility. These qualities are vital in diverse and evolving classroom settings. However, reflection may remain inward-focused unless it broadens to include a wider socio-critical perspective.

### 3. THE CRITICAL DIMENSION

The second dimension encourages reflection to become critically aware. Inspired by Paulo Freire's ideas on liberatory education and rooted in critical educational theory, this dimension places teaching within broader social and political contexts. Here, teacher education extends beyond merely teaching methods to question:

- Power structures in curriculum
- Social inequalities in schooling
- Cultural representation and exclusion
- Democratic and constitutional values

In India, this aligns with the National Education Policy 2020, emphasising equity, inclusion, and critical thinking. Teachers must avoid reinforcing inequalities and become reflective public intellectuals. Critical awareness alone is not enough; it must lead to meaningful action.

### 4. THE ACTION DIMENSION

The third dimension transforms reflection and critique into actual change. Based on transformative learning theory, especially the ideas of Jack Mezirow, this stage emphasises shifting perspectives through informed action. In teacher education, the action dimension might include:

- Action research projects
- Community engagement
- Inclusive classroom innovations
- Participatory pedagogical experiments

Action acts as a testing ground for insights gained from reflection and critical commitments. It also creates new experiences that feed back into the reflective cycle. Therefore, transformation is maintained through ongoing practice.

### 5. THE CYCLICAL DYNAMIC:

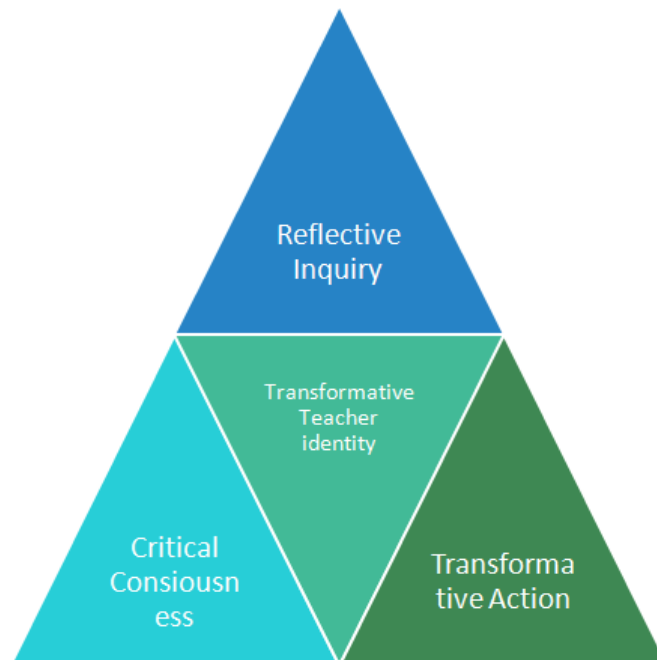
Unlike linear competency models, the RCA framework functions as a recursive loop:



Each cycle enhances the development of professional

identity. Over time, this continuous process cultivates teachers who are not only skilled instructors but also thoughtful practitioners, reflective intellectuals, and advocates for educational change. The cyclical nature of the model allows it to adapt to various institutional settings while maintaining its core principles. It links deep philosophical understanding with practical application, offering a clear yet flexible pathway for reform in teacher education.

### THE RCA MODEL:



**Figure 1** illustrates the Reflective–Critical–Action (RCA) Model as a cyclical triadic framework centred on transformative teacher identity. The circular configuration emphasises the recursive nature of professional growth, where reflective inquiry fosters critical awareness, critical awareness guides transformative action, and action, in turn, reshapes reflective practices understanding.

### IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP: OPERATIONALISING THE RCA MODEL IN INDIAN TEACHER EDUCATION

For the Reflective-Critical-Action (RCA) Model to progress beyond mere ideas, it must be embedded in institutional structures, curriculum design, and regulatory frameworks. The following roadmap presents a multi-level strategy to make transformative teaching a reality in Indian teacher education. This approach aligns with the goals set out in NEP-2020.

#### 1. CURRICULUM-LEVEL INTEGRATION

The first area of change is in restructuring the curriculum. Teacher education programs need to shift from being focused on theory and heavy content to encouraging dialogue, inquiry, and action-oriented involvement. Some of the key strategies are discussed below

- Institutionalising Reflective Practice:  
In teacher education, mandatory reflective journals, digital portfolios, and structured reflection seminars

are used during practicum phases.

- **Embedding Critical Pedagogy Modules:**

In teacher education Courses addressing equity, diversity, constitutional values, gender sensitivity, and inclusive education.

- **Compulsory Action Research Component:**

Pre-service teachers should undertake guided classroom-based research projects addressing real educational challenges.

## 2. INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE REFORM IN TEACHER EDUCATION:

Curricular change alone is insufficient without corresponding institutional transformation. Teacher education institutions must cultivate a culture of dialogue, inquiry, and collaborative learning.

- **Institutional Interventions:**

Faculty development programs centred on transformative pedagogy. Peer reflection circles and mentoring systems. Community immersion partnerships with local schools and social organisations. Seminar-based teaching replaces lecture-dominated formats. By fostering participatory academic environments, institutions can model the very pedagogical practices they aim to promote.

## 3. ASSESSMENT REFORM IN TEACHER EDUCATION:

A transformative framework requires rethinking evaluation mechanisms. Examination-centric models often privilege memorisation over critical engagement.

### SUGGESTED REFORMS:

Portfolio-based assessment promotes a comprehensive learning approach, encouraging students to engage deeply with reflective writing and action research. Through continuous evaluations such as dialogical presentations and collaborative projects, students develop and demonstrate understanding in a supportive environment. Rubrics emphasise nurturing critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and innovation to cultivate essential skills. Ultimately, assessment captures students' knowledge, professional attitude, and potential for impact, guiding them to become thoughtful, ethical, and innovative professionals.

## 4. POLICY-LEVEL ALIGNMENT

For systemic adoption, the RCA Model must be included in national regulatory and accreditation frameworks managed by the Ministry of Education and related organisations.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Inclusion of reflective and action-based components within B.Ed. Accreditation standards can really enrich the program.
- For example, requiring action research documentation for program completion encourages practical learning.
- National guidelines that promote critical pedagogy

and inclusive classroom practices support educators in creating welcoming environments.

- Additionally, offering funding incentives to institutions that implement transformative initiatives can motivate positive changes across the board, ultimately benefiting both teachers and students.

Embedding the RCA framework within policy instruments ensures sustainability and scalability.

### STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE:

The RCA Model does not require a complete structural change; it calls for a shift in teaching priorities. It turns philosophical ideas into practical strategies and connects reform discussions with classroom practice. By making reflection, critical questioning, and active involvement standard practices, teacher education can shift from a model focused on compliance to one that transforms professionalism. This new approach can tackle the challenges of modern education in India.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is conceptual and does not include empirical validation of the proposed Reflective-Critical-Action (RCA) Model. While the framework is grounded in theory and aligns with the goals of the National Education Policy 2020, its practical effectiveness across different institutional settings remains to be tested. Future research could conduct case studies, pilot projects, or mixed-methods studies to explore how the RCA Model works and its impact on teacher education institutions.

### CONCLUSION:

Teacher education in India struggles between policy aims and practical application, often favouring technical, one-way teaching. This gap needs a change in teacher training. The article suggests the Reflective-Critical-Action (RCA) Model, which emphasises reflection, critical awareness, and transformative learning, viewing teacher development as a cycle of reflection, engagement, and action to foster socially responsible educators. It aligns with the National Education Policy 2020 and offers a framework for its implementation in institutions under the Ministry of Education. Incorporating reflective practice, critical engagement, and action research into curricula, assessment, and accreditation can create a more integrated, sustainable system. Recognising teachers as key players in knowledge sharing, democratic values, and social change, the focus should be on continuous professional growth. Future research should draw on empirical studies and policy analysis, while maintaining an emphasis on preparing teachers for classroom and community roles.

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