

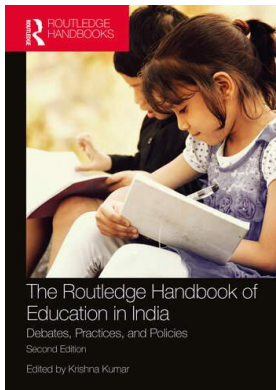
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Discourse of teacher education in India

Latika Gupta

The context

This chapter focuses on the Bachelor of Education (BEd), i.e. training programme for secondary- and senior-secondary-level teachers offered by Indian universities in their departments of education and in affiliated colleges. In the last three decades, beginning since the mid-1980s, there have been widespread efforts to reform elementary education in India. However, the secondary and senior secondary stages of school escaped with sketchy efforts to reform. The only significant effort relevant for these stages has been the identification of priorities in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 (NCERT 2006) and the development of textbooks under its aegis. The NCF 2005 based textbooks are not used by all states and systems of school education. The training of the teachers to teach in secondary and senior secondary schools remained largely unreformed and impervious to the growing demand for an overhaul throughout the entire country. In the last three decades, winds of discontent blew over different institutions related to education, and dissatisfaction was expressed over established curricula of teacher training (TT) institutions. Despite increasing criticism, universities had failed to innovate and make the BEd more attuned to the developments in the field of educational theory.

In December 2014, major changes were notified by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in the *Gazette of India* in teacher training programmes for all stages of school education. The background to this notification lay in the appointment of a commission by the Supreme Court in response to a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking judicial intervention in matters pertaining to the recognition of private teacher education institutions. Chaired by the late Justice J.S.Verma, this commission gave wide-ranging recommendations for reforms in this sector, including remodelling in the BEd and other programmes, and in the functioning of the NCTE, an apex regulatory body with statutory powers. The duration of the BEd programme was increased from one to two years and its curriculum was changed at the behest of the NCTE. The two-year BEd programme is different from its antecedent not just in terms of duration but also in the emphasis it attaches to certain practicum and theoretical courses. The first batch of the revised BEd programme has been admitted in all the universities and colleges of India in 2015 and its nuances are unfolding at different places in different ways. This marks an opportune moment to interpret some of the key features of the discourse on BEd. Here, it is important to

remember that the demand for a reform neither came from the schools nor from the institutions of TTs. This prompts many critics to wonder whether this change in norms and standards will succeed in transforming the way candidates are trained to be secondary- and senior-secondary-level teachers in India and whether such teachers can bring fresh energy into school education.

Bachelor of Education (BEd): a description and reflection

The BEd programme is composed mainly of three kinds of engagement. In the first category are the foundation courses that familiarise students with the theoretical postulates of education, its philosophy, psychology, sociology, and political science. Conventionally, the foundation courses have been: (1) philosophy of education, (2) psychology of education, and (3) contemporary concerns and trends in education. As the titles suggest, these courses offer perspectives formulated in other disciplines but relevant to education. In some universities, the first course had a more grounded title, i.e. issues in educational theory or similar. However, even in those universities, students and teachers referred to this course as a philosophy paper – Delhi University being a case in point.

The second category of engagement in BEd belongs to the realm of practical work, with an idea of giving some experience and exposure to the functioning of a school and a teacher's work-life. As a regulatory body, the NCTE had prescribed a norm that trainee teachers must 'transact' 40 lessons for two subjects during their school placement. This implied that a trainee teacher taught topics of two subjects over 40 school periods. Faculty members were associated with every school group for monitoring and mentoring the trainee teachers during their school experience. The supervisors, irrespective of their area of research and interest, observed all the trainees in one school while teaching their subjects in different classes, and gave feedback about pedagogy, classroom management, relationship with the students, language skills, and so on. This involved a lot of negotiation with the schools. The supervisors had to constantly spend time and effort in convincing the principals to allow the trainees to carry on teaching in regular periods and not only give games or music periods to BEd trainees. There was a great deal of variation across universities in this dimension of BEd. The students of several colleges affiliated to the Delhi government universities never got more than a week to ten days to teach. They had to make do with whichever class was available, whenever it was possible.

The school experience programme was operationalised in a learning-trying-learning sense. The students went to school on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays to teach and came to the department on the remaining days of the week from September to January every week. In the remaining months, they attended theory classes on a regular basis. This arrangement of one day in the department and the next day in the school provided a specific character to TT institutions. Everybody was seen to be running around chasing a goal. The students were occupied in getting their lesson-plans checked so they could use them on the following day, and the faculty members were caught up in giving feedback to every student and counting the number of remaining lessons to be observed for every student. Everybody was anxious and nervous.

In addition to direct school experience, there was a component of community outreach in BEd. The students were expected to do voluntary work in orphanages, old-age homes, or other such institutions. The idea that a teacher was essentially a community developer originated in educational circles immediately after Independence and seeped into the structure of TT programmes as well. J.K. Shukla (1970) has identified two trends in the professional preparation of teachers in India. First, 'increased emphasis on social understanding and social service'; and second, 'increasing emphasis on direct experience through participation, visits, organising community service camps and so on' (p. 30). The idea of the teacher as a community developer has

its roots in the colonial history of India and found a place in the discourse and practice of teacher education. The examination-centred character of the Indian education system (Kumar 2014) ensured that this aspect of social service was assessed by the teacher educators when allocating marks. This component has been dispensed with in the reformed structure by the NCTE. However, it is necessary to take note of this component as it kept the notion alive that a teacher-in-the-making needed personality traits and acumen for social service more than professional knowledge and excitement for ideas. For more than 50 years, teachers-in-the-making donated clothes to poor people and got marks for it.

The third category of engagement is of pedagogy courses in which the focus area is how to teach a particular subject to students of different levels. The word pedagogy is a new entry in this context. The term in vogue has been methodology or methods. Conventionally, pedagogy courses have been of two levels. In level-one courses, students learned the strategies of teaching one subject to secondary-level students, i.e. Grade VI–X. In level-two courses, students learned teaching strategies of the same subject to Grade XI and XII students. These levels were termed as level A and B or 1 and 2. The students who enrolled in a BEd programme after completing a master's degree in their subject were allowed to opt for level B/2 methodology courses. The students who enrolled in BEd after their graduation were allowed to take two methods courses from related or sometimes unrelated disciplines. This often resulted in strange combinations of subjects that students took, and had no consistency with the demands that the school system posed. For instance, the subject combinations that students got were: English and mathematics, English and Hindi, chemistry and English, and so on. In the reformed BEd structure, the level distinction in pedagogy courses has been removed, but in implementation it remains a grey area. The belief that teaching children in upper-primary grades is absolutely different from teaching students in senior-secondary grades is so firmly entrenched in the system that the implementation of the reformed perspective on pedagogy is currently facing considerable resistance.

The popular notion has been that the candidates preparing to be teachers need to acquire a collection of strategies or techniques in order to make the transmission of the body of knowledge appealing to the learner. Writing more than 45 years ago, Shukla drew a conclusion that 'the programme for the preparation of teachers, in order to be effective, should provide scope for continuing increase in subject-knowledge and the necessary skills and techniques needed for imparting that knowledge in a classroom situation' (1970: 39). As we can see, a teacher is perceived as a skilful transmitter of knowledge – *read*: information – given in the prescribed textbooks. Figure 11.1 presents the essential components of the curriculum of teacher education programmes.

Minor differences crept into the organisation of the three components across universities because of specific influences. For instance, a course in gender was a part of the elective courses in BEd in some universities, whereas in others students completed their programme without hearing the word 'gender'. Across universities and a time span of several decades, the basic structure of the BEd programme remained largely the same, comprising the three categories shown in Figure 11.1. This was observed by the National Focus Group (NCERT 2007) that was set up to discuss teacher education in India:

A quick glance through surveys of educational research in India conducted periodically over the years 1974–1998 substantiates the point that teacher education programmes have remained unchanged in terms of their substance, experiences offered and modalities adopted.

(*ibid.*: 3)

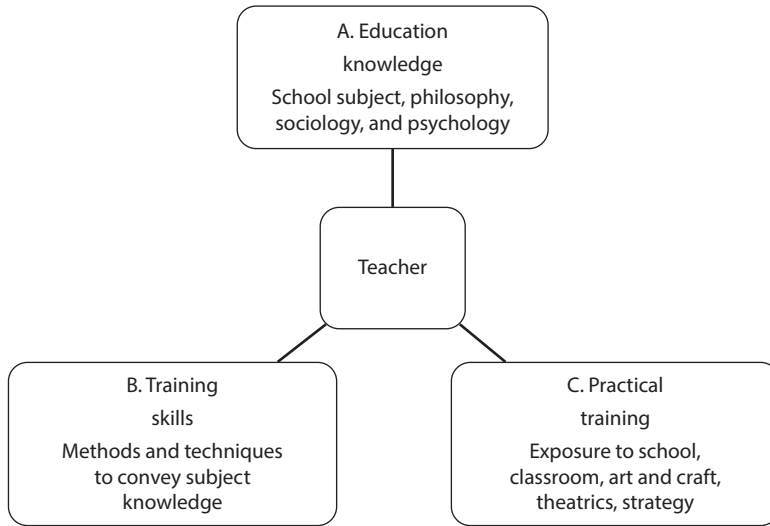


Figure 11.1 Three curricular components of teacher education programmes.

Source: all figures in the chapter are drawn by the author.

The knowledge of an uncanny uniformity in BEd across time and geographical location became accessible to me in personal settings as well. My identity in the neighbourhood and the kinship is that of a BEd teacher. Often, I faced questions from acquaintances, strangers, and relatives: I am doing BEd, please tell me how should I prepare for the final exams? What are the important topics? I faced these questions in diverse social gatherings such as birthday parties, wedding ceremonies, and funerals, in hospitals, markets, and in tailor shops across several towns of north India and in southern states too. The confidence with which so many diverse questioners asked it revealed to me the general perception and the reality of BEd. They did not perceive BEd any differently from graduate and postgraduate programmes in which high scores in the final examinations constituted the most important dimension. The examinations are conducted in the form of a one-time 2–3-hour written test. The questions are based on select topics and are direct in nature, requiring reproduction of learned information. The questioners were aware that a BEd programme did not require any different kind of engagement from liberal arts and science programmes, even though there was a provision of 10–15 per cent internal assessment in every course and the practicum was evaluated without an exam. The requirement was to rote memorise the answers to potential questions which would be asked in the examinations and score highly. Hence, the candidates could imagine a sacrosanct uniformity and saw me as a source of information about important topics and expected questions in the final examinations.

The BEd programme attracted severe criticism in the reports of all the major commissions set up to study school education over the last 50 years. The recognition of the problem of ill-prepared teachers led to the creation of several NGOs that tried to improve teacher quality by providing in-service training. However, the basic organising principle of TT wasn't altered. 'A whole century has gone by without the instrumentalist character of teacher training being challenged or reformed' (Kumar 2008: 38). Batra (2009) has identified six factors responsible for the stagnation in this discipline, out of which two have a direct bearing on the daily experiences of students and teachers in a BEd programme.

The first factor is the popularity of belief in a discourse that unlinks ‘theoretical reflection’ from effective educational practice. Borrowing from Carr (2003), she draws implications of the belief that teaching is envisaged as a matter of practical tricks which doesn’t require any theoretical support. I often heard an allegory in policy discussions which reflected this discourse: A teacher is like a driver who should know how to work with a steering wheel, gears, and brakes in order to drive. A driver doesn’t need to understand the machinery, functioning of the engine, or larger issues of vehicular pollution.

Batra’s second factor is that in TT no attempt is made to ‘develop a grounded understanding of children’s thinking and learning processes, curricular and pedagogic studies within the Indian socio-political context’ (Batra 2009: 128). The integration of theory into practice is either not attempted or is over-simplified to certain behaviouristic notions. The mechanised theories of education, borrowed from late nineteenth-century Europe, have found a permanent settlement in the BEd programme. The over-simplified link between theory and practice is the result of this settlement. An attempt has been made in this chapter to capture the nuances of the experiences of a student in a BEd programme, which can enable us to assess the extent to which the recently brought about policy-level changes will alter the discourse of BEd. For this assessment, we will review three points. The first one is teacher-educators.

Teacher-educators

Russel (1925) identified certain problems of departments of education in England; he discussed the teacher-educator as one of these. The job of teacher-educators is to organise students’ learning in three categories. These three cornerstones of teacher preparation have become so sacrosanct in the Indian system that they define the identity of teacher-educators and categorise them into distinct leagues. The first constituent creates the identity of foundation course teachers; the second creates pedagogues; and the third leads to the role-identity of an expert supervisor who could be from either of the first two categories. This distinction of *specialisation* among teacher-educators gets further classified into subcategories. The subcategory of the first constituent is expert in psychological foundations or philosophical or sociological or contemporary thinker in education (alluding to all the policies and concerns).

The second constituent created the identity of pedagogues of different school subjects. The teachers of foundation courses are considered ineligible to teach a pedagogy course and pedagogues are not expected to teach foundation courses. The criteria for deciding who would fall within which constituent category are based on the subject that the person has studied for his/her postgraduate degree. If the postgraduate programme was in any of the three core disciplines, then the teacher-educator becomes a foundation course teacher. If the postgraduate degree was in any of the school subjects, then the teacher-educator becomes a pedagogue. Rarely is this rule flouted. These identities are so fixed in BEd that they create impenetrable boundaries for any exchange of ideas. And, it is within these impenetrable boundaries that the learning of students takes place. Physically, the students permeate through the boundaries because they interact with teachers in all the ‘identity’ groups, but cognitively the osmosis through which the teachings of different teachers mingle and coalesce only takes place in a student’s mind. The teachers do not aim for any cohesion between different theoretical viewpoints.

The interaction between the teachers of different foundation courses – at the level of syllabus formulation and teaching – is completely uncalled for or is unwarranted because, after all, they stem from three distinct disciplines, i.e. psychology, philosophy, and sociology. As a result of a hermetic conceptualisation of these courses, students do not get a chance to engage with their full complexity and do not develop the ability to understand children in totality by drawing on

ideas from different fields. For instance, students are expected to engage with the criticism of behaviourism as a framework to understand learning in one foundation course and explore its alternatives. This engagement has the potential to introduce them to the development in the field of cognitive theory in which the progressive perspectives on learning moved beyond the idea of behavioural change almost 50 years ago (Bruner 2004). However, in a different foundation course, students learn the theory of behaviourism as a source of ideas to ensure learning. BEd students do learn about structuralism and constructivism, but without acquiring a developmental perspective required to appreciate the shifts in the theoretical world. One doesn't need a genius to guess what happens as a result of this gap. The students do not get inspired by theoretical ideas to function as a teacher in most cases. They start viewing behaviourism and constructivism as equally relevant and efficient theories. As a result, when they teach they end up interacting with children with the instincts that they imbibe in the socio-cultural ethos of Indian society in which adults interact with children by hitting and scolding them regularly (Kumar 2011).

Lesson-plan

A specific kind of hiatus exists between foundation and pedagogy courses. It is important to point out here that though the students get theoretical perspectives from several teachers, their pedagogical perspective comes only from one teacher, who is the method master.¹ The students learn in foundation courses that teaching is not 'telling'. The real meaning of teaching is to create opportunities in which learners arrive at an understanding in the same manner in which that knowledge was developed in a specific field. They also engage with epistemological issues that knowledge is not a compilation of topics and sub-topics. It involves grasping of fundamental principles, development of basic attitudes and hunches for a discipline, and excitement for its applicability. However, in pedagogy courses, this understanding does not get related to the specifics of a discipline and its constituent school subject. This epistemological nuance does not acquire a specific discipline-based flavour in the pedagogy course. The discourse of the pedagogy course is largely shaped by the terms shown in Figure 11.2.

The use of the word 'method' can be easily found in the syllabus of pedagogy courses across Indian universities. Kumaravadivelu (2001) states that in the 1990s congruence was achieved in teacher education between the two mutually informing currents of thought in America. One argued for the need to go beyond the limitations of the concept of method and another emphasised the need to go beyond the limitations of the transmission model of teacher education. These currents of thought reflect a long-felt dissatisfaction with the concept of method as the organising principle of teacher education. However, departments of education in Indian

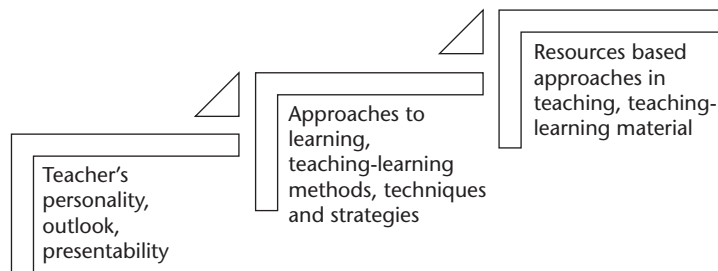


Figure 11.2 Discourse of pedagogy courses.

universities remained ignorant of such ideas and maintained the water-tight distinction between theory and method. Furlong has analysed this distinction as ‘one of the most abiding dilemmas in the UK’ (2013: 69). According to him, four broad discourses about what it means to know as a teacher have been identified so far in the UK. They are: liberal education, propositional knowledge, practical knowledge, and moral knowledge. The dilemma remains how much time should be devoted to each of these and in what manner. In the Indian context, this distinction continues to escape any sense of scrutiny, and faculty members teach without any quandary. There is no common will to recognise this distinction as a challenge and to work around addressing it. To this, the flavour of India’s socio-cultural hierarchy gets added and the introduction of any ideas becomes a personalised battle. ‘My idea is better than your idea’ or ‘I do not like your idea’ are the general reactions to the feeble attempts made to raise issues such as softening of the boundaries between foundation and pedagogy courses.

As a result of this, pedagogy and foundation courses carry on as several parallel streams in the lives of students. In the foundation courses they think about future learners’ caste, age, developmental stage, identity, and so on; in the pedagogy courses they think about school subjects. The imagined learners’ (to be taught by BEd students in schools later) caste, religion, and adolescence cease to be important factors. The imagined learner in school becomes a recipient of the knowledge offered by political science or chemistry or English in isolation. In this method model, it falls outside the realm of political science how a young person conceptualises the idea of choice and decision making in school when she is facing an identity crisis in adolescence as theorised by Erikson (1959). For instance, the pedagogy course in mathematics does not engage with the challenges that students face in Grade VI and VII, when they are 12–13 years old and the capacity for formal operational thought begins to develop (Elkind 1981). The units of algebra and arithmetic acquire a different kind of pedagogic challenge if the teachers-in-training realise that the learners in school may not have reached the stage of formal operational thought. This requires a convergence between knowledge that psychology offers and the nuances of mathematical concepts.

This example helps us to identify the two distinct worlds that BEd students inhabit when they sit in the classes of foundation and pedagogy courses. The aims of education (discussed in the foundation courses) never get synchronised with the purpose of teaching chemistry or geography or any other school subject. The criticism of behaviourism never finds an extension in pedagogy courses. Thus, students make Thermocol² models of polling booths, election symbols of political parties, atoms, animal cells, bulbs, telephones, and equilateral triangles, and so on. Environmentalism is a concern that all the disciplines address and students develop notice boards and organise events to draw attention to these environmental concerns. However, even while making their own models, the students do not exhibit any sensitivity towards the environment. No pedagogy course trains them to use disciplinary knowledge to take decisions about their own conduct. The culmination of pedagogic discourse is in the form of lesson-plans that students make to teach certain topics during their school placement (the erstwhile term is ‘practice teaching’; now in vogue is ‘school experience’). A lesson-plan includes a topic to be taught, specific and general objectives, children’s previous knowledge (as expected by the trainee), materials to be used, questions to be asked and answers to be expected, and finally, recapitulation and homework. One important dimension of lesson-planning is that of questions to be asked by the teacher *as well as* the expected answers that children would give. BEd students read Socratic dialogues and Buber’s (1958) construction of dialogue, but in their lesson-plans they perceive a teacher’s main job as that of posing questions. Ideas like child-centred education and constructivist teaching remain confined to the theory courses and are not reflected in lesson-plans. Often, students recognise the tension, but carry on with the flow of ritualised, mechanised

teaching that their lesson-plans reflect. Sinha observed that ‘they are depressingly similar to the usual teaching that goes on. Nothing strikes new in terms of the conceptualisation of classroom transactions’ (2002: 19).

There is a sharp contrast between the expectation from the BEd students and the reality. They are taught to become critical about the manner in which schools function and teachers teach. They learn about the importance of critical engagement with the learner and the subject matter when they study Dewey, Krishnamurti, and Freire, but they do not get the opportunity to apply this learning while planning their teaching activities. As a result, within their BEd programme span, they fall back on the ritualised manner of teaching. The journey of ideas that they pursue in foundation courses does not carry on in pedagogy courses. ‘The lesson-plan culture perpetuates a “product” model of pedagogic work’ (Kumar 2002: 12). In this culture, the teacher’s job is to create products that give a structure to their work and which become evidence of their work. The lesson-plan has become established as the most important product. In this dichotomy, ideas do not inform their practice. What informs their practice is the stuff about transmission given in pedagogy courses. This degree of desynchronisation between ideas expressed in different courses certainly creates cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957).

Raina and Raina conducted a study to determine what concepts teacher-educators in India have of the ideal student in terms of characteristics to be encouraged, as well those to be discouraged. Out of 62 characteristics, the chosen top six were: (1) industrious, (2) considerate of others, (3) receptive of others, (4) obedient, (5) courteous, and (6) does work on time. Indian teacher-educators assigned less importance to asking questions, independent thinking, and unwillingness to accept things without examining the evidence. The authors speculated that ‘the emphasis on industriousness is perhaps associated with the concerns of the teacher’s colleges to equip prospective teachers with all the “tricks of the trade” during a short span of one session extending to 200 working days’ (Raina and Raina 1971: 305).

The desire for an industrious student is prevalent even now and, in that, lesson-plans play a big role. Students spend a lot of time in writing the same objectives repeatedly because they make a couple of plans to use one textbook chapter. BEd students work hard to make a sketch of the blackboard in their lesson-plan files to convey its final appearance when they have written everything on it, as planned. They paste black paper in their files and write on it with a silver pen to give the impression of the final look of the blackboard. In addition, students decorate lesson-plans with colours, strings, ornamental strips, sparkles, glitter, ribbons, and colourful paper. I will always remember a student who had written his lesson-plans on sheets of letterhead paper, not plain. It had hearts drawn in several colours, with sparkles on the cupid. The decorative presentation of lesson-plans reveals that it is not perceived as an intellectual exercise that involves knowledge and cognitive dimensions. Rather, it is seen as a product that has to be presented to somebody. The emphasis on industriousness meets the lesson-plan-making skill component in the life of BEd students and creates a solid bond. The presentation of information becomes an end in itself and occupies the student’s time and energy fully. It isn’t for nothing that students miss classes to make their lesson-plans and get them checked by their respective method masters. There is no room for serendipity in the life of BEd students as they end up becoming tricksters rather than rationally independent professionals. The distinction between the roles played by teacher-educators contributes to this end.

Material of instruction

The general understanding has been that a BEd student learns to make lesson-plans; to execute those plans, one needs some material. Mellan (1936) prepared a key of educational

material patented by various people in the USA since 1790. The key is divided into a couple of sections based on the title under which the material was patented. The titles were: invention, apparatus, device, means, appliance, instrument, and machine. The entries in the key are reminiscent of experimental psychology in which the current of thought was to train animals to prove various points about learning. According to Mellan, after World War II, active steps were taken in the USA to equip a large number of classrooms with appropriate apparatus to demonstrate the role that planning plays in the pursuit of efficient teaching methods. At that time, the most widely discussed educational problem was 'classroom procedure known as the instruction by mechanical devices' (Mellan 1936: 291). According to Bruner, this kind of psychology conceived of learning as essentially an individual process in which the individual's mind acquired neutral and objective knowledge with the help of related or unrelated material (Bruner 2004).

Searching for teaching-learning material (TLM) or making such material themselves is a major activity that BEd students engage in while making lesson-plans. They practice instruction with mechanical devices. That learning takes place when the work done in the classroom is aided by concrete material has become the most accepted stance. BEd students spend more time on the task of collecting 'appropriate' material compared to philosophical reflection on ideas and theories about learning and the specific nature of knowledge in different fields. Mannheim and Stewart's deconstruction of the use of the word 'training' is consistent with what BEd students experience in Indian universities. Referring to the word *training*, they postulated that

it [training] is associated with the tricks of the trade, with dependent attitudes and with a limited understanding of the purposes of any activity.... It has to do with technique and it is for this kind of reason that 'training' has often helped to confuse some of the principal issues in education.

(Mannheim and Stewart 1970: 13)

The dominance of the idea that a teacher must acquire all the 'tricks of the trade' leads to a fixed routine, a procedural orientation to teaching, and views the child as somebody who needs textbook content in easily graspable and attractive forms. Dewey warned us against seeing education as an enterprise of routine application. Dewey's progressive education required teachers to be prepared in a way that they would become self-reliant in setting new aims and accordingly fresh ways of teaching, and not become accustomed to the plans and material. He was anguished with teachers colleges in America during the middle of the previous century, for in them the ideas and principles were converted into a 'fixed subject matter of ready-made rules, to be taught and memorised according to certain standardised procedures and to be applied to educational problems eternally' (Dewey 1952: 132). The departments of education in India work in this manner. The BEd students pick up some rules and procedures, and become familiar with certain problems that they are taught to expect later when they start teaching in schools.

The relationship between ideas about children, learning, knowledge, society, and aims of education acquire a distant location in the minds of BEd students, while material acquires immediacy. They are seen mostly in the open grounds making charts and models, and rarely in the library with books. The need to read classics in education, the latest and old research, commentaries and other kinds of books, acquires the status of a not-so-necessary intellectual activity. For them, teaching does not become an 'interaction of the minds of teacher and the taught' (Mannheim and Stewart 1970: 14), and influencing the younger generation's knowledge and attitudes; it rather becomes an activity of passing on information in an appealing way. Describing the character of the TT institution, Zaidi put it succinctly:

It is not an uncommon though only a tacitly-owned belief in the Training College circles that ‘method is the thing’, that a student teacher who is initiated in the mystic lore of method will, by some mysterious process, be transformed into a paragon of pedagogical virtues. A mystique of method has come into being, which is handed down to successive generations of teachers with the fond hope that it will somehow more than compensate for their utter ignorance of the relevant subjects.

(Zaidi 1971: 160)

The inordinate importance of method keeps alive the out-of-proportion significance of the need for teaching–learning material. What student-teachers lack is the wide knowledge, enthusiasm for ideas, and a genuine ability to engage young people with the basic structure of any discipline (Bruner 1960). According to Kumar (2008), NCF 2005 (NCERT 2006) described two facets of a desired teacher. One was the social facet that posed the challenge of overcoming the social hierarchies in the classroom; the other was the facet where the teacher recognised multiple curricular sites and the plurality of resources. To have such a teacher, it is important to develop the capabilities of reflection. However, what we end up developing is the capacity to arrange or make material to play better tricks on children. This keeps BED students restricted to viewing children as – similar to Pavlov’s dogs and Watson’s rats – capable of responding only when stimulated and reinforced with the help of some material.

Ethos of BEd institutions: cultural and celebratory

A BEd institution has a distinct ethos that arises from the daily institutional circumstances of students and faculty members. The combination of regularly conducted activities, timetable, and faculty members’ and students’ way of conducting themselves create an ethos which acquires relative stability and provides a unique character to the institution. According to Mills (1959), it is important to understand the different ethos that people access if we want to understand the rise of individuals in them. Using this construct, an attempt has been made here to grasp the ethos of BEd institutions to comprehend the rise of the teacher in BEd students.

When the programme starts every year, students undergo a week-long orientation which sets the tone of the experiences to come in the course. The students get introduced to the practice of a compulsory morning assembly and weekly cultural activities as an important component of life in a department of education. There are fixed slots in the timetable for cultural activities. These activities include singing songs, dancing, debates, extempore speeches, and certain games for building team-spirit. A working day begins with a morning assembly in which the students sing the national anthem and discuss an issue of contemporary or universal relevance. Sometimes, this discussion takes place in the form of debates or poetry reading sessions. The discussion and singing is followed by announcements with regard to their classes and other activities. A morning assembly, involving religious prayers and a few activities of public speaking, in TT institutions is a country-wide phenomenon. A faculty member is designated as in-charge of the assembly, whose work is to supervise and communicate the need for regularity, punctuality, and active participation in the assembly. In Delhi University, till recently, participation in morning assembly carried scores in the form of a larger exercise that involved cultural activities and was equivalent to some of the theory and pedagogic courses in terms of their weighting. The new curriculum notified by the NCTE has done away with such a provision, but the singing and dancing fervour continues unabated and its related weekly and annual events are being held, the same as earlier.

BEd students spend their first half-hour in the morning in exactly the same manner as children do in schools. The insistence on participation in the morning assembly and in the cultural

activities of the BEd programme establishes an acute similarity with the lives of schools in India, and it enables us to understand the desired personality of a teacher-in-the-making. The insistence takes us back to the 'trick master' model of a school teacher. The premise of this model is that a teacher needs to perform tricks from morning to afternoon every day, and thus she or he must learn to conduct assembly and organise cultural activities by doing so on a daily basis. This has reflections of the earlier popular apprenticeship model in professional programmes that implied that the learner learns by engaging in exactly the same activities that she or he will do in the future. This echoes an inherently mechanical view of learning and the sense is that all teachers are required to be 'cultural beings' who must have the wherewithal to organise outside-the-classroom activities. It is true that this dimension has a rather direct connection with school life. To begin with, there are several such activities for which an average Indian school suspends teaching for days altogether; the number of these has increased considerably in the last few years. The bureaucracy, central and local governments, and boards of examination issue orders on a regular basis to mark and observe week-long activities such as hand-washing week, neighbourhood cleanliness week, good governance day, plantation week, and celebrating our heritage week, and so on. So far, a critical view has not been taken of this aspect of Indian schools in TT institutions. In fact, there has been a sense of conformity to this and thus the organisation of such exercises emerges as one of the major enterprises in BEd.

The students are divided into groups and faculty members are designated as being in charge. Their responsibility is to ensure that there are students willing to dance, sing, and debate. The students often miss classes on the pretext of preparing for such activities, with a sense of legitimacy. It also gives them a sense of being industrious because they run around to decorate, arrange various things such as furniture, an audio system, dresses, refreshment, etc. Such activities are organised regularly and give rise to a celebratory ethos consistent with that of families in India when they celebrate big or small festivals and weddings. During cultural activities, BEd students and faculty members engage on matters which have no bearing on their academic interaction. They talk about food, dress, films, dance, relationships, and so on. In this celebratory ethos, faculty members shed their academic personas and emerge as cultural beings similar to BEd students. This is how Indian schools function. While organising such activities almost every week, teachers end up in situations in which their engagement with children in schools does not revolve around any field of knowledge. Its epicentre remains a non-academic activity. We can, therefore, notice that this situational teacher-student interaction is identical in TT institutions and in schools.

The school-like fervour carries on in other aspects of general conduct. One indicator is the ardour with which students wish 'good morning', 'good afternoon', and so on to their teachers as many times as they cross them. As a practice, BEd students stand up to issue such a greeting when a teacher enters the classroom, just like children do in schools. The verbal wish is accompanied by a slight bow that Indians acquire at school, and which also has a feudal heritage. The students pay respect to the professional authority of the teacher (Freire 1970) by repeating this gesture mechanically.

The necessity of this wishing is internalised so deeply that they wish even while talking on their mobile phones and holding animated conversations, while stepping in and out of the toilets, while noting down announcements, and even while the teacher is engaged in a serious conversation with somebody. This is indeed a common sight in a large number of academic institutions of higher education in India, but in a department of education it acquires significance because the BEd students are expected to appreciate the role of a teacher as somebody who thinks critically about real life (*ibid.*). In the real life of a BEd programme, the intellectual inspiration of Gandhi and Tagore and the rituals to mark teachers' authority go in parallel. They

never intersect and create contradictions in the minds of the BEd students. They do not become even slightly critical about this ritual, that their act of repeated wishing may disturb the teacher's flow of conversation or that it's not needed so many times in a day. Mostly, students call themselves *bachche* (children), and also behave like them. A large number of students remain casual, playful, and insouciant. It seems as if they just pass their time and fill their institutional life with sporadic activities.

At a very young age, learners in India internalise that missing school often is not a big deal; this concept becomes rock solid as they progress up the educational ladder. BEd students also miss classes quite regularly. Under the NCTE's mandatory provision, a minimum of 85 per cent (earlier 75 per cent) attendance throughout the year is required. The implication of this provision is that every class either starts or ends with attendance-taking activity by calling out the name of every student. The attendance record of every student needs to be maintained by faculty members and submitted to the authorities at least twice every academic year. It is an interesting eventuality of the attendance regime that a few students remain absolutely regular and some remain highly irregular throughout the academic year. However, the bulk constitutes what can be called the floating population of BEd students. They attend a few classes and miss a few as a practice. During winter, one finds students basking in the sun and sipping tea/coffee rather than being in class.

The reasons for missing classes are wide-ranging and deserve a full-length discussion. However, a brief reflection is needed here. The reason for missing a class is often covered by a few common excuses: I (or a family member) wasn't well; I had to attend a wedding or festival celebration in the family; I had an exam; and so on.

On average, BEd students are 21–26 years old. Many of them pursue the programme along with several other professional options such as jobs in banks, lower and higher bureaucracy in the state and central governments, and so on. With their minds busy with a wide range of professional options and dealing with the reality of family and kinship responsibilities, characteristic of social life in India, there is little room left for unobstructed commitment to the choice of becoming a teacher. This results in a sketchy understanding of issues or ideas. For instance, a student comes to the class in which the discussion on Gandhi's ideas on education starts, and then she misses the next four classes for a relative's wedding. Gandhi's ideas become a casualty in such a case, and this is a fairly common phenomenon. One knows very well that the student will not make any effort to engage with Gandhi's ideas on her own.

The fervency born out of cultural activities, students' irregular presence in the classes, and their conduct altogether give rise to an ethos in which the students' enrolment in a BEd programme does not become a distinct purpose. They carry a fluid perception of institutional academic spaces and their function. Their minds do not become 'disciplined' in the structure of the discipline of education. At best, they acquire the sense of teaching activity that encompasses several kinds of performances. Smith (2003) has applied the construct of habitus (Bourdieu 1990) to organisations. His argument is that an educational institution's ethos is continually constructed under the influence of individual students' habituses and that of institutions in the external environment. In TT institutions, school is the external environment. A school's life remains a model for how students and faculty members structure their behaviour while being members of a BEd programme. The TT institution's habitus is not marked by the nuances of the discipline of education. It is largely shaped by India's socio-cultural fabric, which comes in the form of students' and faculty members' habituses and by a school's shadow.

Every year, BEd programmes set out to prepare teachers who will be able to reform a senior-secondary school. In its processes and activities it replicates school most of the time and treats school as a frozen entity in time and behaviours. At the end, the programme produces teachers

who do not take long to fit into the structures of schooling. The secondary and senior-secondary schools in India have not received substantial policy attention for their reform, except a minor scheme of the central government, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), which hasn't been implemented with great energy or zeal. The unreformed school becomes the demand agency for which BED has been supplying trained teachers. So far, there has been no major conflict between the two. If by chance one or two BED students pick up critical insights and ideas and try to practise them in schools when they get jobs, in no time the school's daily circumstances will dampen their spirits and so they adjust to the prevailing system. They cannot carry on the project of bringing fresh energy into that school. The biggest challenge ahead of the reformed structure of the BED programme is the narrowness of the discourse of teacher training in India.

Notes

- 1 It is a commonly used term in the Indian context for those teacher-educators who teach pedagogy courses.
- 2 Thermocol is a commercial name of polystyrene, a synthetic petroleum product. Polystyrene is one of the most widely used plastics. Uses include protective packaging in packing peanuts and CD and DVD cases, clamshells, lids, bottles, trays, tumblers, and disposable cutlery. In India, Thermocol has found its biggest use in making models of various concepts that children study in different school subjects.

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