

A Qualitative Study of Prevailing Practices at a Private School during School Internship

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Abstract: This qualitative micro-study of prevailing school practices was undertaken at a private school in the NCR of Delhi. It aimed to discover and strengthen the relationship between educational theory and educational practice. The focus was on reflective practice that generates knowledge about teaching by connecting a student-teacher to a concrete, context-specific and self-experienced situation. The research was designed as an observational micro-study located at a private school drawing data from the school internship programme's experience. The specific objectives were to explore the learning, curricular and classroom management practices prevailing during online education at the select private school; to undertake an analysis of the language pedagogical practices in the school; and to make sense of the prevailing practices through the lens of educational theory, in a spirit of phronesis. The observational data indicated that there was a gap between the progressive educational theories that are studied in a liberal pre-service teacher education programme and the prevailing educational practice in schools. A kind of distortion of language was observed in the classroom as its teaching was often reduced to a breaking down to merely disconnected grammar rules, accuracy, memorization, decontextualized texts and drills, pattern practice, and reinforcements; without a real world context. A major limitation of this study was that it was undertaken at a time of physical closure of the country's school system. The data too have been gathered during the course of an online internship experience. The key focus in this research report is on data vignettes based on classroom observations. The quest to evolve a personal theory of education was nevertheless a running thread of interconnectedness all through this research. The present research report is mainly based on some of the observational aspects of this quest.

Keywords: Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed.) programme, educational practices, language pedagogy, phronesis, school curriculum.

I. Introduction

There is no gainsaying that a comprehensive base of knowledge is essential to preparation of teachers. This provides a basic foundation upon which to base teaching practice. A quality pre-service teacher education programme recognises this need for broad-based theoretical knowledge. The theory courses in an initial teacher education programme fulfill this need. The inclusion of field based units of study further facilitates the discovery of the alternate relations between educational theory and educational practice, something which is particularly valuable in education discipline. The practicum courses conversely provide a similar opportunity for application of a broad-based teacher education knowledge system to matters of teaching practice. The key idea underlying the present mini-research is that the study of prevailing educational practices in school systems is a significant aspect of teacher preparation. This provides a basis for reflective practice by direct, first-hand analysis of the dynamic realities of school education in a society. It also enables prospective teachers to discover their own version of what is wrong with prevailing schooling practices; an important concern of a forward-looking, radical, and progressive teacher education discourse. The four year initial teacher education programme Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed) was introduced at the University of Delhi with the promise of preparing elementary school teachers as transformative agents of change in the stratified, multi-layered school system of our country (1). The programme empowers young woman student-teachers as 'primary change-agents' (2) by inclusionary processes one of which is 'reflective practice in a specific socio-political locale during the course of fieldwork in school education' (3). The B.El.Ed curriculum framework integrates the study of theory and practicum courses in each year of the degree programme in order to streamline the relationship between educational theory and educational practice which is not necessarily a linear one. Qualitative micro-

studies of prevailing practices in the schools are premised on the logic of discovering the theory-practice linkage in real world contexts. The present research undertakes such a study at a private school in the NCR of Delhi.

II. An Interpretative Framework

The relationship between educational theory and educational practices has tended to remain a chequered one. Kessels and Korthagen write

During the 20th century, scholarly thinking has been dominated by a strong inequality between theory and practice. Abstract knowledge was considered to be of a higher standing and of more value than concrete skills or the tacit knowledge of good performance. Much of the educational research concentrated on theory formation, both descriptive, for explanation, and prescriptive, for behavioural instructions. Consequently, educationalists in different subjects and professions were confronted with the problem of bridging the gap between theory and practice, a task that never seemed to succeed. (4).

The notion of reflective practitioner (5) refers to basing knowledge about teaching by connecting to concrete, context-specific and experienced situations for which generalised abstract rules may not always exist. The nature of knowledge that develops through such a process is based on 'research' on actual teaching, which is a kind of knowledge that is knower-dependent (6).

The research focus on educational practice in the present study is in affirmative resonance with Aristotle's ancient notion of phronesis (7). The concept of phronesis refers to a specific type of knowledge based mostly on practical wisdom which may be non-universal, variable, and particular. It is 'not abstract and theoretical, but it's very opposite: knowledge of concrete particulars' (8). In educational literature phronesis as knowledge is sometimes understood by contrasting it with Plato's theory of forms which is premised on a concept of knowledge as a purely intellectual activity consisting of abstract ideas (9). Theoretical coursework in pre-service teacher education curriculum may be looked at as knowledge that is episteme, a term that is used to contrast with phronesis. The issue of theory-practice gap potentially arises in the context of school internship programme particularly while examining learning, curricular and pedagogical issues. Does theoretical coursework equip the student-teacher to face the challenges of learning to teach? This question is research-worthy especially to the beginning teacher and the teacher-educator. Looked at from another lens a student of education would not be able to understand what is wrong with educational practice without a thorough study of educational theory. The research focus in this study embraces a phronesis notion of knowledge and emphasises observation of school practice in the particular context of a school. As a consequence of this approach,

...we may conclude that the gap between theory and practice is not a problem inherent to the teaching situation. It is only inherent to our conception of knowledge as episteme. In a conception of knowledge as phronesis, the question of how to bridge such a gap, how to connect the complexities of concrete, experienced situations to some given, abstract rules does not exist (10).

Kessels and Korthagen (1996) further argue that a shift towards phronesis kind of knowledge in teacher education programmes, curriculum and research needs to move away from theories, books and conceptual analysis to perceiving, experiencing and reflecting upon concrete situations. The latter constitutes the sine qua non of phronesis in teacher education. This does not frequently happen in initial teacher education programmes since,

The main problem here is that most teacher educators have themselves been steeped in the episteme conception of knowledge. So they have always taken for granted the traditional, epistemic perspective on the relationship between theory and practice. This makes it very hard to understand the full impact of the shift towards phronesis (11).

The present mini-research brings together the teacher-educator and student teacher as researchers in appreciation of phronesis as knowledge in teacher education. The researchers' positionality, development and teacher growth was shaped by a reconciliation of episteme-phronesis personal contradictions. The study was designed as an observational micro-study of school practices in the mainly phronesis interpretative framework in which it was located. It drew observational data at a private school during the school internship programme of the 4th year of B.El.Ed programme. This research report is mainly based on some of the observational aspects of this programme.

III. Research Question

The present research aimed to problematise the prevailing practices at a private elementary school. It was undertaken at the onset of online education during the Covid-19 caused physical closure of the school system in all parts of the country. In the NCR of Delhi too all the schools-government, private and private-aided had physically closed but shifted to some kind of online education or the other. The schooling practices during this closure time also transformed which is something that the research aims to make sense of. The fieldwork was undertaken at a private school that was allotted to the student teacher for her B.El.Ed 4th year school internship.

3.1 Research Objectives

The research has three specific objectives. The first objective is to explore the learning, curricular and classroom management practices, or, phronesis, prevailing during online education at the select private school. Secondly this research attempts to undertake an analysis of the language pedagogical practices in the school. The third objective is to make sense of the prevailing practices through the lens of educational theory while also struggling to evolve a personal theory of education.

3.2 The school and the participants

The present study was undertaken in one of the elementary schools in NCR of Delhi, as mentioned above. It was a private school established in the year 1982. The particular school was part of the school internship programme of fourth year B.El.Ed coursework in academic year 2020-2021. The student-teacher researcher was allotted grades IV and V during the primary school internship and grades VII and VIII in the middle school internship. The other researcher was her teacher-educator at the department of elementary education, though not her school supervisor. The students and teachers from school were the participants of this study. The student-teacher was also in close contact with two mentor-teachers, specifically associated with her during the school internship programme, who were the regular teachers of the school. This was a valuable point of contact that provided nuanced insights into the practices followed by the school over an extended period of time, which the student-teacher may not have an opportunity to learn about otherwise. The duration of this school internship was 4 months during the academic session 2020-2021.

The school is attended by around 5000 children and a staff of approximately 450 members inclusive of teachers. The entire school internship was conducted in the online mode. As a consequence of this no information could be gathered about the physical infrastructure, the other aspects of the premises of the school, or any of the other related dimensions. The status of implementation of Right to Education Act 2010 was outside the scope of the present study and no information in this regard was collected. The identities of all participants are blinded.

The school declares itself to be a happy school with Indian values and an international outlook. It believes that true education must be life-sustaining and life empowering by creating curious, enquiring minds eager to explore ideas and concepts by providing them varied experiences. Since the researcher did not have an opportunity for physical presence at the school not much insight was possible on the school's aim of education in a first-hand way. The data gathered are completely restricted to the observations, interactions and interviews during an online mode.

3.3 Research Method, Tools and Techniques

The research is a qualitative study that is based on simple qualitative tools and techniques for studying a school. The tools include classroom observations, informal interactions and unstructured, open ended interviews during this period in the virtual school internship programme with the participants. Detailed classroom observations were undertaken on each day of internship. The data gathering with students involved close observation but not in-person interaction or interviews. Informal interactions with the mentor-teacher from the school, as also with the other teachers and school officials, also generated data. These were also not person to person. The observations as well as the interviews were in-depth notwithstanding that an interview schedule was not prepared since the interview was designed as open-ended. Some themes were identified by an analysis of the data. The data vignettes are presented titled under these select themes while analysing them. The student-teacher's elective theory course was on pedagogy of language. There is a full sub-section on learning, curricular and pedagogical issues related to language education in the presented data.

IV. Data Presentation and Analysis

Six data vignettes are presented and analysed under the undermentioned themes. The data vignettes presented in this section are partly drawn from a teaching journal that was maintained by the student-teacher for the purpose of reflective record-keeping of her teaching as well as personal development and teacher-growth. Some of the data vignettes are additional observations.

4.1.1 Data Vignette 1

On the very first day of observation at 8:45 a.m. the teacher enters, students who were chatting went on mute, and stopped typing; 8:47 a.m. prayer recitation of 'the loving god' takes place, the teacher corrects the pronunciation; 8:50 a.m. roll call is done with; at 9:00 a.m. the class hears, 'Define astronaut.', 'who's 'I''?', 'who's the author?', etc. On the second day of observation, students of 1st grade were told the prayer position. The teacher instructed, 'Join your hands, close your eyes, and thank god.' The teacher stayed in that position as she selected a random student to read aloud the prayer that was presented on the screen. The child read the poem

slowly in a mechanical manner, post which she appreciated the child for the recitation of the prayer. On the third day of observation, the teacher offered two options of poems to read out as prayers to the students, 'Loving God' (a short poem) or Tagore's celebrated 'where the mind is without fear'. She asked before presenting the screen whether anybody had learned the poem by heart, and the same child was selected for the prayer recitation recital. The recitation was mechanical in tonality, procedure and spirit. The child was in fact pausing to recall the poem rather unnaturally from time to time. A student was then appointed for the next day's recitation. Throughout the week and in every session each day, the same prayer was recited. Once, a class 5 student's pronunciation was corrected while he recited the prayer. In an informal interaction with one of the school-mentors about the prayer system she replied, 'the kids are young to recite the poem where the mind is without fear...', so we ask them to learn 'loving god' instead.' This whole process exactly multiplied by 7 is what went on throughout the 7 days, each session.

4.1.2 Morning assembly and 'prayer' rituals: rhetoric or communitarianism

The morning prayer is what the school day opens with even in the online mode. The students did not seem to be able to relate with the prayer wholly, not just because of the choice of words or the style but simply because a common prayer cannot be a prescribed format in a diverse classroom, with students coming from various backgrounds, worshipping various gods, and following various practices. Several students forget the prayer every day even though they've heard it for several years now. Is this not evidence enough that the students do not connect with this ritual? Students are evidently not enthused by this high-minded tripe. At another level such practices reflect lack of acknowledgement of the challenges that young students face in engaging with informative texts and pieces of 'literature'. It is ironical that this does not provoke a rethinking of educational discourses regarding the role of a morning assembly or prayers in a school setting. They're often corrected by the teachers regarding the pace of prayer, the delivery of pre-instructions, the diction, etc. Independent thinking moments in the morning assembly are not much evident. Neither the teacher seems to become one with this experience nor the students. The practice or ritual can be seen as trying to meet one of the nation's aspirations which is to produce patriotic students, or a sense of community among all the members of the school. There seems to be a connection between patriotism, communitarianism and prayers. It appears as if in going to school every individual at least born in India, must be a believer at first, and then may choose to become a nonbeliever, though believing is often never a choice. It is often not known that not believing was an option. Isn't this a component of the school curriculum designed on the deference of a captive student 'audience' which is not an audience in a meaningful sense? According to Rabindranath Tagore there should be no compulsion upon students for such renderings including in matters of personal growth and spirituality. In fact when he established his own school he believed that a compulsory morning assembly or any other practice aimed at spiritual realization was neither necessary nor respectful of child nature. He writes,

Experience of this spiritual world, whose reality we miss by our incessant habit of ignoring it from childhood, has to be gained by children by fully living in it and not through the medium of theological instruction. But how this is to be done is a problem difficult of solution in the present age (12).

A pedestalization of God often takes place in schools to manifest habits and values in young minds. This does not leave the child free to explore their own relationship with 'The Divine'. Also, assigning a definite ritual, through a set position, choice of words, etc. seems immensely controlling, authoritarian practice something which amounts to a denial of freedom that is essential to personal growth. It seems like a didactic mode of control that an 'other' possesses over one's relationship with someone/something which should rather be personal. Observational data during this study reflected that students hardly even comprehend the meaning of this coming together during a prayer recital nor realize a sense of becoming one school community during this time. There is so much more in a school community that can build a sense of communitarianism among students and teachers. The compulsory rituals instill fear in the minds of students in an unnatural teaching of moral values, belief-systems and even shame. It is in the nature of what iconoclastic philosopher J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986) has termed as a mere technique that fails to lead to the development of an integrated being. He writes,

Life is pain, joy, beauty, love, ugliness, and when we understand it as a whole, at every level, that understanding creates its techniques. But the contrary is not true: technique can never bring about creative understanding. Present-day education is a complete failure because it has overemphasized technique (13). There is a far deeper issue here about inclusion of all students into the fold of educational practices. A practice such as a compulsory prayer does not leave any space for non-believers. Our constitution mandates all public spheres like schools to be secular spaces and thus school practices should aim for inclusion of both believers as well as non-believers.

4.2.1 Data Vignette 2

Observations indicated that on any typical day in a virtual classroom there was a longing for the chitter-chatter of students; laughter; touch; passing of stationery; group visits to the washroom; recess and the carefreeness associated; tea sessions in a staff room; simple greetings; birthday celebrations; correction of papers with a red pen, that is usually asked for; other countless dynamic 'norms' of a school.

There is monotony in teaching-learning further since the teachers are owners of the meeting with control over everybody's microphone and video, placing the locus of control on the teachers. Already the interaction on virtual platforms had minimized, especially amongst the students, the teacher behaviour further discourages it, resulting in the classroom being teacher-centric, now more than ever. Once one of the school mentors suggested that the student-teacher join the link five minutes prior to the formal lesson time, to observe the 'chit-chats' of students' over a variety of topics, including the teachers. This was a break from the relative inertness of the online lesson focused on information-dispensation versus getting involved in student 'chit-chats' and the stories of their life.

It is assumed, for instance, that when the classroom becomes a storytelling session, it is a distraction from education, something that students love but teachers avoid. Student's often fail to recall the language lessons during examination even when they had studied them a day before, but tend to recall the pets owned by some teachers, festivities, and rituals of some others', someone's losses, some others' life story. It is amusing how the same teacher can narrate stories that they meant for different purposes so very differently, while the ones that are remembered are those that were not intended to be remembered with great details. Which one of these is education? The schema theory argues in favour of activating students' schemas for various topics and themes that are taken up by the teachers in the classroom (14). The process of schema activation cannot be hurried as it requires time, discussion and sustained engagement; whereas classroom teaching was observed more often to be a hurried exercise.

4.2.2 Inert classroom: monotony of online education

These are the aspects of life at school that bring peers, students and teachers together; and becomes the basis for peer learning, interpersonal relationships and self-development. This is what builds a spirit of a school community rather than a mechanically conducted, unnaturally-enforced kind of school assembly. A student-teacher relationship in a physical classroom goes beyond textbooks, there is humor in the classroom, personal anecdotes are shared, sometimes teachers become a student's mentor or counselor as well to not only help students meet their learning goals but also to hear them out. With virtual classes that extremely important element is missing. Beyond those silent voices, could be suppressed emotions, which need a space to get out. A teacher's mental health would be affected too, with no workshops, staff trips, or even frequent communication, and the teaching-learning process thus becomes mechanical. To involve and engage students becomes an outright challenge. Manifested in pedagogy, a behaviorist approach, the classrooms have become entirely teacher-centric, and textbook-centric. Earlier, this manifestation was mostly illusioned because of the physical classes, with students at least getting some opportunities to engage. The teachers now seemed in a difficult spot since they were neither able to reflect and give up on behaviorist practices, nor able to engage students. The only time a student is heard of is when they are eliciting an answer, or at most, asking a doubt from the immediate content that was 'taught'. Sometimes, if a conversation picks up, teachers seem unequipped to manage a virtual classroom, thus their first and last attempt is to mute students and scold them afterward. Teachers have picked up some computer literacy as they use tools like pear deck, Kahoot, add videos/audios to their presentations, etc., and that might have grasped a student's interest. A balance between virtual classroom management and the active involvement of students is a great challenge that teachers visibly face but may/may not have identified. In response to that, either a student's name is called out multiple times; pointed out in the classroom; encouraged at times/made comfortable, or complained to parents. Creativity has also been a savior when engagement issues arise, sometimes teachers try to plan activities, but observations at school indicated that there is still a long way to go.

4.3.1 Data Vignette 3

The student-teacher, apart from the various challenges in a virtual mode, began to struggle with a serious lack of motivation. After a few weeks of internship, there was a privation of enthusiasm to teach. Teaching turned into a chore with a lack of intellectual excitement. This monotony that rules a virtual classroom can be lethal to all the curiosities, interests, and willingness to learn. Technology has in some quarters been viewed as a panacea to bring some gimmickry with learning, but this research pointed to the opposite. Even after spending quite a number of months in engaging with virtual learning and with digitalization, an area claimed to attract young kids, the students and teachers who were the participants of this study did not seem to have adjusted or gotten comfortable with virtual learning. A challenge to this finding over a period of time will be an underestimation of a physical classroom and merits further sustained research.

4.3.2 Theory-practice relations

In the transition to virtual platform all the essential progressive educational theories that constitute the theoretical basis of a liberal pre-service teacher education programme were put through ‘another’ lens. Cognition and its context were sought to be integrated as co-constituents of one another in cultural-historical theory, an important theoretical perspective in teacher education (15). This accords a key role to the social context as an important element of learning, something for which there is no space in the asocial online education system. The possibilities for peer learning, an invaluable aspect of education, are obviated too. So are those for experiential learning, an important concept much emphasised in teacher education (16). There is hardly any room for the development of a teacher-student relationship (17) that is an essential aspect of education for personal growth. The establishment of a circle of love kind of positive learning climate, hands-on experience, and concrete activities are some of the elements of a child-centred education that are hardly possible to incorporate in an online mode (18). A question that this research begs further is whether a new wave of educational theories based on virtual platforms itself will originate or not. While undertaking the research this seemed like the need of this hour. Online platforms have made the concepts, terms and scope of exploring an environment; hands-on activities; peer-peer interaction/ learning, teacher-student relationship, experiential learning, and catering to a student’s cognitive and psychological needs like attention; at the brink of becoming oxymorons. Constructivism in education argues that children learn best by developing mental constructions of their own. Where is the scope to invent such constructs without meaningful teaching-learning experience? To pay attention to the boons of the virtual platform, which some commentaries in academic and journalistic articles have pointed out; will mean to turning indifferent to its fundamental limitations. For example one of its long-drawn effects on students could be screen addiction, another topic that is worthy of research but outside the scope of the present observational study.

4.4.1 Data Vignette 4: Conversation with mentor-teachers’

The school mentor provided very few opportunities to teach during the school internship. In the first week only two lesson plans were prepared. The student-teacher was advised to prepare three more lesson plans, along with worksheets, and the various other minor tasks related to teaching. However whether the student teacher could facilitate lessons using the instructional materials in various primary grades was generally ambiguous. This uncertainty was discouraging. At another level it was mentally exhausting to not be able to teach.

Informal and semi-structured interviews indicated that the teachers in the school were allotted a lot of work, and their lives began to revolve around that. This routine is in a way rather mechanical and uninspiring with very little scope for teacher professional development. There was a palpable dislike for this virtual mode of teaching-learning, especially viewing it from a teacher’s lens, who has various other responsibilities at home, and the school doesn’t acknowledge and leave enough time for a personal space. On the other hand the mentor teacher opened up to the student teacher revealing how her entire day on a regular working day revolves around school meetings, correction of papers, making plans, planning other teaching-learning activities etc. She also has to visit the school at times, and the kind of mental pressure all of these scenarios combined may exert is just too overwhelming to imagine. As a student teacher the experience was of exhaustion in a few weeks. There was an eerie eagerness for the last day which seemed just too far. It is hard to imagine how the teachers are holding up. School work seems to fill up their lives leaving hardly any personal space. At an individual level one may not even be able to function in such a pressure. It was intimidating to observe the online system and its extensive demands so closely. Talking to the school mentor made one feel grateful for not being in her place, and helpless for her as well.

4.4.2 Overworked Teachers

The student-teacher even suggested to her mentor- teacher to take some time out for herself, but she seems too exhausted to even try to give herself some space. She was eagerly looking forward to this Diwali break and her priority isn’t even the festival. She just wants to sleep and watch some cinema series, to rejuvenate for the upcoming patience test. It seemed that the virtual mode has affected people at various workplaces in every aspect particularly the emotional and mental aspects and that there needs to be some drawing of a boundary. The student-teacher suggested to her mentor that if all the teachers feel the same way they may write a letter to the principal, suggesting some code of conduct, and she refused to do that as well. That is a lot of threshold. Despite being an novice and an amateur at this workplace, the student-teacher was convinced that she would have done that. Teachers need therapy, and counseling sessions to survive this, and definitely, a lot of professional willpower to fight back.

4.5.1 Data Vignette 5: Online language education

This was in fact the first day of observation of grade I. The computer screen displayed the phrase or rather the instructional objective 'to enable students to listen to and repeat the poem'. A few more attention-catching phrases written on the screen were: 'learning objectives' and 'success criteria'. The vocabulary consisted of terms that young students would hardly be able to either read or connect with. For instance, appreciate, confidently recognize; these were the verbs for instructional objectives written in behavioural terms that students did not seem to connect with. The teacher's instructional delivery was through a power point presentation. The presentation was text-heavy, dense and very information-loaded with each slide having several colors. Even the student-teacher couldn't focus on the key points that the teacher wanted to highlight. Also, a recapitulation of usage of demonstrative pronouns like is/am/are, has/have, this/that/those/these, and verbs in barely 40 minutes seemed a little too much in inadequate time. The teacher had to rush in the end to explain verbs and the student's participation was minimal. They were not even asking any questions. The teacher did attempt some attractive pedagogy. She brought a lunch box with cookies and toffees to explain 'has/have'. Although rare, she switched to Hindi to explain. She tried to trigger the student's schema by asking general questions on squirrels. She asked the students to enact the action words presented on screen. She also used a music based video on 'is/am/are'. She was also appreciating students for their shares over chatbox and audio. She asked students to sing along the poem on mute the third time, twice she read aloud with gestures and voice modulation. The sentences which were presented for the exercise were random, disconnected and decontextualised. The researcher was easily distracted while observing the class, and so seemed several other students.

In another classroom observation, with one of the mentors, the teacher was revising a literature chapter. The questions asked were: 'what is the meaning of astronaut?', 'spell chameleon.', 'give two characteristics of Henry.' The children who had their video on seemed very distracted. One of the students started dancing and was pointed out for their behavior. Students were asked to practice spellings and word meaning, revise grammar and were being corrected for pronunciation as they spoke. When asked about collective nouns, she responded that the child will have to learn the collective nouns. She also warned them about deducting marks for wrong spellings. In a single class, collective nouns, gender, countable-uncountable nouns, singular-plural, and past tense were revised. A progressive vision of teaching would hope for inclusion of the third gender in the curriculum but the whole topic was rather reduced to, 'host-hostess, deer-deer', etc. The teacher rushed towards the end yet stayed back to answer queries. No student stayed back though. She told them that the paper is set from their textbook, and questions beyond its scope won't be asked. Full explanations were not given, only the right answers were told.

4.5.2 Lack of Meaning-based Comprehension

There was lack of meaning-making as in the online teaching everything seemed decontextualized. In case a child gave out an 'incorrect' answer, instead of explaining why it was incorrect, the teacher provided the right answer. She used the same lesson plan for another class. The pace seemed too fast considering the topics covered in a given time, student's minimal participation, along with pressurizing students to answer 'quickly', while the focus remained on micro-skills like grammar coupled with didactic pedagogy even after introducing an interesting poem. Using the same lesson plan with no spontaneous changes goes to show that learning was assumed to be a homogenous process for all learners. This was aligned with an outcome-based approach that expects every student to be on the same page. This uniformity in the schooling system results in blaming the students for their poor performance, a behaviorist notion that dominates schooling practices.

A distortion of language was observed, it's breaking down as well as reduction to merely disconnected grammar rules, accuracy, perfection, memorization, decontextualized texts and drills, pattern practice, and reinforcements; without a real world context. The pedagogy and curriculum observed in the English language online lesson resonate with the oral approach direct method advocated by classical structuralism which believed in breaking down the language into 'simplest forms' to teach language; by insistence on formal procedures for the analysis of language data, as well as a general tendency to embrace rigorous scientific type of teaching methodology (19). Instead of the above approach there seems to be greater intuitive appeal in another viewpoint which seems apposite in the classroom. Krashen's theory of second language acquisition proposes that acquisition of language in the classroom does not require either the repeated, extensive and technical use of conscious grammatical rules nor laborious drills. It can be acquired simply through a meaningful interaction in the target language through natural communication (in the present case English) in which the speaker is concerned not with the form they speak but with the meanings that they intend to convey (20). The nature of the content is non-interactive, didactic, follows a bottom-up approach, skills model, decoding; encourages behaviorism and structuralism in the classroom along with efferent reading; depriving students of meaning-making, talk, or a effective learning environment.

In a phronesis-orientation, in her own pedagogy with upper primary and middle school grades during the internship programme at this school, the student-teacher tried to promote aesthetic reading in her classes, fusing cognitive and aesthetic elements (21). For instance, the lesson plan on articles started with a poem, which

was essentially enjoyed, but then the focus also shifted to micro-skills like identifying the articles and their usage. Similarly, the plan on a lesson 'The Big Friendly Giant' was approached through hands-on activities and writing tasks eliciting student's creativity and imagination. This made reading aloud of this lesson a relatable activity, although the student-teacher felt the need for approaching reading in other ways too. Along with aesthetic reading, aesthetic listening also occupies its space since the students share their ideas, which are openly received and commented on by other students. The attempt was not to explicitly teach, destroying the aesthetic stance, but sometimes that becomes unavoidable, especially when teaching grammar topics. The follow-up activities are however designed to maintain the lived-through experience of reading. The student-teacher also experienced spontaneity in her teaching while teaching using the school's assigned power point presentation she encouraged students' deviations in answers related to the grammar topics. The kind of questions that came up during the teaching of pronouns, in a stimulated recall, creating a space for discussion included the following: Why was the monster in the movie titled, "It", was referred to as 'it'? Which pronoun to use for microorganisms, like the coronavirus? Why do some people use masculine/feminine pronouns with their pets? Is it wrong? Why do people name their pets? Is it appropriate? Some people even use pronouns with non-living things. Why do they do that? To receive such questions was reassuring. It was an affirmative resonance of meaning making during teaching-learning. The student-teacher avoided a direct answer but tried to follow up questions to students, in an effort to provoke them to think and reach the answer. For the development of self-expression she tried to incorporate various forms of writing in her lesson plans and worksheets that were prepared. Journal/diary writing, letter writing, prompt writing, picture prompt writing were among the activities that could to some extent create an enabling environment for students with frequent opportunities to speak and write, giving them the freedom to express and gaining their trust. In lesson planning the attempt was to construct linkages between the text and a child's experience.

4.6.1 Data Vignette 6

The virtual assemblies appeared a kind of a videoconferencing facade, taking up an elitist approach under the garb of showcasing a student's talent. The purpose of assemblies seems quite unknown as the celebration doesn't even belong to students or teachers, students having the least agency amongst both. It seems aimed at promoting the desirable elements of a culture, transmitting them to highlight certain values that are deemed necessary by the dominant society. The question: Whose culture? is hardly raised in this process. The values are to be blindly adopted by the students, reciprocated, and transmitted. The teachers prepare the entire script, and the students are selected for narration. This time even the celebration was in the online mode. The parents get highly involved too, they are present in almost every student's video, and then the entire celebration becomes about prestige. From a platform to showcase talent, allow expression, and celebrate festivals, to a competition about who's best dressed off and the social anxiety associated with that, the assemblies seem to highlight a lot of underlying issues. In a scripted celebration the teachers also play a role in shortlisting the videos and suggesting possible backgrounds, aesthetics to students and their families. Most of the script for their Diwali celebration was Sanskritized, thus out of reach of the majority of the audience, including parents, and students. The obsession with Sanskrit and its association with a lot of Indian festivals seems authoritarian, however subtle. Students barely understand the meaning of their morning prayers which are repeated every day, for many years, and are here made to recite 'shlokas' in a language that is not even spoken by the majority. Instead, they could have allowed the freedom to use the mother tongue and could have promoted multicultural shares around the festival, rather than use the same generic script that even teachers have probably recited in their childhood. A lot of effort had gone into the making and compilation of the entire video since it seemed so dramatized, with everybody just doing the same thing with different backgrounds and clothes. So much effort had gone into setting that up, that Diwali seemed to have already passed. The songs in the assembly were the 'classics' and seemed irrelevant to children's lived realities of today. From commencing the assembly with an inspiring thought, to (highly insensitive) donation drives, the strive to make the assembly didactic was effortlessly visible. In a heartfelt donation drive video, a family was seen gifting their watchman, 'this Diwali, gift... so they can enjoy their Diwali with joy' as if the watchman's joy depends entirely on that one gift. The scenario begged the question that if it wasn't necessary to record, and compile videos, would these people donate? It seemed like a prolonged advertisement, just like the ones we see on fighting the virus, with Bollywood elites, lip-syncing on songs, selling motivation and kindness to people, and sharing how to battle with the virus.

4.6.2 Culture as a determinant of school curriculum practice

The didactic tone in schooling practices was observed to be quite high. Teachers were observed preaching to students now more than ever, emphasizing respect and certain values, as per dominant social norms. Online education made parents a willing audience in a teaching-learning scenario, and pleasing them, or rather, not offending them, has seeped into a teacher's daily classroom journey. At times, parents interrupt during the classes disrupting the seamlessness of the flow of teaching-learning. This challenge has not been

discussed or been quite explicit but felt and understood by teachers. Sometimes the teachers are seen taking charge and asking parents to not interrupt, but that is rare too. A subtly integral part of a virtual classroom, the role of parents has become more active and explicit than ever. One can observe in an online classroom, a few students when unmuted suggest background disturbances, which may be distracting. While some appear more confident and outspoken even with people in their background. During virtual tests that the school conducts, one can hear parents helping out the students, or even during classes, for instance, while introducing a story, the teacher had asked students to introduce their pets to the class, and a few parents were actively helping out and engaged. They become an integral part and the 'voice' of an assembly. In direct and indirect ways culture was a determinant of the prevailing school curriculum beyond the prescribed textbooks in an online mode as well.

V. Conclusion

The objectives of this research spiraled into a wide-ranging list of questions that seemed like a rolling stone. As the research sought to answer them and understand prevailing school practices the answers changed stances. It was sometimes seemingly an amateur understanding as the research attempt was akin to a wandering around seeking those answers, but maybe it felt like a novice because as a researcher one doesn't have what one seeks or maybe didn't seek before. In the meanwhile the reflections on classroom observations, the research findings and the conclusion seem to generate metanoia. The researchers' outlook towards various instances which as an educator one would (un)comfortably feel irritated towards, has undergone some shift. It does not mean a refrain from critical analysis, but a deeper attempt to (try to) understand the possible origin(s) of the various teaching-learning situations. The evolution of stance within the six data vignettes is noteworthy. The first few reflections tended to blame the teachers along with the school education system. The concepts of discipline, authority and freedom as they were practiced in the school were critiqued, as is mentioned in the analysis of the data vignettes. So were the teaching practices particularly in the arena of language education where a distortion of language pedagogy was noticed. But over time the classroom observations and informal interactions also led to the development of empathy towards teachers coupled with an appreciation of their work which may be at variance with prescriptions of educational theory. The experience of school observation was that the hidden curriculum influenced students' learning. These observations and reflections upon them, in a way later on, weaved in insights from personal life (which are not detailed in this research report) leading to philosophical ideas and motivation within. Every reflection has brought out (un)conventional insights, and a different version of the student-teacher's own personal theory of education. As mentioned before, the attempt to rethink the practice of education was to wipe the lenses off the current pretentious humanizing educational practices. It is hoped (not) that the readers would have had, 'this happened to me too', 'I have heard this happen to someone' moments, and if they connect with these accounts. This becomes particularly pronounced in the phronesis-spirited research context as a student of education tries to bring together her study of education courses in a practical setting of a school. There is however continuous teacher growth in this process, something which was effortlessly experienced during the course of the present research.

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