This chapter contains the analysis and findings of the ethnographic study. The results presented are qualitative in nature and provide a rich description of the participants – who they are and what they do. They explore the why, what and how, including the participants point of view. The attempt has been to present portraits of the participants and capture the context fully since the goal of ethnographic research, according to Geertz (1995), is to produce thick descriptions which allow others to understand the community from within.

The large amount of data gathered for the research was analyzed and interpreted to provide a holistic understanding of the community of early childhood teachers in Mumbai. The chapter is divided into three sections – the first section elaborates the context of the study – the city, the socio-cultural milieu and the observed early childhood scenario, and the understanding gleaned from the demographics of the participants; in the second section, an overview of the participants with a brief profile of each is given to help the reader have an ‘idea’ about each participant. The third part of the chapter presents the major themes that have emerged from the study and each theme is elucidated.
4.1 Understanding the Context

4.1.1 The research setting

All the participants were teachers in early childhood programs in the city of Mumbai which, in all its complexity is difficult to explain in a nutshell. Mumbai (known as Bombay till 1996) is a dynamic metropolitan port city and called the financial capital of India. It is the capital of the state of Maharashtra. Migrants came to Mumbai due to its economic activities and made it a ‘culturally diverse, linguistically varied and over populated city that it is today’ (Juneja, 2001, p. 19).

Moreover, the grossly exorbitant land and housing prices created newer ‘suburbs’ which were further away from the centre leading to massive expansion and building of satellite towns. It has a population of 11.9 million (as per the 2001 population census), with a density of about 16,000 habitants per square kilometers. It is congested with a juxtaposition of slums, residential and commercial skyscrapers. In terms of population groups, Mumbai is one of the most diverse cities of India. Hindus make up almost 70% of the population, followed by Muslims (12%), Sikhs (6%), Christian (5%) and Buddhists (4%). People from all over India have settled down in the city. With a per capita income at current prices of 48,954 Rs, Mumbai is one of the richest cities of India. Indeed, its per capita income level is twice that of Maharashtra and more than three times that of India (Statistics reported in Cappa, 2004).

This glimpse of Mumbai is hardly descriptive of the cacophony of the traffic on the roads or the unbelievable trains which carry millions of passengers in a day. It is indeed difficult to explain the enterprising soul or the resilient spirit of the city immortalized in books, plays and films. But what it hopes to do is to situate the setting in this interestingly diverse, multi-culturally rich and over populated city.

The research settings were early childhood centers in this city. These centers or schools have been referred to as pre primary section/ Nursery/ Kindergarten/ play school/ preschool. Early childhood education continues to be provided by all the three sectors—the government, the voluntary and the private sector. This study focused on the private sector. Due to the non-obligatory role of the State in providing
education for the under six, there is no compulsion to document or monitor ECE, hence, quantitative data is rare.

The unregulated preschool sector mostly caters to the middle class of the population. The explosion of the middle class population is reflected by the prediction to 550 million people by 2025 (Varma, 1999) from about 350 million (Gupta, 2006). The middle class comprises of social and occupational groups – business traders, professional practitioners, corporate workers etc. who have a high spending power and give priority to educating their children.

From my observations and field work, I came across different types of ECE centers. As mentioned earlier, the nomenclature varies from one place to the other. I was able to clearly create a typology based on the criterion of ownership. There are three types of centers – one is private ownership, one is privately-owned but contracted to a franchise and one is owned by Educational Trusts or Society. The individual or dual partnership owned private center is limited in its area to (a part of) an apartment or a garage area. So is the franchisee center. But a defining feature is that there is a clearly defined minimum specifications that the franchise company lays down. The ECE centers attached to large schools owned by Trusts are situated mostly in the premises of the school and the resources are mostly shared.

There were two types of schools that were taken for the study – the small private nursery schools typically founded and run by individuals (henceforth referred to as small schools) and the pre-primary section attached to a larger school also having the primary and the secondary section which are managed by Educational Trusts (henceforth referred to as large schools). Six teachers were teaching in private nursery school and four were teaching in a pre primary section of a secondary school.

Due to the space crunch and high prices of land / housing, many individuals have founded schools in garages or any extra space available. Since it does not require any permissions from the government, getting consent from the building (cooperative Housing Society) is not too difficult a task. One of the participant who founded a preschool rented a commercial property–one ‘shop area’ in a row of shops on the ground floor of a building. She reasoned that starting the preschool near her house
 ensured that ‘I didn’t have to travel out and the equipment like the books and whatever was there (was) at home. As such I didn’t have to make an investment - a great investment monetarily.’ Within the course of my research, she had shifted her preschool from that area into her home. She informed me that the rent had increased so she decided to continue in her house – a flat on the 1st floor of a residential building, where the hall was converted into a classroom during the daytime.

A common refrain I heard from the many owners of preschools was that it took at least 3-4 years for a venture to become financially viable (give back profits). In many of my conversations with owners of private nursery schools, I heard that it was a difficult task to keep the school running. A Principal of a Nursery school where I had gone to ask for consent to do my research (I was unable to select any teacher to suit the inclusion criteria from that particular school) summed up the difficulty of operating a preschool,

“We don’t get as many admissions as compared to the earlier years. I think the big schools sensed the opportunity that parents want admissions to their school so why not take them in earlier (at 3 years)? Now we need to have advertisements of our school to get more children. I don’t see a great future. I might not be able to continue. I know we are doing great work. But nowadays the ones who tom-tom about their school or give a brand name are the ones where parents want to send their children. A good quality school which will take care of their children and their development is rarely what parents want.”

The franchisee schools were the ‘branded schools’, where for a fee, a franchisee can use the name and follow specific norms. The comparatively bigger budgets allow for ‘marketing’ of the schools through hoardings, print and audio visual media, which is what my informant mentioned. This issue has not been dealt in details as the typology of franchisee schools was beyond the scope of this study. A similar scenario was mirrored by another co-founder of a private preschool.

The pre-primary section attached to secondary schools is another type which provides educational opportunities to children below the age of 6 years. My observations (but without any factual data) pointed out that many schools established the pre-primary section years or decades after the establishment of the large school. In recent enterprises, the preschool is clearly incorporated at the time of
starting the school. Another fact I noticed was that the pre–primary section of the school was considered as a separate entity even though it was housed in the same premises, obviously using the same resources. On further investigation, I found out that the ‘separateness’ works well in terms of finances, recruitment, resources, taxes etc., again a fall out from the lack of regulation of this initiative as compared to a primary or secondary school (which comes under the ambit of either the State rules or the Board with which it is affiliated).

Even though both these type of schools have no rules or guidelines to follow, my observations and informal conversations helped me delineate certain differences between these two typologies. I underscore the differences here (which will be later used for understanding the implications of the results).

The nursery schools mostly catered to children in the age range of 2 – 6 years – this implied that children were taken in at an earlier age as compared to the larger schools – the nursery schools had created the ‘playgroup’ to cater to the children below 2 years 6 months but in the pre-primary section of the secondary schools children joined the nursery class after they had turned 2 years 6 months.

The private nursery schools on an average had lesser number of students as compared to the larger set ups. Within the classrooms that were observed, the number of children ranged from 25 to 45. The adult-child ratio in small nursery schools ranged from 2:25 - 1:35 (one main teacher and one assistant teacher)*. In larger schools it ranged from 2:32 - 1:45. In Nursery schools due to the presence of assistant teachers and also due to open/common spaces, there seemed to be more adults per group. Another point to note is that small schools are increasingly finding it difficult to get more children enrolled. This could be reflected in the lower number of children in the small schools. Large schools restrict admission of children based on the number of children per class and the number of divisions they can have in the school. Typically, in the schools that I observed, the strength of students was limited. In most cases the policy for intake of students was 40 – 45 per class. It was interesting

* I took into account the main and the assistant teacher or co-teacher. The other adults though in the vicinity e.g non-teaching staff, trainee teachers, parents have not been included to arrive at the adult child ratio.
to find out that the large school where there were less than 40 children, the school was open to taking new admissions during the year into that particular class.

The difference in the number of students between the smaller and larger schools also arises from the need felt by parents to get their children admitted to a school which will cater to them till they pass out the 10th Standard. Parents feel relieved to get their child admitted into a ‘big school’ as the hassle of getting admission is considered to be stressful (Sengupta, 2005). The smaller schools have been ‘hit’ by this trend and to stay in business had to resort to taking younger children and grooming them to join the large schools. The Principals of the small nursery schools that I interacted with mentioned their reservations about taking 2 year olds but ‘there was no choice…otherwise we have to wind up’. The reservations related to difficulty in handling separation anxiety, the issue of toilet training and the longer time period required by the children to settle in.

A Principal also mentioned that over the years she had noticed that parents’ demand for an alternative child care arrangement has changed to a need to provide educational competencies. Earlier the working parents needed child care; now there was an inclination for developing cognitive abilities of children of stay-at-home mothers also. This may be strongly related to the increased awareness of parents about the importance of early schooling to navigate the school process better, to develop necessary social skills as well as a demand by many schools for some kind of preschool experiences as a pre requisite for getting admission to the schools.

In the smaller schools the groups were divided according to ages but there were instances of multi age grouping for particular activities i.e. where there was mixing of the groups. Demarcation of age/class groups was ambiguous (not clear cut) as compared to large secondary schools. In the larger schools, clustering of children based on age was more formal i.e. children born in a particular time period were eligible to be in a particular class.

Larger schools had more than one division of the same class (the range was from 3 to 9 divisions). Another feature noticed in the private Nursery schools was that maximum children were in the younger age groups and the Kindergarten classes had evidently much less number of children whereas in the larger schools there was
consistency in the number of children per class at all the levels of the pre primary classes. Table 2 shows the differences amongst the small and large preschools on different indicators.

Table 2: Observed differences between small and large ECE centers of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator Type of school</th>
<th>Number of children in Nursery class</th>
<th>Adult child ratio</th>
<th>Clustering of children based on age</th>
<th>Divisions of same class</th>
<th>No. of children in different age groups/classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small ECE centers</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>Ranged from 2:25 - 1:35</td>
<td>Ambiguous (not clear cut)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>More in younger age groups (below 3 ½ years); remarkably less children in higher age group (3 ½ - 5 ½ years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large ECE centers</td>
<td>34-45</td>
<td>Ranged from 2:32 - 1:45</td>
<td>Strict demarcation (based on date of birth)</td>
<td>Ranging from 3-9 divisions</td>
<td>Consistent number of children across 3 age groups or class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of physical infrastructure, it was difficult to demarcate the differences between the two types of schools. Strictly looking at the classrooms there did not seem to be any observable differences in the area of the classrooms. Small schools may have the luxury of more space being utilized by the children as compared to the children in large schools. Without doubt the large schools outsized the small schools but my observations led me to believe that having more area did not translate into the child having more area to play in. In large schools there was a cap on which areas could be utilized for the younger children. Much of the large courtyards (I noticed in two schools) were used for parking of the school buses. Interestingly, in the small schools, out of 6, 4 of them had outdoor area which was utilized by children to play at least once or twice during the day. Another difference that was noticeable was that the small schools were located on the ground floor and the play area was directly and easily accessible to the children. This was not the case with the large schools. Except for one large school, in the other schools the children had to climb down to go to the play area.

Resource utilization has always been considered as a vital issue in early childhood classrooms. When children can easily go to play outside it can be assumed that teachers would also encourage it. I noticed a tendency of the teachers to take the children to play outdoors in the schools where the outdoor play area was directly
accessible to children. This was not the case with schools who did not have the area or ease of access e.g. if children had to go down one or two flight of steps to go to play, the teacher would need more time and help from other adults to let them do so. In the case of these schools, I can safely say that availability and accessibility of outdoor space (irrespective of the type of school) has pedagogical implication. So, having easy access to outdoor play area ensures that children in that center will get more opportunity to play outdoors as compared to a center where difficulty to reach the play area may limit time to play outdoors.

To sum up, the participants of the research were from two types of schools-small private preschools or pre-primary schools attached to larger set ups. The bustling city of Mumbai, the diverse socio-cultural background of the middle classes, the economic feasibility of educational enterprises, the unregulated early childhood scenario and the observed differences in the two types of preschools- this formed the backdrop of the research.

4.1.2 The demographics

The characteristics of the segment of early childhood teachers who participated in the study have been dealt with in details in this section. The aim was to bring out specific issues related to the demographics like gender, teacher training and other variables. I present these characteristics as a backdrop of the study and to help get a overview of early childhood practitioners selected for the study.

a. Age and gender

All the participants were female. In all the schools that I observed, I did not come across any male teacher teaching preschoolers. Moreover, all the participants were married and except for 1, were mothers (one was also a grandmother). The participants ranged in age from 25–64 years. The age ranges of the women were as follows: 2 in the 20-29 group; 3 in the 30-39 group; 3 in the 40-49 group and 2 in the 50+ group.

Many studies referred to teaching as a gendered profession (Whatley, 1998; Griffin, 1997; Stone, 1994; Pagano, 1994; Biklen, 1995). Teaching had been marginalized for being a women’s work and as it was considered to be a helping profession. In a study by a group of experienced early childhood
educators that represented diverse international backgrounds (Jalongo et al., 2004) suggested that ‘the field of preschool education worldwide was challenged by gender bias which assumes that only women are suited to caring for preschoolers’ (p. 146).

Married women seem to be drawn to the teaching profession. This has been noted by Phillips & Hatch (1999) as vulnerability that prospective teachers echo the society’s view of teaching being ‘women’s work’ and that they bring in some special strength. On the one hand, the participants clearly linked joining the teaching profession with helping them to be better mothers or preparing them for motherhood and on the other side as a more convenient, part time, ‘easily-accepted-by family job’. It was also a job where teachers could ‘come’ and ‘go’ (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1983) which meant that it was a profession which allowed for discontinuity in the job. Amongst the participants, a high number took up the job of teaching after their marriage and some took ‘breaks’ for raising children. The high acceptance of teaching as a suitable job for married women was also mirrored in higher ratio of women in primary schools (154:100) in the state of Maharashtra (Selected Educational Statistics, 2003-04). Figures were not available for preschool teachers. Due to the timings and the nature of the job, women, more than men, seemed to be attracted to the profession of teaching young children.

b. Teacher education

Out of the 10 participants, 7 had a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (E.C.C.Ed.), a training course aimed to create professionals who impart care and education to children below the age of 8 years. 1 of the 7 had done a Montissorie-based ECCEd course. 3 participants had not undergone any formal training, one had completed a 6 month pre-service training, one had done a 1 year once a week in-service training; the remaining 5 had completed 1 year formal pre-service teacher training course (out of which 3 had gone to private institutions and 2 to university affiliated course). 2 of the 3 participants who had finished a formal teacher training (non-university-affiliated) course from private institutes had done so on a part time basis.
The diversity in training is exemplified by the representation in the sample. 6 of the 10 participants had opted for a pre-service teacher training in ECCEd. None of the trained participants had made an informed choice of the training course that they undertook. For them, information from a known person sowed the seed for doing the training. 4 out of the 6 who joined a pre-service course either were already doing some other job (one was a secretary, one was in the banking industry) or had completed other courses (e.g. interior decoration, travel and tourism, marketing and management). They joined the training so that they could get a job as a teacher. Except for one of the participants, the others at the time of doing their course, were not aware of any other institute offering the same course. The participant who was aware had done her course in the recent past (3 years ago). It is a conjecture that lately awareness about the field of early childhood teaching has increased due to the visibility through advertising of commercial private preschools which was unheard of earlier.

Another fact of interest was that though the pre-service model of teacher training is offered prior to joining the profession while the formal in-service model of training is a course offered to candidates who are already teaching; among the respondents one joined the pre-service after having taught children while the one who opted for the in-service took up the course while not exactly teaching (she was ‘helping out’ in a school). Eligibility criteria may not have been strict when the participants had done their training. It would seem safe to say that since there is no regulatory body many of the admission practices of training colleges have remained arbitrary and vague, least of all due to the non articulation of clear guidelines and rules for admission.

The duration of training ranged from 6 months to a year. In a year, there was the option of part time or full time. It must be noted that these options are not within the same institution. Each institution has a specific model that is offered to the trainee teacher. For the participants of my study, it seemed that if what was available suited them in terms of time and convenience, that ‘match’ was enough reason to join the training college. Empowering
prospective teacher trainees to make informed choices about where to do their training may need a concentrated effort from all stakeholders (training colleges, universities, professional bodies, parents, researchers etc.)

Out of the 6 participants who had completed their pre-service training, 4 had taken courses from private institutions and 2 had a university affiliated Diploma. University affiliated courses are monitored and there is some degree of conformity to laid down norms (by NCTE), due to which the quality is better as compared to private institutions. The lack of any monitoring has led to non-uniformity in implementation of private training courses. A plethora of institutes offer a student either a part time or a full time course (again, part time can be interpreted by the management of the institution in different ways – for some it is once a week, for some it is 3 hours per day). 2 of the participants had done their training as a part time course and 2 as full time. Out of the part time courses, the duration was of 6 months.

Currently there are 2 college/university departments offering diplomas which are according to the NCTE norms. This was not the case a decade or so back. Many private colleges had university affiliations but de-affiliated from the university after the NCTE norms stipulated a 2 year course instead of a 1 year course. So in effect, university affiliated courses have decreased considerably raising concerns of quality in teacher education.

Table 3 illustrates the varied courses which attributed the participants with a professional training.
Table 3: Formal teacher education of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Pre-service</th>
<th>In-service</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>University-affiliated</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anuradha</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamta</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reema</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sejal</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kavita</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunali</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sana</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhumika</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayura</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c. Qualifications

The participants were either undergraduates (having passed the higher secondary or Standard 12th) (n=4) or graduates (having passed their graduation with either Arts or Commerce) (n=6). Studies (Bowman et al., 2001) have clearly shown a link between higher education and more appropriate practices (mostly studies have taken the DAP as a benchmark for appropriateness).

d. Work experience

Their experience in teaching young children ranged from 3 – 27 years (5 teachers had experience below 10 years and 5 had above 10 years).

e. Religion

Out of the ten participants, 6 participants were Hindu; 2 were Christians; 1 was a Bohri Muslim (married to a Hindu) and 1 followed Sikhism. There was no overt attempt to find teachers from different communities or religions. Religion has been considered to attribute to the development of beliefs but was beyond the scope of this study. Table 4 gives the demographic details of the participants of the study.
Table 4: Demographic details of the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name of participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Educational qualifications</th>
<th>Training exposure</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anuradha (Hindu)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Graduation (Arts)</td>
<td>No formal training</td>
<td>27 years</td>
<td>Private Nursery School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mamta (Hindu)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Std 12th</td>
<td>Diploma in Montessori-based ECCEd. pre-service part time training (duration 1 year</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Private Nursery School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>from private institute)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reema (Hindu)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Std 12th</td>
<td>Diploma in ECCEd. - Pre-service training (duration 6 months from private institute)</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Private Nursery School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sejal (Hindu)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Graduation (Commerce)</td>
<td>University-affiliated Diploma in Nursery Teachers Training.- Pre-service training</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Private Nursery School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma in Travel &amp;</td>
<td>(duration 1 year-University affiliated course)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kavita (Christian)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Graduation (Arts)</td>
<td>University-affiliated Diploma in ECCEd.- Pre-service training (duration 1 year</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Large Private Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>from University affiliated course)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kunali (Hindu)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Graduation (Commerce)</td>
<td>Diploma in ECCEd. - Pre-service training (duration 1 year from private institute)</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Large Private Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sana (Bohri Muslim)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Graduation (Arts)</td>
<td>Diploma in ECCEd. – Pre service part time training (duration 6 months)</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Large Private Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pearl (Christian)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Graduation (Arts)</td>
<td>Diploma in ECCEd. - In-service part time training (duration 1 year)</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Large Private Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bhumika (Hindu)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Std 12th</td>
<td>No formal training</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Private Nursery School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mayura (Sikh)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Std 12th</td>
<td>No formal training</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Private Nursery School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To sum up, the demographic details evidently give a glimpse of the world of the participants. The diversity of teacher training of the participants has implications on teacher education. The observed differences between the small and the large preschools reflect the current models of education available to our children and reflect the socio-cultural milieu. These have been dealt with in the latter part of the chapter in details. In the next section, I profile the participants who volunteered to be a part of the research and whose ‘stories’ I attempt to deliver.
4.2 Profiles of the Participants

There were 10 participants who were observed and interviewed for the study. All the participants were early childhood teachers based in the city of Mumbai. What was common among them was that they were all women and married; that they were teaching children for a number of years in different settings. The participants of this study were Anuradha, Mamta, Reema, Sejal, Kavita, Kunali, Sanaa, Pearl, Bhumika and Mayura. These names are fictitious in order to protect the privacy of the teachers.

The brief profiles which follow help the reader get an idea about them—glimpse their perspectives, what they feel, what they say they believe in, how they teach, the connections between their personal and professional lives—in short, a ‘snapshot’ of the whole person. The aim is to visualize the ‘actors’ and get acquainted with them. I have chosen an autobiographical flavor in order to give their perspective and have taken the liberty of using their words. Care has been taken to retain the essence of what they mean, even though it may seem that part of what they said has been taken out of context.

**Anuradha: The joy of working with children**

Anuradha has been teaching young children for over 27 years. Brought up in a town in North India, after her graduation and subsequent marriage, she came to Bombay (now Mumbai). When her 2 daughters were young, wanting to work, she initially joined the preschool started by her sister to handle the administrative work but was soon teaching. The preschool is a private nursery which caters to children from 2–5 years of age in a ‘posh’ residential area in the Western suburbs of Mumbai.

Having no formal training, she learnt on the job and from workshops and mentors of a professional non-governmental organization. She considers teaching not just a career but ‘after a point I thought it is my life. The children are our life. This school is our life.’ For her, the greatest asset of being in the profession is that she too can evolve with the children and get back ‘double fold of what you give to them’.
Anuradha is a warm and vibrant 64 year old. She has the demeanor of a grandmother who you can always fall back on. Completely involved with the children in the preschool, singing, moving around and supervising the other teachers, she has the ability to multi task. She is alert to what is happening in the classroom, she is also concerned with what the non-teaching staff needs to do and she closely mentors ‘new’ teachers, personifying the name she is known by – ‘Big Teacher’.

For her, the total development of the child is important. When teaching, she ensures that the child can see what is being done in the classroom. She believes that attracting children’s attention is the most difficult part of teaching; she uses music, movement, storytelling and singing to engage their attention. She believes that ‘handling the child comes very naturally to me, because as I told you, we know the pulse of the children’.

She is concerned about how society has changed, ‘…it is the quality of life. Children have no time to go down and play…Especially in a place like Bombay we have nothing for children...just nothing!’ She strongly believes that parental involvement over the years has deteriorated. She wants children to become sensitive human beings and good citizens of the country.

Anuradha is actively involved in teaching underprivileged children under the aegis of a foundation that she started decades back. Working with them ‘has changed me tremendously’. She is proud of the way her daughters are bringing up her grandchildren. Influenced deeply by Rabindranath Tagore’s ideas and Swami Vivekananda’s philosophy, she feels the next generation of teachers must be inspired, ‘Our job is not very glamorous. But there is so much joy in it. So much of satisfaction is there. So much of reward…’.
Mamta: Harnessing potential of each child

Mamta has worked as an early childhood teacher for the past 10 years. She is married, with a daughter in high school. Before founding a preschool, she worked in her daughter’s school where she learnt the ‘realities of teaching’. After her 12th Std, she did courses in Interior Design as well as a Diploma in Management and Marketing. After getting married, since she was not allowed to work, she joined the Montessori-based ECCEd course. The course required a one year part time commitment and according to her ‘thinking that it will help me in some way or the other when I become a mother’, she joined the training. As she got involved, she realized that ‘the more I am into it day by day, it opens up so many different windows.’

She has been running the preschool with 3-4 assistant teachers but finds the management of the preschool a tedious task. She enjoys being with the children firmly believing that ‘each child is a born genius and it is the environment that harnesses the potential within him’. She worries about the children who are ‘quiet and do not come out with it…I don’t know what is going on in their minds.’ She views teaching not just as ‘me teaching them (children) but also as a constant learning process for myself’.

Mamta clearly thinks that children should not be exposed to the adult world (especially exposure to TV programs), and that there should be more rules in society for children. She is proud that she is able to help children ‘look at things in a different way’ which will have a positive and lasting effect on them.

She emphasizes routines in schools and giving enough mental inputs for them to learn. She believes the best way for them to learn is by showing pictures/books, taking them out for field trips, constantly interacting with them while letting children make their own mistakes.

She feels ‘parents do very little’ for their children nowadays. Ideally she would like them to be more involved, taking them out for walks, to the parks and helping with schoolwork. She wants children to become responsible and put in effort to be the best
in their field, ‘and of course a little pushing is required at certain times just to get the child into focus.’

At the age of 49, she is open to learning anything new, whether related to education or for her personal growth, attending workshops, talks, seminars and conferences. She is closely associated with an NGO which aims to ‘enable a joyful childhood for all children’.

Reema: Valuing discipline

After about 4 years of marriage, Reema joined a 6 month part time teacher training course (ECCEd.) thinking that if ‘I feel I am happy I will continue it…but it went much better to my expectation’. The turning point was a job she was offered while doing the course. Initial misgivings of her in-laws convinced her ‘to change my whole life style, from a typical house wife to a working person’. She called it the ‘most important decision in my life’ and that she hasn’t looked back since then. She had completed her 12th Std. prior to her marriage and dabbled in taking tuitions where ‘the money was not worth the tension’. She is 33 years old and completely occupied with her family (in-laws, husband and her son) duties and her job.

She didn’t feel that her training was useful to her ‘but definitely the right kind of training would help a teacher… and exposure to kids before joining would really help the teachers to be able to teach’. It is more than five years since she has been working. Currently, she works in a school which is just 2 buildings away from her residence - a privately managed ‘feeder school’ for the secondary school just across the road in front of the building. According to her ‘no other profession can give you so much of love, appreciation and respect, (that) you forget all your worries’. A vivacious personality, she seems sure about what she is doing whether in the classroom or when talking with parents or other adults.

She believes that young children need ‘not just book knowledge but also practical knowledge’ and repetition is necessary for them to learn (especially to pick up new words). She feels strongly about ‘the amount of time that you can give, the amount of talking that you do’ with children is important for them.
Reema identifies balancing discipline with teaching as being the most difficult part of teaching. She expects discipline from children ‘...because I feel if they are disciplined right now, then that will help them to be better persons in the future... you ... have to listen... to obey... the frame work (it) will help support your life’.

She is concerned about society becoming ‘very self centered’ these days, echoing the apprehension that children are being exposed to the adult world too soon. She thinks that parents ‘underestimate their child’s capability and that sometimes hampers’ their learning and development; so, parents must spend time conversing with the child which ‘really helps them to grow’ as ‘they are smarter than what we are.’ She is proud when parents acknowledge the importance of teachers and compliment her on doing a great job.

Her goals for children include leadership qualities through as much exposure to learning as is possible. Ideally she would want the children to grow up to love their country and to become caring, responsible and confident individuals.

She gives emphasis to ‘openness ... (to) accept your fault. (Otherwise)...if you feel that I am the best, then I think nothing can help you.’ She values whatever she can learn from the other teachers in the school. She is confident that ‘a teacher does make a lot of difference’ in the life of the child.

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**Sejal: Personifying motherhood**

Sejal has 15 years of work experience teaching in an early childhood program. She is 52 years old and feels that the teaching profession has helped her tremendously as a mother (of 2 daughters), apart from other benefits. It is obvious that her college-going daughters are the pivots in her life.

After her graduation, she did a Diploma in Travel and Tourism and later the Diploma in ECCEd., which was a university affiliated course. She chose to practice as a teacher as ‘this is one job that one can always do...at any stage in life...even after one is married’. The family supported her and she began teaching in the same school where she did her internship (’I feel as long as I am here I am going to stay young’). She has
continued to teach in the same private nursery school, which is well reputed in the ‘city’ area for the past 15 years.

What attracts her to teaching is the ‘unconditional love that you get from the children’ and their innocence. She is touched deeply when children show their trust ‘they put their little fingers in your hand …now finally the breakthrough has happened and they trust you. … enough to leave the person they are familiar with’. She believes that the important role of teachers is ‘also an extension of the motherly figure…’ and to provide guidance.

Sejal looks calm and is precise in her articulation. She is concerned about the expectations that large school systems have from these tiny children. She strongly believes that many of the small schools aim to get their children admitted into the larger schools and ‘gear up to work only towards that (aim)’. She feels that the preschool where she works makes children more confident.

Sejal is relaxed when she is teaching. Flexibility for her means ‘if the child or class is enjoying a particular thing just let it be and change your plans according to the needs of the child’. Innovative ideas and sharing of ideas with teachers in her school, especially the new ones, makes her feel good. She appreciates the practice of allowing new parents to sit in the school with their child as she feels that ‘a new parent is a very eager parent… she is very keen to know’.

Sejal clearly empathizes with children coming from broken families explaining that the younger generation has become intolerant. She emphasizes ‘Indian society is about tolerance, is about acceptance and learning to adjust to a certain extent where you can. Not to forget these are your Indian roots. …don’t get so Westernized that you forget that. I still live in a joint family and my children have learnt so much in a joint family’.

Sejal likes to read, watch old movies and listen to Indian classical music. Sejal socializes with the other teachers of the school – ‘A lot happens together as teachers…music, reading and films.’ According to her, she would like to be involved in curriculum planning at a later stage but surely she intends to ‘be doing something with children … as long as I am able to’. 
Kavita: Nurturing self esteem

What strikes you when you meet Kavita is her respectful attitude towards everyone - be it the child in front of her or the watchman. She values respect ‘not only for the high authority but for oneself and the brethren’. At 45 years, her daily schedule is hectic. Taking care of her aged, arthritic parents, her extended family of 15 members (including 5 children), cooking for the family, managing the household, going to church (‘I try to take 10 minutes ... I am very close to God. The day I don’t go I feel like something is missing in my life’) and at least an hour of reading or net-surfing before she calls it a day. And a full time job as an early childhood teacher working in school that continues into higher grade levels.

She has been teaching for the past 14 years. After she completed her graduation in Sociology, she joined a job as a secretary to a Chartered Accountant. One year into the job and she realized that it was not helping her to grow. She quit the job, continued to do voluntary work in the night school associated to her church. She went on to do a special education course (in a university) but was a ‘nervous wreck’ teaching in a special school. She did not complete the course but on a Faculty’s suggestion, joined the ECCEd. Course affiliated to the same University.

After the training, she started a nursery school with a cousin (‘having your own thing is a different scenario’), worked in another school where she didn’t enjoy working (‘You are told to do and you do ... you do not grow ...I worked for a year and said I cannot live like this’). She believes that ‘if you cannot live by something you believe in, move on because somewhere it will suck out from you and you won’t be able to give it your best. So you need to be in such kind of an organization where you believe in things.’ She found such an organization in this particular where she is working for more than a decade.

Energetic yet relaxed and comfortable, she comes across as being caring and shows it through her actions. She doesn’t raise her voice and consciously tries ‘not to hurt their (children’s) self esteem’ explaining that ‘if I don’t live by that then I am failing very badly as a teacher and as an individual’. In the classroom, she is constantly trying to relate to each child, responding, listening, hugging, talking and just being fully present. She clearly practices hearing not just what a child is saying but ‘hear from the heart also’.
Her greatest moments in life are ‘when our kids come running to you’ and people remembering you ‘itself is a great reward’. She exemplifies the satisfaction that when children actually remember you well into the years, ‘that is something that no amount of money or anything’ can give you.

She values the training and feels that the theories get ‘built over the years’. It also helps as ‘you know why you are not doing a particular activity with that class’. She does not expect children to always conform to adult standards. Since each child is different, ‘we need to change our self some times’. She believes that ‘children are not something that you have to catch hold of … If you want to teach them you have to live with them, you have to understand them’. Teaching them and handling them are synonymous for her. She clarifies ‘I could be teaching them by not even teaching them anything’.

She feels that parents are losing out on emotionally connecting to children because they are paying more attention to the wants and desires of the children. Ideally, she would like more time to communicate with parents of the children to align them with the goals of the preschool. Her concern includes first-generation English learners and the difficulties of communicating with them. What bothers her is the lack of time for children to play and over exposure to the TV (‘you are not respecting your eyes which are a gift of God’).

She sees herself learning new things, innovating, ‘thinking out-of-the-box’ and using opportunities to gain knowledge effectively in the future.

**Kunali: Responsibility of teaching**

Kunali is a 28 year old teacher teaching in the Nursery class of an International School. She joined the school fresh out of her training college and has been working for the past 3 years. After her graduation in Commerce, she did Business Management as ‘I thought I can help my father …in our business work … I can do all the banking and it will always help in (the) family’s business’. A few years after her daughter was born, her husband ‘realized my strengths’ and encouraged her to join a teacher training course.
She joined a private training institute where she completed a full time course. The training helped her to know the appropriate level of teaching children but she values ‘the training I have got from the school...I have learnt from other teachers & colleagues...(about) time management ... dealing with the parents...practical ways which I have learnt from the school’.

She is sincere and firm in the classroom, expecting children to listen to the instructions. She looks firm with her spectacles till she breaks into a big smile. Discipline in children is high on her priority (‘At the end of the year I was so satisfied that my children are going as a disciplined child to the next level. I have done (a) satisfactory job ... I feel very good.’) She feels discipline helps children ‘focus, they are able to concentrate’, hence ‘I am using my most energy in disciplining’.

Kunali considers that as a teacher ‘I feel I am solely responsible person in the class...that I should give them this concept in a very clear way... that they should understand’. She feels ‘re-enforcement & repetition is important’ for a child to grasp a concept.

Kunali values the positive feeling of children smiling when they go home which makes her feel satisfied and good. Her reward is when they hug me and ‘my children those who are going from my hand they are remembering me as a good teacher’. She believes that she has a personal bonding and therefore each child relates to her. Difficulties in teaching for her include being patient with children and ‘to keep your mind stable’. She wants children to become ‘responsible, independent…and disciplined.’

The role of the parents is ‘they have to tell him (child) you are going to school you have to listen to your teacher.’ Parents and teachers should work together as families ‘trust me and I should be able to give them that much satisfaction’ to ‘shape them (children) in a proper way for the next grade’. She is concerned that parents are not being able to give quality time to their children due to the changing trends in society.

She is busy with her job and bringing up her young daughter. She would ‘like to grow... (and) experience & explore’ and in the future take up a coordination or management role.
The gentle and sensitive face of Sanaa belies her age (44 years). She admits that she was ‘an average student…in awe of the teachers in school’. After completing her graduation and a ‘rather long courtship’, she married into a different community. She had to take care of her ailing mother in law and after her children were relatively older, her husband encouraged her to do a teacher training course as she feels ‘when you are with children, you can be yourself’.

She joined a one year part time ECCEd. course where she learnt ‘the theory of being a teacher but not practically considering the realities’. She was offered a job near her home in a large private secondary school as a pre primary teacher. She has been teaching in that school for more than 4 years.

In the classroom, Sanaa comes across as serene. She believes that children should not be hurried up all the time for every activity. She lets children do their work at their own pace (‘you have to give each one their time’). She believes in praising children and that they should be ‘comfortable in the class and with the teacher’, and she goes out of the way to speak in the language that the child knows – Marathi, Hindi or English. She feels strongly that the first generation English learners don’t get exposure to listening to the language e.g. ‘nobody says good morning in the morning (at home)… but we expect that they should speak good English’.

She gets flustered when children are screaming and ‘it is out of my control’ since she cannot scream back. She is comfortable handling the nursery class though she believes that ‘working with older children is different as compared to the younger ones’. She explains that now ‘I have learnt to relax…follow a routine & then slowly start teaching them things’. It is difficult for her to articulate what she values in her teaching as ‘I have never given it a thought…I feel all the teachers are good enough like me’.

She feels best as a teacher when children are happy. Sanaa wants the children to ‘be good humans…(and) to be happy.’ She believes ‘children are so innocent really’ and her reward is when she realizes that children love her.
She is worried that parents are pushing their children too hard nowadays and ‘the TV media (is) having so much of an effect on children’. Her concern is how to inculcate basic moral values in them. She finds it difficult to handle parents of slow learners, who ‘are not ready to accept or agree’ that their child needs special help.

Her work experience makes her feel that teachers may have to face a ‘lot of politics from the people above you – those running the institution…which definitely affects the teacher’. However, if one adjusts to the expectations, it is easier for them to work with the children. Even though the Management may feel that teachers are not doing enough, it is just a matter of time, ‘they (children) will pick up.’

She has been advising her daughter who is doing her MBA to ‘decide a career is such a way that you are able to concentrate on your family life also’ and ‘the best profession I told her is to become a teacher where you can balance both family and career’. She cannot imagine what will happen to her in the future but right now Sanaa is ‘happy being the way I am’.

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**Pearl: Reflecting values**

The open and friendly face of Pearl greets children lovingly as they walk into the class. As a teacher of one of the 22 classes in the pre-primary section of an International school, she handles the class created recently for the new admissions since ‘the Management feels I can handle them well – it is a special responsibility’.

At age 38, Pearl has been teaching for the past 7 years but always felt that she was oriented to teaching (‘I always liked teaching right from the beginning’). Her father wanted her to complete her graduation before taking up a job. She continued with tuitions, and joined a software institute. When her son was a little older, she decided to do the in-service ECCEd course on a part-time basis. She had to go once a week and somehow with support from her parents and husband managed to complete the course. She believes that there was no change after her training (‘training did not prepare me for the realities of teaching’) but she thoroughly enjoyed the singing and piano lessons ‘that brings joy… which is why I try to do at least that much for my kids’. 
She joined a school as a proxy teacher where ‘they did not even give me the chance to do what I wanted to’. She applied in this particular school where ‘certainly the experience that I gathered (from this school) was far more effective than the training’. She clarifies that the ‘teacher has to adjust to a particular system’ and she is lucky to be in a school where ‘this is the same thing what actually I wanted to do. So, you know, I blended quite well here’.

Pearl believes that ‘all children should be made to feel important’ and she praises liberally. Her voice is pleasant and her diction clear. In the class she likes children to be organized as ‘you will do things on time … it is an important life skill’. She gives clear instructions to the children and patiently expects that they will follow the instructions. During her lessons, she asks questions to the children – a few respond (‘it is important to recap…repetition helps then to learn’).

She believes that each child is different and you have to tap the potential of each child (‘if one can sing well, or speak well…tap that strength…there is something in each child’). If the teacher can give them ‘opportunities matching to their potential’, then children will gain the confidence. She wants children to become confident, optimistic and organized adults – ‘a reflection of the values that I carry’ (inculcated by her parents and her Dutch grandfather)

She likes being appreciated for her work, especially from the Management (‘you feel good’). She attributes the other teachers in her current workplace for all the learning and feels that there needs to be ‘openness and coordination among teachers’. This kind of team work (’coordination meetings, sharing ideas and activities, appreciating and being appreciated’) is helpful for teachers to evolve.

She believes that a teacher can use strategies to handle difficult children: ‘Make them sit next to you. Take a chair & make them sit close to the board.’ If she is certain that the child understands whatever she is teaching, she just lets them be.

She is concerned about ‘some working parents……not paying attention to their children…not giving enough time to their children.’ She is conscious about TV viewing of her son too and cautions ‘even TV is something that you must keep a tab on’. She has made a cassette (with a friend) for parents to know ‘what we are doing in the class…you have to
make parents feel special…they play a very important role because what we do in school is what they have to do a little at home.’

She is disturbed by the hardships that people go through. She shares the agony of the children whose parents were in the bomb blast (in Mumbai suburban train, 2007).

Ideally, she would like to incorporate life skills into the curriculum and make the bags of the children lighter (‘it affects their spine’). And in the future either continue in the same job or maybe start her preschool (‘I gathered all the skills. I have learnt everything. I know I am confident. Probably I could do that’).

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**Bhumika: Spreading the circle of love**

A delightful person, Bhumika is 39 years old. Working for the past 12 years in the same private nursery school in a satellite town of Mumbai, she cheerfully declared, ‘but I am not a trained teacher! What can I tell you?’ She has done her graduation in Arts and joined the ‘nearest school so I could remain sane’ after both her sons were in the primary school. She completed her higher secondary schooling ‘ages ago’.

In the school, she handles the ‘middle set’ (2 ½ to 3 ½ year olds). Looking comfortable in a cotton sari, with big glasses, she looks every bit the proverbial teacher. She seems to attract children who surround her whenever she enters the school each one wanting and getting attention from her.

Her mantra is ‘envelop them (children) in a world of love’. She clearly believes that ‘there is nothing called too much love …children can never be spoilt with too much love’. She can be seen picking up children, moving around, hugging, patting and smiling easily.

She considers this profession as the ‘best in terms of satisfaction index and worst in terms of monetary index’. She believes that the next generation may not be willing to join the ranks as the opportunities are multifold and sometimes it is difficult to explain to ‘youngsters how this career permeates happiness’. She strongly feels that ‘just like the new International schools, all schools should start to give lucrative offers’, then the image of the profession will completely change.
In the classroom, Bhumika, is constantly on the move. There seems to be a sense of supervising children. She feels that ‘at this age they should just play’. She feels it is important that children feel ‘safe and secure because only then will they be able to learn’.

She is an avid reader. She has realized that formal training is not necessary as long as you use your common sense and ‘read, read, read…about everything related to teaching and children’. She makes it a point to ‘interact with the trained teachers (of the school)’ but ‘they are a confused lot’. She admits that after more than a decade of teaching experience, ‘I’m comfortable with what I do with the children’.

There is a constant din in her classroom. She believes that it is important that children talk, ‘that is what we want them to do…if they talk with the other children that is thirty times more than just talking to me’. She would like all the children in her class to express themselves and ‘it doesn’t matter which language they use…it could be their mother tongue’.

The most difficult part of her teaching is to balance the ‘needs of an individual child with the needs of the group’. The struggle also reflects in her responses to individual children and the whole class.

She feels parents are more worried about the academic achievement of their wards rather than the socio-emotional development. Parents expectations from not just their children but also from schools has gone up tremendously, ‘which will have adverse effects in the long term’.

Since both her sons are in college, she has enough time to ‘do justice to my work’. She sees herself continuing in this job till she’s ‘too old to contribute’. This work is her passion and she wants to ‘spread the circle of love’.

Mayura: Learning on the job

I met Mayura in a private Nursery school in a small ‘village’ in the midst of a bustling suburb of Mumbai. She looks prim and proper, with a soft voice and moves her hands to make a point. She earlier lived in a small town in North India and
moved to Mumbai when she got married. She is 25 years old and has been teaching preschoolers for the past three years.

She completed her 12th Board exams (‘I got good marks’) and joined the local college as an undergraduate. She was unable to sit for her final third year exams as her marriage got fixed. When she came to the big city, she thought she would continue but the prospect of enrolling in a three year graduate program was daunting so ‘I just decided to look for a job’.

The preschool also doubles up as a creche, with many children ‘staying back till the evening even though the school activities happen in the morning’. She comes in for the morning shift, as ‘I have to manage the household work also’. She teaches the ‘nursery group’ but since it is a small school, ‘I sometimes land up taking other children too...it depends on what the activity is’.

Mayura quietly supervises the children when they are involved in outdoor play. The school has a beautiful, spacious courtyard, which is used to its fullest potential. Conflicts between children are ‘common and I don’t interfere too much...sometimes I just remove a child away...and children forget easily so the conflict dies out’.

She believes that children should be told a lot of stories with morals as ‘this is the age to learn values’. In the Indian way of life, ‘we learnt from our grandparents...I feel we are not using them to help the next generation’. She feels children learn ‘because they listen...you may think they are not but actually they do.’

She has no formal training and doesn’t feel the urge to join one. In the initial phase of her interaction with me, she told me that her future is uncertain as her husband might be transferred and ‘also, if I start something (course) here I may not be able to finish it’. She looks forward to being a mother and the experience of teaching is ‘surely going to help me – I have become attentive to the needs of children’.

She has become comfortable with her teaching lately. She has learnt a lot from the other teachers of the school, ‘you pick up so many things – how they handle the children, how they talk to them, how they get their attention, how the activities are planned, how they create an ambience so children learn’. She points out that she may not ‘know the theory but I do know I’m doing my best – and that’s important’.
Her concern about families and children stems from her distaste with ‘what is passed as entertainment in the media – TV, newspapers, magazines, radio, advertisement, films’. She is disturbed to see parents taking young children to see ‘those violent, cheap, disrespectful films’. She feels that there has to be a sense of ‘sacrifice when your child is young because what you do today is going to have a lasting effect on him’ and that ‘children understand everything… but at their own level’. ‘Children are smarter than we think’ and as adults it is our responsibility to ‘protect him …nurture him in a happy, harm-free environment.’

She has made a few friends with whom she spends the evening talking, going for walks or doing other household work. She looks forward to coming to the school as ‘the sparkle in the eyes of a child is enough to make your day’. She is unsure whether she will continue to be in this profession but ‘except for the money, the work makes you feel that (what) you are doing …. is worthwhile’.

The profiles give clues about the personal meanings that the participants have constructed in the act of living a life of a teacher. These complex realities of the teachers clearly create a fabric which is at once ambiguous and ethereal. It is difficult to ascertain at a glance where their personal and professional lives get enmeshed. I clearly realized the limitation of trying to present a ‘living’ person in such conciseness.

To conclude, the profiles of the ten participants presented their uniqueness. And yet, in an obscure way, it seemed almost as if there are common strands in what they said and did. It was my attempt to unravel these common threads. The final step in the journey to understand early childhood teachers was to try to answer the questions ‘so what meaning can we make out of what these teachers said and did? What does it tell us about early childhood practitioners?’

Four major themes emerged in the cross case analysis, which are explained in the next section.
4.3 Emerging themes

As I met one participant after another, interacted with them, observed them in their classrooms, interviewed them, I was struck by the apparent uniqueness of each. Each one had a different personality, a distinctive way of dealing with me, of handling the class, of managing other people – their temperaments were different, some were candid, some were guarded, some were spontaneous; and so on.

As the analysis and the interpretation of the data evolved, it became clear that similarities did exist. I noticed that each was so different from the other yet there was a strong link like the proverbial thread that tied them unknowingly together. This revelation of the unusual in the ordinary, the overarching commonality in the diversity, the connection in their uniqueness is presented here through the themes.

Analysis of the data focused on the identification of regular patterns of action and talk that characterize a group of people (Spradley, 1979, 1980; Wolcott, 1999). I must add here that I considered it appropriate to mention incongruities or exceptions within a pattern as I believed all voices were valid.

The patterns were at times obvious and at times tacit. I was able to (I must admit, after a considerable period of immersion, reflection and discussion), meaningfully and logically present it. There may be alternate ways of presenting the same analysis. It is important for me to mention here that though it seems that the emphasis is on bringing the ‘voices’ of the teachers to the reader, it opens the subculture of teaching in preschools, how teachers think, what they do because of or in spite of what they think, how they negotiate their life, and what can we learn when we get to know about early childhood teachers. To develop a picture of this subculture, we need to build the ‘pieces’ (Wellbourne-Wood, 1999). Invariably, the picture of early childhood centers in the city of Mumbai also emerged. I attempted to uncover and present a gist of the meaning that I could make from knowing about ‘real’ teachers and their teaching practice. Perhaps it will widen our understanding of early childhood education. This attempt is fundamentally grounded in Ayers (1989) premise that “teaching cannot exist outside of a person, and people cannot exist outside situations” (p.140).
I would like to clarify another aspect before moving to the explanation of the themes. Why have these particular themes emerged from the analysis?

I viewed the teacher as the central protagonist of the research. Based on the objectives of the study, I wanted to illuminate her beliefs, values and attitudes regarding children, towards the teaching profession, regarding learning and teaching, her professional development and her role in the context of education. As I tried to make sense of the amalgamation of data, I inadvertently searched for meanings from their voices. Four themes were revealed: the first one was the integration of the person and the work they do which reflected their belief systems about the teaching profession and about children; the second theme related the teachers to their place of work revealing their beliefs about their work places; the third theme addressed their belief systems about teaching and learning with some clear links between their beliefs and practices; and the fourth theme dealt with the process of reflection and again it exposed the connections between the teachers belief systems and practices. For each theme, after the description, the summary of the findings have been presented followed by detailed discussion of the theme. At the end, conclusions and overall implications have been addressed.

The four themes presented:

4.3.1 Theme 1: “Teaching is being”

4.3.2 Theme 2: Schools as learning-training grounds

4.3.3 Theme 3: “Lessons for life”

4.3.4 Theme 4: Reflecting on reflection
My participants – ten married working women (nine were mothers) - entered the field of education with a proclaimed and vast enthusiasm for teaching, as if it was the most ‘natural’ thing for them to do. Teaching was integrated into their life in more ways than one. All of the participants moved effortlessly between stories of their own children and stories from their workplace in their interviews. They each expressed the belief that teaching was particularly well-suited to who they were, the kind of person they were and ‘how teaching was not separate – it is me!’ (Kavita)

It was almost as if teaching was an extension of who they were and understanding their teaching was a way to understand them. I have already alluded to the complexity of wanting to understand a person. But how does one unravel a person who believed that ‘I am balancing my home and job (which I think is not a typical job) but actually it completes me’ (Bhumika).

As a researcher, how could I present this completeness without over simplification? As I looked for ways to present the complexity and the completeness, I came up with a conundrum. How could completeness be addressed, without sounding ‘mysterious’ (which was considered an anathema in research)? Does an attempt to simplify take away from explaining a composite? I don’t pretend to know the answers. The theme of ‘teaching is being’ is a sincere attempt to present the complexity of being a person who also happened to be a teacher; a complete individual for whom teaching was an indelible part of their identity. As a participant told me, ‘teaching is being!’ When I asked her to explain, she said,

‘I mean, that’s who I am! Teaching is being…my love for children, my dream, my refuge, my centre of life….that doesn’t mean family is less important. I can’t think of life without teaching…without going to school every morning…worrying about a child in my class…meeting my colleagues. It’s so important to me…I have learnt so much…it’s like I can’t see myself not as a teacher’ (Bhumika).
This idea was mirrored by other participants. Anuradha called it her life,

‘I never look at it as my career. After a point I thought it is my life. The children are our life. This school is our life. And we have to grow along with the children, I mean what I am saying “grow” means evolving yourself. That is what I am trying to say.’

Mamta put across the idea in a simple way

‘I don’t see teaching just as me teaching them (children). I see it also as a learning process for myself.’

She called teaching her ‘daily tonic’ and said that she can’t think of missing her daily tonic. I spotted this authentic zeal and enthusiasm in all the participants during the observations.

Sanaa, when explaining why she was relaxed in the classroom, told me that it was to do with her ‘...personality. I am like that. So I am just being myself with the children’. She went on to add that since she was a sensitive person

‘I feel...I get...touched easily... affected.... Somebody tells me something which I have not been responsible or something, I am very sensitive. So I see that I do not do the same thing to others...to the children... Because since I am like that I would not like to hurt somebody else.’

What she tacitly meant was that she behaved the way she would like others to behave with her. This enmeshing of personal and professional identities was a theme which ran through all the stories. In order to explain the theme in greater details, I have chosen to portray four dimensions, each lending credibility that teaching was a way of life for my participants. These dimensions were integrally related to each other and could be represented as four interconnecting cogs of the central hub (see Figure 1).

4.3.1.1 Choosing to teach ‘naturally’

4.3.1.2 Life experiences and teaching

4.3.1.3 Integration of mother and teacher persona

4.3.1.4 Connections between personal and professional interests
4.3.1.1 Choosing to teach ‘naturally’

The seamlessness of the person and teacher came out clearly in the conversations with my participants. Each of them had negotiated with life to be led into the profession of teaching. Some were lucid about wanting to become teachers but for most of them, it happened in their search to do meaningful work along with the daily demands of their life. They even referred to teaching as a ‘natural’ way of being in the world. I speculated that in the minds of my participants, there did not seem to be a criticality of the action (the act of becoming a teacher) as I was unable to categorize responses as ‘before and after’ with the act of joining being at the centre. Perhaps it was another reason to justify teaching could not be separated from life.

From the interviews with the participants, it was clear that they joined the profession due to a love for children, encouragement of the family and perceiving personal growth and meaning in the profession. The teachers attributed their affection for children as being the core reason for becoming a teacher. Some of them also saw that since they enjoyed interacting with children, it would be a natural progression to join a teaching job. The drive to
join a job or training towards a job came from family members implying that
the profession was viewed as noble and respectful.

All the teachers mentioned about the ‘high’ they get from being with
children. As Sanaa articulated the thought:

‘...when you are with children you can be yourself. You do not have to think.’

It was considered a bonus to be in a job where there was no room for
pretension. The teachers seemed to enjoy interacting with the children. In the
classroom the teachers were involved completely with the children. There
was always a sense of comfort and reassurance in the way my participants
related to children.

Though Kunali was not sure she would become a teacher, she mentions
living in a joint family where there were many children. She was comfortable
interacting with them. Kavita had ‘millions of cousins’ and nieces and was
teaching in a night school when she recognized that this was what she saw
herself doing. It was interesting as she was actually working as a secretary to
a chartered accountant where she worked for a year and thought, ‘I cannot
live like this.’ She came to teaching through a detour but felt that in her heart
of hearts she was meant to teach.

Sejal explained the influence that her affection for children had on her
becoming an early childhood teacher:

‘I was always very fond of children, so I thought to myself this is one job that one
can always do...teaching.’

She was sure that she would do well if she became a teacher,

‘I knew that it was just the children. You know I love the unconditional love that
you can get from children of that age... they have not been exposed to the society
and the other thing... this child is so innocent’.

The idea was echoed by Kunali about what attracted her to teaching,

‘I like to interact with children & if I am given an opportunity to describe
something to children... I love it...any type of interaction.’
In a way, the natural progression from being fond of children into the space of teaching was an idea oft-repeated by the teachers. For some of the teachers, they seemed to instinctively sense that teaching was what they wanted to do. For others, it could be a more convoluted journey but the ‘fit’ was easy to recognize. As Anuradha pointed out that once into teaching she realized that ‘I have to build my whole personality, my whole imagination, my everything with this, with the children’.

The expected ingredient of loving children was strongly correlated in the minds of my participants as a requisite to step into the world of teaching. In hindsight, it revealed to them that it was ‘but natural’ that they had become teachers.

Another impetus for becoming a teacher was the realization that teaching would lead to personal growth. Mamta pointed out how she would love telling stories to children (in an orphanage) and realized that:

‘I was bettering myself all the time. So I would see it as a growth for myself as well as at the same time having an audience where children are really learning something in a different way.’

The idea of evolving in the job was suitably demonstrated in responses of participants when I asked them what attracted them to teaching. There was a high probability of the satisfaction emerging from the children’s responses, which meant that the immediacy of ‘the a-ha! moment when children understand’ was considered as ‘it is like you have achieved something great. No one can replicate that feeling. For me, my sense of evolving on the job revolves around these moments’ (Bhumika). All the teachers suggested that working with children was as satisfying as they had thought it to be. Reema extrapolated that she joined the job thinking she would continue only if she found it interesting, and she had not looked back since the time she joined. For her, it had been ‘more than satisfactory...I have learnt so much’.

There seemed to be the urge to satisfy oneself, to feel that one is capable of doing something meaningful. The cliché of the noble profession was reflected by the participants. Though the teachers were aware about their ease of connecting with children and got the necessary support from their families,
the decision to teach came from the faith that they would be able to grow and evolve in this job. Without fail, all the teachers noted that they have evolved tremendously as teachers over the years. The tipping point seems to be ‘doing meaningful work’. As Bhumika succinctly stated:

‘…I did want to work…but not the usual jobs…I wanted to do something meaningful which would help me go back home every day and feel useful…something which will have an impact on others. Teaching children fitted the bill completely.’

For the teachers who changed career tracks, the meaningfulness seems to be a moot point for joining the profession. Whether from working as a secretary or helping in the family business or interior designing, the change was initiated due to the perception that teachers were respected by people in the society.

In trying to understand the high likelihood of individuals to gravitate towards teaching, I found the added complexity of cultural factors. It would be simple to say that persons who loved children and who wanted to do meaningful work were the ones who became teachers. But of course that sounds strange!

What the data revealed was significant though apparent. All the participants were constantly struggling with the social demands of being a part of a family. They had certain roles and responsibilities; chief among them roles of a wife, a mother and as one of them said ‘Home Manager!’ (Mayura). They acknowledged the fact that these roles were important and the need to negotiate the family demands was a part of who they were.

All the women told me how important it was to balance home and work responsibilities. Without exception, the teachers declared that the convenience of the job was an attraction for many. Trying to do something meaningful, having a career and yet being able to balance work with family life created the grounds for taking up the profession. The timings of work (considered as part time), with the added bonus of vacations (which match their own children’s vacation) were perceived to be suitable. Reema recounted:
‘...that is the period ... where I was really frustrated being just a house wife... being so educated and then ... I thought that ... I could be out part time and then take care of my family and my son.’

Sejal reflected the common perception of teaching as a job one can take up at any stage in one’s life,

‘I was always very fond of children, so I thought to myself this is one job that one can always do…teaching…which one can always do at any stage in life...even after one is married...because it is a part time job.’

In Sejal’s case, she had the choice of either joining the airline industry (as an airhostess) or join as an early childhood teacher (she had completed training in both). Deciding on the latter, she reasoned out,

‘I think in our Indian society they like children. It is a job that nobody objects to. Not that there was any objection for anything else. But I thought that adjusting to a new home if I had a part-time job it would be good that I could spend some time at home also. And one thing I was very firm was that when my children were small I did not want to work.’

The profession of teaching was considered to be one of the careers which could be resurrected after a break, mostly for women, who could come back to a career after children were ‘old enough’. Moreover, it had added value because getting a job as a teacher was easy in any geographical location. Since the women were expected to move to the location where the spouse is working and living, she could continue with her career irrespective of the location she relocates to.

Though it was an acceptable option, Anuradha shared her difficulty of managing two small children as well as the home. But, she recounted,

‘... then I put my foot down. Instead of six o’clock, I used to get up at five. And I managed it.’

The participants had faced enough challenges in their day to day life. I heard narratives of rigorous working hours in the daily life of teachers, which could be an inspiration to many. Yet, the motivation to work seemed far more powerful than the challenges that teachers faced in their day to day life. In my
association with the teachers, I felt that most of them were willing to find ways
to balance family pressures so that they could continue to be in this profession.

Negotiating the demands of their other roles was possible due to the support
from their families. My participants repeated often that one of the factors which
gave them the necessary push was the encouragement of the family members.
What could be discerned was that the participants believed that encouragement
from families meant a lot to them. Clearly, the finding had socio-cultural
connotations but I present it here as a dimension to understand teachers.

For the teachers, it was important to get some sort of endorsement from their
family members. A job against the wishes of the family was not acceptable.
The comfort level of being accepted as a working woman by the family was
as important to them as was the need for personal growth. Sejal was
appreciative of the understanding shown by her daughters, ‘My children when
they were small in fact at this stage also they understand that how important my
work is to me. … how seriously I take my job.’ She narrated an incident about a
day when she could not take leave (as she had already taken 2 days leave
prior to that day) but was expected to attend her daughter’s college function.
Her daughter informed her after reaching the college that she need not come
as other mothers had not arrived. Later, Sejal got to know that her daughter
told her that so ‘that I could go to work without feeling guilty. This sort of support
is there all the time’.

Reema felt that her son was very cooperative and helped her with whatever
she was supposed to do at home. She treasured the cooperation (like when he
helped her prepare for the next day). Similarly, other participants mentioned
about how important it was to them to have a supportive family. I heard an
unmistakable pride in Anuradha’s voice when she came to know that her
daughter had told a magazine that her mother had inspired her to work.

One of the participants made a statement of evidence,

‘For me I want both…do what I want to do …and do it with a high degree of
acceptance from my family…only then can I give myself entirely to both – my
family and my work. If I don’t have passion for the work or help from my
family…either way I lose. I want both for myself…’
Families encouraged them to take up teaching. All the teachers acknowledged the invaluable role that their families – either a sister or parent or husband – played in their becoming a teacher. For many of them, doing a job was secondary to taking care of the family. Persuasion from a family member seemed to be an important trigger towards the decision to teach.

Reema posited that it was encouragement from her husband that spurred her to take up teaching. She noted,

‘I think it was my husband who wanted that I should keep myself busy…to satisfy myself that I am capable of doing something.’

Sanaa also had encouragement from her husband, which combined with a natural desire to be around children. She remembered,

‘He (husband) was the one who said now since you are free I think you should get back & you should have something which you can do.’

The importance of familial support was underscored by the participants. A supportive family was looked at as the cornerstone for making a career in teaching. This encouragement led to their joining a training course or joining a job directly.

Bhumika summed up the various factors which helped to take the joint decision of teaching:

‘What attracted me was one when being a mother it is important for a mother to give time to a child… so this is the only profession where you can give time to your child as well as gain something for yourself… satisfy your family and again I think when you are doing this job it is like you get a lot of respect.’

So how does all of the above support the idea that individuals who take up teaching do so due to varied factors? These factors were meaningful in the lives of teachers and it reflected a specific enmeshing of who they were – a person with aspirations and a person with responsibilities. They felt the need to fulfill both and teaching seemed to be a suitable way to do so. The teachers did not perceive teaching as a ‘job’ but as a way to be. It mirrored what Ayers (1989) wrote: Teaching is not simply what one does, it is who one is (p. 130). As Sanaa said, ‘you can just be yourself when you are teaching young children.’
The nuance of teaching young children, and not just teaching, may be worth deliberating on (during discussion).

4.3.1.2 Life experiences and teaching

Another dimension was the interplay of life experiences and teaching practices. I found overlapping spaces. In other words, teachers were able to connect their life experiences with their teaching practice and there were times when what they had learnt had impacted their personal life.

Sejal unraveled some implicit messages from relatives:

‘I remember some aunt used to tell me that you are so good with children, you should do something with them. I do not know... it stayed in my mind or what...but I definitely knew that I loved children and I had an affinity with them. So if I could find something which I liked doing and if my profession could be like a hobby then nothing like it. So I feel little seeds were sown at that time…’

In her case, the idea that she interacted well with children was reinforced by others to the extent that she started to believe that she could go for teaching young children. The ‘affinity’ that she felt reflected clearly in her classroom. It was apparent that she enjoyed being with children.

Mamta talked about her love of books and teaching children to value books. She narrated that when she was young, once in the day they were given time to read books. I saw a large number of books all around in her classroom as well as in her house. I observed her when she was sharing photographs of fishes with the children. In the morning, before the children came, she had kept aside about 6 picture books. In the class, she opened the books one by one and while showing the pictures talked about the fishes. The big, colorful pictures attracted the attention of the children. She later told me that books were the best teaching aid. I also saw a number of books in the cupboard which she allowed the children to handle. She presented her reason,

‘I have been using books right from the time I was … may be 2 or 3 so why can’t other children handle? …If they are not handling it how will they learn to handle books? So I see to it that I give the opportunity for each child to be handling … whether it is books…whether it is the games…puzzles…each child gets time to handle whatever they want to see.’
Results and Discussion

Children learn through different ‘learning styles’ was what another teacher learnt from her sisters. She talked about the connection,

*I have seen that my sister would rather learn through listening… she listens …there is another sister of mine who even if she is listening… her hands are constantly moving. And, if I tell her to hold her hands and sit, I am sure she will get up from there and just go away. So when I started teaching all that came back to my mind.*

She made sure that in her practice she included different ways to learn. She explained that for the theme of ‘fishes’ she gave children picture books, she took them to the nearby aquarium, there were activities to simulate how fishes moved in the water and so on. Thus, her teaching practice evolved from her experiences. It was difficult to separate whether the connection was just a starting point to build a belief and later, through exposure (training) confirm the belief. Attribution of causality may not be such a simple one to one process but what is of importance is the ‘connect’ that the teachers made.

Similarly, Pearl shared that she wanted children in her class to become organized. She connected this need of doing things on time to the effect of her Dutch grandfather. She said that she still carried those values that he imbibed in her during her early years. In her classroom, she insisted that children sit facing a particular side for specific activities. During snack time they had to face the table but during the time she was ‘teaching, they should be turned towards me’. Although a time-consuming process, she followed it in the classroom daily. She related this to her sense of being organized.

Teachers seemed to be influenced by families. Some teachers were able to articulate the influence and in some cases, I saw the reflection of the influence in their practice.

Many cited the early experiences in their schools for having an implicit effect on their teaching. Many of the participants mentioned particular teachers from their school / college whom they admired either for certain specific qualities like ‘making me feel important’ (Pearl); ‘being open and natural with us’ (Bhumika); ‘… soft spoken and yet get me interested in doing things in a
better way’ (Meera) or for more general influences like ‘... she left a mark on my life’ (Anuradha).

Kavita reasoned that as her teachers were excellent,

‘...I always feel I was given so much...I need to give back in some way. They say that also forms the core of whatever you are.’

For Kavita, her teachers influenced her to be tolerant as ‘they were so patient with me’. She believed that she tried to be like her teachers in her practice. She reflected the deep love that she got from her teachers which was amply replicated in her class. Kavita’s class was full of children basking in her love and care. I recount my observations:

The class (with 30 children) has a variety of material that Kavita has given them – there are puzzles (including a mega puzzle), hoops, blocks, toys, big Lego pieces and other materials. The children are choosing what they want to play with and Kavita is sitting on the floor with the group of children who are throwing the hoops to land on the tower which one of them has made from the blocks. One boy asks Kavita to throw a hoop and she immediately is all concentration but is unable to land the hoop around the tower. The next boy is able to throw it in place and he comes to her with a triumphant smile. She hugs him and tells him to try again. In the meanwhile, another boy is pulling her sleeve because he wants her to help him solve the puzzle. She tells him she is coming. Little Pakhi comes and sits on her lap while sucking her thumb. Kavita picks her up, and goes to the boy who called her. Children come from all sides to show her something or to just come and stand close to her or to just connect. One can make out how the children dote on her.

I shared this picture to convey what Kavita called ‘giving back’ the love she got from her teachers.

An anecdote related by Mamta on how a teacher inspired awe,

‘We had one sir who used to com...in that typical Guruji style ... though he looked like a typical sadhu the way he used to speak in fluent English ...I think I was floored by that... and that is when the seed for learning Indian scriptures was sown...he could give example in every minute and .... he could elaborate on it ...we would listen to him with our mouths open ...’
The Indian scriptures had been read by her and she made it a point to include Sanskrit prayers in her daily practice. She was proud that the children were able to recite the hymns so well.

The motivation to teach is likely to come from teachers who have had positive influences on students but it is quite interesting to note that negative experiences with teachers have also galvanized many of the participants to ‘not’ be that kind of teacher. Two of the participants became emotional while recounting these experiences. One of them related the incident,

‘……there is just one incident which I remember…which I cannot forget. The Principal of the school while she was giving the report cards told me…you are an abnormal child. You can’t do anything. That hit me. I felt really bad. That is one incident that I cannot forget.’ (crying)

The impact was so deep that even after three decades, recalling the incident made her cry. Another detailed her experience,

‘… she happened to be my class teacher… once she stood up and said, “I am calling out the names of the children, who are not going to go through this year”. Then she said, “Tell me now, who all feel that they are going to remain back in the ninth class?” So I didn’t put my hand up. There were two of them who did. Then she tells me, ‘Do you think that you are going to pass?’ I said yes, because I still have two terms to go and I will work hard and I am sure that I am going to pass. She said, ‘Oh! Lot of confidence…!’ That really hit me because I always felt that I was a good student.”

At the end of the year, she was able to pass but the incident continues to irk. The negativity of the teacher put her ‘off’ and so she wanted to become different than her. In both the cases, what they experienced in the hands of their own teachers created the will to teach and to consciously avoid such experiences for their students.

Both of them used praise liberally in the classroom. I also felt that the teachers were sensitive to how they interacted with the children. They were polite and respectful in their classrooms.
Both positive and negative experiences with teachers in the school scenario [none of the participants had any college teacher as a role model probably as the college scenario is ‘impersonal’ (Anuradha)] were cited as impactful in how teachers teach in the classroom.

Another participant shared that she considered herself different when she was young and therefore, she had a soft corner for the one’s in her class who epitomize the ‘different’. She was aware and alert in the classroom about the issue:

‘I am from a family where everyone is light eyed... My sisters, my brothers they are fair. I am the only one dark skinned like my mom. So I generally tend to take kids who don’t look so good. So I am very careful to make sure that I take all my children. You must have seen if one child comes to me I make sure that I go & at least tap the remaining children... I tend to do that.’

It was interesting to note that the teacher herself understood the bias and did her best to make appropriate changes in her practice.

Although one noticed some practices which were consciously cultivated, but majority of the teachers believed that their early experiences had made them into the kind of teachers they were. The above might give the impression that teachers were well aware that they were influenced by their past experiences, but the process of connecting was not necessarily easy. The connections sometimes revealed themselves while they were musing and sometimes had to be probed. I got the distinct feeling that teachers had not given much thought about why and how they had become teachers, it was more like ‘it was meant to be’.

4.3.1.3 Integrating persona of mother and teacher

Another dimension that became clear was the indelible connect between the teacher and mother persona with complicated linkages. These seemed to be the two main roles which had profound interchangeable effects on their lives with no clear line between the teacher and the person.

Becoming a teacher, as explained earlier, seemed in some way not just connected to the family but also approved by the family. Many teachers had
contemplated on the feasibility of the job in terms of ‘giving time’ to their children. What was of interest was that the women mentioned about having these thoughts even before they were married or had children of their own. In Sejal’s case, the decision to join teaching came from her belief that it would be a convenient job, when she got married and had children. Mamta suggested that she felt the line of teaching would be useful to her when she became a mother.

Reema believed that it was ‘important for a mother to give time to a child’ and therefore, when her son was a little older, only then ‘I decided to go for the teaching job’. The analysis showed that the participants had strong beliefs about their role as a mother, sometimes, even prior to becoming a mother. Responses also revealed that all the participants valued their family, and their child was (or children were) treasured by them. In India, the role of the mother was as venerated as the role of a teacher. I found an integration of the persona of the mother and the teacher reflected in all the participants. One of the participants, though not a mother yet (at the time of data collection), was of the opinion that teaching was going to help her tremendously when she became a mother. There was always this belief that teaching would help in the role of rearing one’s child.

All of them proclaimed that there were many influences between these two roles that they played – as a mother and as a teacher. Bhumika put it in a succinct way, ‘Family and work...work and family...your roles become interchangeable all the time’.

Sejal clarified her take on how teaching had helped her to be a different mother:

‘When I had started off it was a great learning experience because I was not married and I did not have children but I feel that a lot of what I have learnt in this particular place has helped me so much with my children because I did not, I think I would have been a different mother if I hadn’t been here. So many things which naturally come to you have come because of my experience’.

Another teacher repeated the thought in her own words,
‘Things that I have learnt here have really helped me change as a person, as a mother I think. I think I would have been different…’.

Some of the teachers attributed the difference to their training though in the same breadth they called themselves good mothers even prior to the training,

‘My job …my training has changed me a lot as a person. My personal life also & my professional life as well though I was good in dealing with my child…certain things which I was not knowing… training has helped me a lot’.

On probing she spoke about becoming aware of learning problems and becoming more patient with her daughter.

In my conversations with the teachers, not only did they speak favourably of teaching and its impact on mothering; but they frequently mentioned their own child in the narratives. Some reasons for doing specific practices were explained by the ubiquitous ‘that is what I would have done with my child’ or ‘I would have expected the same from my child’s teacher’.

I felt that the integration of the two roles in their lives had become a way to validate the roles. When Pearl talked about teaching values to the children she taught, she exemplified with what she wanted her son to learn. She had made it mandatory for her son to call up his friends after their birthday parties, to thank them and ‘make them feel special’. What was worth observing was the fact that she considered this as a value which could be transmitted from one generation to the next. She brought in this belief into her classroom. So her belief was matching across both her roles.

‘He will do it for me…later on he will do it to his daddy & my mother i.e. his grandparents….it will go on. I think even his children will do it. It will go on. Later on in life you can see that reflection….my son is my reflection. I can see it in him…. When he talks to his friends I can see that little bit of me in him. May be this child (in my class) will influence his parents the same way…and what value I teach to them will be passed on’.

Sejal had two college-going daughters and in many of her responses, much of what she was in the classroom would find favor as a mother. The twin values of freedom and trust were a constant refrain in her conversations. In the
classroom, giving choice to children as well as establishing trust was paramount for her. In the interview, she said,

‘... my parents have given me so much freedom... in fact for my girls... at present also when they are in their twenties or when they were in their teens I gave them freedom very early. Only thing was that you have to come and tell me that you are back. So then I knew that they were safe. More than anything else it was the safety point of view. And there was no time limit, because I knew that even if they came at 2 or 3 they would not be doing anything wrong. I still have full trust in them. I think in the initial years what a mother can give to a child nothing else can compensate for that.’

It seemed that the trust she placed in her daughters was reflected in the children she taught but that seemed simplistic. Did the training make her trust children or did the mother’s role beget trust? But what it does confirm is how she thinks in a similar way to handle her own children and her class.

Reema had a young son who taught her that children understand much more than what we credit them. She narrated two incidents - one related to a child in her class and one related to her son where the commonality was what she said was the tendency ‘to underestimate the capacities of children’. She was surprised when a parent told her that the 3 year old in her class had seen the dish antenna and told her that this was what helps them to watch TV. Reema remembered that in passing she had mentioned about the antenna (she was showing a picture which also had the drawing of the dish antenna). She was amazed that the child could recall and connect the information. She gave the analogy of her son handling a death in the family in a calm manner, wondering why she and her husband had both underestimated his capacity to take it at his age, ‘So they are much more capable of handling things than we are. That is one thing I have seen of late...they really have the capacity to understand things... much more than we think.’

Mamta understood the importance of her role as a teacher when she realized that if she told her daughter anything ‘... it will be of value to her, but if that same thing the teacher says then it is of greater value.’ The teacher having more impact on the child in comparison to the mother was learnt through her
daughter. Hence, she realized that what she told children will be valued by them.

Another teacher, who was also a grandmother, presented her discomfort about children feeling sleepy when they came to school,

‘Certain rules should be followed like sleeping on time...in my own childhood and how I have brought up my children, it is important to have discipline then you are organized...you do things on time...now my daughters tell me that it was good that I was strict, it has helped them tremendously in life’.

Her conviction arose from the fact that her own children had validated her upbringing and that experience made her believe in the notion of having rules in the house. She expected that ‘parents should adjust to the child, not that the child be expected to adjust to parent life style’. She considered this piece of advice was valuable for parents of her school.

She also demonstrated the effect of teaching on her personal life through this anecdote about giving advice to her daughters about their children:

‘Now both the daughters... now they have their own children...for everything they consult me, and I always say that don’t give in to peer pressure, don’t give into peer pressure. So they have not done it and automatically my younger daughter’s daughter who is 5 years old she is quite surprised to see that child has learnt to read, write because I told her don’t push her, don’t push her. She has not done that and she is so thrilled to see that, mummy because you told me, I never pushed her and automatically she has picked up...so being in this line (of teaching), this line helps me even in my personal life.’

The boundaries between the personal and the professional merged for these individuals in the above examples. Let me illustrate another facet worthy of review. Teachers expressed about how the changing context was having a deep effect on the children. Whether it was through their words or actions, there seemed to be a certain kind of unease about a number of issues. The core idea was about children’s development and the role of parents and society. What became obvious was the fact that these views and beliefs were spoken as a mother rather than as a professional.
Some examples:

‘I worry that children don’t go down to play in the evenings. I always made sure that my children did so’.

‘Parents are pressurizing their children. As a parent, I don’t remember expecting perfection from my child’.

‘Why are children being taken to the mall? Why are they watching adult entertainment like serials on T.V.? Why don’t the parents understand that it will lead to children becoming more violent? Even though my son is so big I take a walk into the room and see what he is watching. These are some very small things but it goes a very long way like how you train your children at home.’

‘Children’s world is a beautiful world! We should let them enjoy their childhood. All the children have a right and as parents, we have to do our best to give them what they deserve’.

There was a felt need for time and space to play as well as the need for places like museums, zoos, parks etc. for children to be taken to by parents. All of them agreed that the school had limitations and it was the parents who had to take the responsibility. It was of interest that I saw complete identification as a parent on this issue.

4.3.1.4 Connections between personal and professional interests

Another connect that revealed itself was how teachers’ personal and leisure pursuits were attached to their teaching lives. Connections between personal and professional interests were obvious. As one participant had pointed out (mentioned earlier), if the profession could be a hobby, what more could one want? That seemed to be true for all my participants. In some way or the other their personal interests had an element of ‘teaching’.

Anuradha was a prime example. She had interests which were an extension of her professional interests. She started informal educational evening classes for underprivileged children ‘and we have applied our knowledge of preprimary education to them. And it really worked. It really worked.’ She had been deeply involved with a voluntary organization which works with children from all strata of society. She admitted that being a teacher helped her considerably as
she had used the innovative teaching methods with all the children. She summed up her learning,

‘You know one thing I noticed that children are children everywhere. Whether they are on the street, whether they are in orphanage, they are in the slums, they are on the road, or they are urchins, or they are prostitute children, or they are institutional children… everywhere… children are children.’

So, beyond the usual teaching hours she spent her time teaching informally. Mamta also worked for underprivileged children as a volunteer. She was also involved with an Association of Professionals for training teachers. She was active in organizing workshops for the members of the organization (and ‘I get to attend the workshops too!’). She revealed she was always on the lookout for any opportunity to evolve and grow. Another hobby was to learn the Indian scriptures which she considered worth incorporating in her daily practice. Much of her understanding about values came from the study of the ancient Indian texts.

When I enquired from Kunali, whether she was involved in any project outside teaching, she informed me that her time beyond the school working hours were spent with her young daughter, especially spending time playing or supervising her. She did mention that she would like to start ‘some creative class’ with others at a later date as, much of what she does in school would be interesting for other children to learn.

Sejal was sure that even during vacations she felt ‘the need to connect with children…the need to do something with children…so I plan these cooking classes or something… may be for a week or ten days. I always enjoyed this’.

Even during the vacations, she expressed her desire to do similar work, which gave the impression that teachers probably love the idea of teaching. Kavita felt that her contribution was to read or surf the net in order to tell her friends about it. She would fit in this activity at the end of her hectic day:

‘...I love to find a new site. The minute I come to know anything about the net…anything about a new site… I immediately jot it down. It helps me in my teaching and my general knowledge. There’s so much to learn. So I can tell my friends because everyone does not really know. I can understand that people don’t
have the time but I have to read. If I don’t read I could yell. I also love to do research on the net’.

Bhumika and Pearl both shared that they were teaching underprivileged children from their neighborhood. What was lucid was the fact that all the teachers continued to ‘teach’ during their leisure hours. It strengthened my idea that teaching is an integral part of who they were.

While Sanaa did not have any interests or projects beyond her work, she shared a fact which made me believe that teaching was really a way to be for her:

‘Like I tell my daughter… I feel very strongly about this. I do not know if society will allow her to do it. She is good in her studies & I tell her…you decide your career is such a way that you are able to concentrate on your family life along with your career…the best profession I told her is to become a teacher’.

When I asked the teachers what they planned to do 5-10 years from now, all of them wanted to continue in the field of early childhood education. Only one of them mentioned ‘if health permits me, I shall continue’ but otherwise, either the teachers wanted to start their own centre or they wanted to become a supervisor/facilitator (which in the organizational structure is perceived as a ‘higher’ role) or be involved in creating curriculum. None of them could think of leaving the profession.

The four dimensions of ‘teaching is being’ can be summed up in Anuradha’s words,

‘...deep down that satisfaction comes, that contentment comes only when you really do something for others. I do not know whether I can help others or not but it gives me tremendous satisfaction and today really when I look back I haven’t wasted my time, God has been very kind that he had used me in so many ways. To be with the children...to touch their lives...to change their lives... and make them citizens... to make them responsible citizens of the society’.

Teaching had given deep meaning to each one’s life and enriched them as persons.
4.3.1.5 Summary of theme

Let me summarize the belief systems that teachers had regarding the teaching profession and about children:

- Teachers believed that teaching was an indelible part of their lives, as a way to be.
- They believed that teaching was a profession which reconciled their aspirations on the one hand and their responsibilities on the other.
- Teachers believed that their life experiences had an impact on their teaching and vice versa.
- Teachers believed that there was an overlap in the roles of mother and teacher with each ‘feeding’ from the other.
- Teachers loved to teach even during their leisure time and were involved in ‘teaching’ activities beyond their work place.

4.3.1.6 Propositions and discussion

I put forth the following propositions and discuss the findings related to this theme:

- Choosing to become a teacher was influenced by social as well as individual factors. The alignment of an internal drive (to do meaningful work) and external endorsement (in the form of support from family) were necessary to step into the field of teaching. The cultural connotations attached to teaching worked in subtle ways towards taking the decision to teach.

Belief systems of the early childhood teachers regarding the teaching profession clearly indicated that the raison d’être for joining was twofold. There was consensus that teachers considered the worth of the job to be ‘learning’ and ‘making-meaning’. There was also another intertwining factor to take up teaching – the convenience of the profession. Teaching seemed to be a profession that combined well with what women want
from their life – a balance between fulfilling their aspirations and fulfilling their family responsibilities.

What does it mean? Individuals who entered the field of early childhood teaching seemed to believe that the profession offered opportunities for personal growth and meaning which they find reflected in the interactions with children. Implicitly many of the participants had figured out prior to joining that they enjoy the act of teaching. Studies (Richardson & Watt, 2003; Watt & Richardson, 2003) have found that individuals’ perceived teaching-related abilities were a prominent factor in influencing their decision to teach. In a way, teachers were socialized early into the job (this point has been discussed in the next proposition). Were teachers more committed to the profession because they perceived it as a ‘meaning-making’ profession? It could be so. Richardson & Watt (2006) suggested that teaching may afford different types of rewards that were not always inherent in other occupations, and that participants seek out those rewards that come from the experience of teaching.

There was the additional subtext of ‘convenience work’ attached to the teaching profession. Was the world of early childhood teaching dominated by the convenience of the job rather than the nature of the job? It seemed that initiation into the world of teaching through subtle socially-constructed connotations were the order of the day. Many studies found that previous teachers and family were frequently nominated as influences on the choice of teaching as a career (Book & Freeman, 1986; Lortie, 1975; Robertson, Keith, & Page, 1983). In trying to understand why the profession of teaching was chosen by the teachers, I looked at the social and cultural context.

It may be noted that though there was active support of the family, it seemed to come attached with the suitability of the work. The socio-cultural context of a patriarchal society, where the primary duty of the woman was towards the family, seemed to be relevant. In most of the cases there was an ‘adjustment’ from the woman’s side to balance the pressures of family duties and work. Teaching became suitable as it was viewed not only as a ‘safe’ profession but that which does not seem to
have further scope of reinvention. The family was a motivating factor for women to take up teaching as a career, which needs to be lauded but raised concerns about the external orientation to a career in teaching. It almost seemed that women continually looked at the support system before deciding to opt for a job. Wanting to spend time with their children was a common refrain for choosing the job; the finding implicitly suggested the importance to the role of the mother in the child’s development, a belief that had other connotations (discussed in the next point).

Teaching appeared to be a socially valued occupation (Richardson & Watt, 2006). The perceived nobility seemed to be an essential component for choosing this profession. In India, teaching has always been considered to be a highly respected profession. Teachers have been viewed with deference and respect in India (Anandlakshmy, 1998). The respect is obvious when in a social gathering, a teacher announces her profession. Gupta (2006) ascertains that respecting teachers reflects the reverence to wisdom and learning grounded in the Indian psyche. There was a deep belief that inculcating knowledge among young students is worthwhile and that you serve a noble cause when you teach.

Here is a conundrum. If we venerate our teachers, why do they continue to have such a low status in our society? I found an interesting analogy of a social campaign powered by a media house. The campaign advocated ‘the noble cause’ for anyone to join in to make the country literate, signifying the righteousness in the act of teaching another person. What bothered me (and probably many of my ilk) was the broad underlying message that anyone can teach. In a country which already complains of low number of teachers and the dismal pay and work conditions, could we afford to ‘downgrade’ our teachers to a status that anyone can take up the job if they have an hour or two to spare? Maybe I am being a little too harsh but I’m sure that the campaign did exactly the opposite in the minds of the common man – it created the myth that teaching was a job that just needed some extra time. Could teaching be portrayed as an intellectually demanding ethical work which was
person-specific and situationally-grounded (Ayers, 1992) that enables individuals to realize their talents and abilities?

In the early childhood education scenario of urban India, there is no doubt that the numbers interested in the profession need to increase. It seems to be almost a personal calling for individuals to become teachers. As a field, it would be significant to work out a well-defined plan to attract and motivate students to join this profession. As teacher educators and educational administrators, invoking future teachers could be the ‘mantra’. A planned, definitive advocacy may help to get many more students/individuals interested enough to join the field.

Another related point was how could teachers create their own trajectory of growth? There was a negligible scope for early childhood teachers in terms of ‘promotion’ or ‘going higher’. In today’s complicated educational milieu, despite the many challenges, many teachers can survive and thrive when they are able to find meaning in what they do. That seemed to be the case but it raised questions about the future: could we let ad hoc, individual reasons continue to be the basis of motivating teachers to join and remain in the profession? Offering diverse models of teacher education so that individuals can be encouraged to create their own learning journeys could be a way out.

Enjoying the company of children seemed to be almost like a pre-requisite for coming into the profession. The teaching profession seemed to attract individuals who were fond of children. In my years of experience as a teacher educator, I repeatedly heard this particular reason from candidates for joining the teacher education course. In a survey of students, Hayes (1990) found that 92% chose teaching because they loved children. Phillips & Hatch (1999) also found loving children as a theme in responses by prospective teachers. It seemed that individuals were drawn to early childhood education because they have affection for children. It is indeed fortunate that to work with younger children one seemed to think that it was almost an imperative to love them. Our ‘screening mechanisms’ for imbibing trainee teachers could use indicators beyond ‘love for children’. Studies have noted that the ‘pre-
dispositions’ that teacher candidates have, tend to have an overwhelming impact on how they teach. Creating a formal protocol for screening could be a step forward.

In short, could we create ‘mind shifts’ in the way teaching was viewed - from a job to a ‘profession’?

- *Past experiences played a part in teacher socialization. Significant others, especially teachers, influenced teacher action in the classroom.*

I would like to view this finding under what in literature had been referred to as ‘teacher socialization’ - a term which encompasses the process whereby the individual becomes a participating member of the society of teachers (Danziger, 1971). Dan Lortie’s famous book ‘Schoolteacher’ (1975) alluded to the powerful socializing influence of predispositions; more than the formal teacher education or workplace influences. The interpretive approach to socialization in the present study was meant to seek subjective experience within the frame of reference of the participants (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

Three explanations prevalent in the literature for teachers learning to teach (either student teachers or working teachers) from their past experiences were –

a. The evolutionary theory (Stephens, 1967 in Zeichner & Gore, 1988) which proposed the role of spontaneous communicative tendencies learnt from parents and teachers;

b. The psychoanalytic explanation which suggested that teachers try to become like significant others (e.g. parent, teacher etc.) in one’s childhood (Knowles, 1988; Connell, 1985);

c. The “apprenticeship of observations” (Lortie, 1975) which posited that teachers internalize teaching models during the considerable length of time spent as students.

All of these explanations could be held true for my participants.
Some studies (Crow, 1987; Ross, 1987; Koster, Korthagen & Schrijnemakers, 1995) discussed the influence of both positive and negative role models provided by former teachers, which was a finding of the present study. A line of thought that they proposed was that the process of modeling former teachers was a highly selective and deliberate process whereby teachers ‘pick and choose the various attributes and practices they observed as pupils and synthesize them into the model they would like to become’ (in Zeichner & Gore, 1988, p. 10). From what my participants mentioned, I feel that all influences were not likely to be conscious; there could be many subtle influences which may be deeply ingrained, not only due to the influence of important others but also due to the cultural and social context at large.

The present study explained the patterns emerging from their subjective experiences of individual teachers. Collective aspects of socialization e.g. of a group of teachers would be an interesting point for future research. Teachers’ perspectives as rooted in the cultural experiences that they brought to teaching could be a place to look for the collective influences.

Another related matter is whether the impact of past experiences is more pronounced in teachers teaching the very young. Since subject matter was deeply integrated with pedagogy, a question that came to mind was whether the subculture (early childhood education) engenders common determinants or distinct patterns of socialization into teaching? Does early experience have such deep sway for all teachers who teach young children? Or was that not ‘in spite of’ but ‘due to’ the fact that they are in the field of early childhood education? Hollingsworth (1989) suggestion that formative experiences may not totally determine socialization ‘outcomes’, gave hope that institutions like teacher education and workplaces could play more crucial roles.

Hence, the need to become aware about the influences on one’s own socialization could be an integral part of the reflection process within the teacher community.
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- **Maternal roles could be stronger in shaping beliefs about children than their role as teachers.**

Another finding is the integration of the mother and teacher role.

I looked at this finding as a derivative from and contribution to the larger social context. Teaching had always been considered a gendered profession and early childhood teaching had been perceived as ‘women’s work’ (Anliak & Beyazkurk, 2008). Teaching had been the domain of women, since its feminization as an occupation (Reis, 1999). Even in the current study, I did not come across any male early childhood teacher. Weis (1988) talked of how gender could impact the life chances of individuals. The impacts could be in the social demands of their roles (which were discussed earlier) or the opportunities that they may beget.

At a deep level, a teacher’s role could have reflected a desire to identify with the role of mother amidst a world of children. My interpretation of the responses of the participants made me believe this could easily be so. In India, socialization of girls to the inevitability of motherhood was common. From the early years, girls were wont to hear about ‘when you get married’ or ‘when you have children’. In a society that continued to expect women to be the primary caretakers, the ethos of caring could be internalized easily. Also in the Indian culture, it was often heard that the mother was the first teacher of the child. Teaching as a necessary training to become a mother was also reflected in the responses of the participants and maybe the reason why teacher education courses continued to have a higher percentage of married women/mothers (Sengupta, 2006).

The prevailing model of ‘teacher’ is one of female nurturance, based on a definition of femininity that is akin to a mother (Reis, 1999). The mother-child relationship implied strong emotional involvement and a sense of responsibility. The teacher–pupil relationship also was considered as a meaningful, stable bond characterized by direct responsibility (Emiliani & Molinari, 1994). The implicit connotations could be reasons for teachers to create overlapping role identities.
The caring orientation that many women teachers take towards their work could be an extension of their maternal role. Gupta (2006) found that many teachers (in the city of Delhi) viewed their students as their children and deeply invested in them. Women exhibit a more caring orientation with teaching in general and with their students (Noddings, 1992; Hargreaves, 1998). Noddings (1992) advised that a positive school culture was based on the development of reciprocal relationships in classrooms, where students were cared for and about and, in turn, responded appropriately to care. The importance of caring in good quality teaching and learning have been positively correlated; therefore, it was comforting to believe that teachers cared about the children in their classrooms.

Many respondents connected ‘being a teacher’ with ‘being yourself’ in the classroom. Pivotal to that sense of belonging were the relationships they formed with their class where they could be themselves without pretension and where they could get unconditional love from the children. Nias (1986) portrayed his concern about the same. He argued that when teachers were ‘being themselves’ in school, that could cause disconnect with the practical aspects of teaching children skills and information.

The point is worth considering in the context of early childhood teachers. Can the profession afford teachers to just be themselves? Could we advocate the differences between the roles of mothers and teachers? I agree with Gupta (2006) when she made the point, ‘But if the mothering is removed from the teaching, there is, I fear, a corresponding reduction in the teacher’s sense of responsibility and accountability with regard to the overall development of the child’s personality in accordance with acceptable social norms’ (p. 103). Could we build on this caring orientation and yet move towards a well-documented role-demands of a teacher? It may not be a difficult process if we create spaces for empowering teachers towards building a clear professional identity.
Teaching as an indelible part of teachers’ identity signaled a passion for teaching, which could be a probable cause for their deep commitment.

There seemed to be no line between personal and professional interests. The act of teaching was (if I may use the word without sounding like a counseling psychologist) internalized in the participants. Teacher identity was referred to as a culturally embedded process (Sachs, 2001). Calderhead & Shorrock (1997) suggested that teaching could be a crucial expression of self for teachers. Since teaching was perceived as meaningful, this could well be plausible for the participants of the study.

I sensed a deep passion for teaching in all the teachers. Researchers have constantly emphasized that teaching is complicated and demands complete attention and engagement which was bourne to be true for the current study. Hargreaves (1998) had suggested that emotions are at the heart of teaching since, without it teachers face the constant danger of burn-out in an increasingly intensified work environment (Nias, 1996).

Fried (1995) mentioned that teaching was a passionate vocation. Good teachers, according to him, were passionate about learning, about ideas and their relationship with students. The sense of passion was argued by Day (2004) as indispensible to all good teaching. In other words ‘passion, uncomfortable as the word may sound, is at the heart of what teaching is or should be about’ (Fried, 1995, p. 6).

Palmer, 1998 (in Gregory, 2001) mentioned the power of teachers to awaken a truth within us. This special power of teachers to infect others with their own passion for learning, often gives teachers more power than they either realize or want (Gregory, 2001). The recognition of power may be related to the passion, though the connection may not be direct.

There was a strong connection between teacher commitment and the passion for teaching (Day, 2004; Fried, 1995). Huberman (1993) identified teacher commitment as one of the most critical factors for the future success of education and schools. It was heartening to find a group of teachers whose heart seemed to be in their work and to recognize the
generosity of their being. That they were willing to spend hours ‘teaching’ the needy when they could have utilized the same skills to augment the meagre salaries was a point to be celebrated.

Sumsion (2006) suggested a link between commitment to teaching and past experiences. Though the link is nebulous, future research could help to make the picture clear, especially focusing on the role of reflection to illuminate the link.

The stories revealed high levels of commitment not just to their workplace (discussed in the next theme) but to teaching. An issue which I inadvertently would like to raise is about the vulnerability due to the commitment. As professionals, since I assure dedication to the job, does it lead to a taken-for-granted attitude of the authorities or employers? In other professions, employers have continued to look for ways to motivate their employees through higher wages, better perquisites, improving work conditions and using strategies to attract and retain committed employees. I wondered if teachers would have been a disgruntled lot (the realities give enough reasons to be so); then, by now, would we have seen a movement towards professionalization? It may be time not just to celebrate the commitment but also to look at leveraging it for the best of the community.

Another factor worth commenting on was whether teachers’ passions were linked to clear articulation of ideology, values and beliefs, which other studies (Day, 2004; Fried, 1995; Nias, 1996) have found. The current study presented ambiguous evidence – in most cases teachers seemed to connect values but rarely articulated ideologies. The next theme takes a relook at this aspect.

Thus, teaching seemed to have a high index of job satisfaction but a sobering thought would be whether future generations would continue to find passion for teaching. Teaching must compete with other professions for new entrants but its appeal as a career has declined (in Richardson & Watt, 2006). Research in the area of workforce retention maintained that many graduates were not willing to enter and stay in a
workforce characterized as economically, socially, and politically marginalized (Langford, 2008). Do school systems need to take responsibility towards inspiring and maintaining a committed workforce? The next theme looks at the issue.
Theme 2: Schools as learning-training grounds

It appeared that teachers were being molded by the education system in which they worked. All the early childhood teachers attributed the school for helping them to learn how to teach. This may outwardly seem contradictory to the first theme of the integration of teaching and being; especially the idea that their beliefs about children were extended to the way they handle children in the classroom. But on closer examination, these are not opposing ideas. Teachers believe that the skills that are needed to teach are developed through exposure to what they observe or try out in their workplace; their beliefs about children are rarely disturbed by the policies and practices expected by the school. The theme attempts to find patterns about the belief systems of teachers regarding their work places as highlighted through the following sections:

4.3.2.1 ‘Move on’ if not comfortable

4.3.2.2 ‘Blending’

4.3.2.3 Opportunities from school (coordination meetings, observation of peers, mentors, professional development opportunities)

4.3.2.4 Approval from school

4.3.2.5 ‘The role of formal teacher education

(See Figure 2 for a pictorial description of the theme)
4.3.2.1 ‘Move on’ if not comfortable

Analysis of the data indicated that when there was a ‘mismatch’ between the school expectations and individual beliefs and values, the teachers prefer to ‘move on’. Teachers believed that if they are not ‘comfortable’ (Pearl), then it was best that they look out for another workplace. Pearl, who worked earlier in a school where she was not given a chance to teach the way she wanted to, clearly made the point that when she could not apply what she wanted to do, she wrote to the school authorities ‘to let the kids have more activities’ but when nothing changed, she decided to take up a new job.

Kavita clarified that if one does not believe in a school’s philosophy, it is best to move on.

‘So you need to be in such kind of an organization where you believe in things. If you do not believe in it and you cannot go by that philosophy then obviously I will not be able to. Like suppose I can say to-day I credit (the school) for everything but if I am in any other school and their system and philosophy is
contradictory to what we are doing I will not be able to give them that performance’.

Obviously, she placed a lot of emphasis on the school system. An example of one of the participants further clarified how teachers get to the point where they think of changing their workplace. In one of the schools, the teacher was expected to sign on paper a salary amount which she actually was not paid. She vehemently denied that it was about the money but placed value on what she referred to as a wrong practice. She called the school unethical in their practices and therefore wanted to move away. She clearly specified that when she joined her current workplace there was not much difference in the pay but what she liked was the honesty and the way the teachers were expected to handle the children. It somehow matched the way she would have wanted to handle children.

This idea of ‘moving on’ if one’s beliefs don’t match, seemed to suggest that teachers consciously look for places where they will be comfortable of what is asked of them. But two of the participants clearly felt that it was a matter of luck to get a school which ‘matches’ their beliefs.

‘I didn’t know that (the current workplace) was like this. But I just applied because I knew everything had already closed then and mine was the last application to come in...They just took me ... There was someone who had left in between and so I was there. It was just like that. In that sense, it was luck’ (Pearl, 2007).

‘We get this kind of atmosphere here we were very lucky and blessed’ (Kavita).

So teachers seem to believe that through sheer chance they happen to be in the workplace where they are comfortable. In two of the cases the participants had high stakes in the setting up of the school (one was an owner, the other a relative of the owner); so it was easy to understand when they said that there was no conflict between their thinking and the schools as ‘we are the decision-makers’ (Anuradha). It would seem that their own beliefs shaped the practices that were adopted by the other teachers in the school. Mamta believed that it was important that children ‘experience the outdoors’; one of the practices in the school was to take the children out every Friday for
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A field trip either to the nearby forest, the supermarket or the park. In Anuradha’s case, her love for music was reflected in the time given each day to sing songs along with live music (this was the only classroom where live music was observed). It seemed easy for owners of schools to include certain practices commensurate with their own beliefs.

But what about the teachers who have no decision making powers in the workplace? For majority of the participants, the current workplace was the first place where they worked. Is it only a matter of chance that they consider the workplace as being suitable; where implicitly they feel comfortable? Or is it easy for teachers to adapt themselves to the school as long as it does not remarkably contradict their thinking?

The analysis points out to the latter point.

4.3.2.2 ‘Blending’

Analysis suggested that early childhood teachers adapt to the school where they feel at ease. There is, in Pearl’s words, a ‘blending’. She explained it as the match between the system and ‘what actually I wanted to do’. She contrasted with her previous job, where she was expected to ‘follow the method which we had when I was in school. Open your books…write numbers 1-10’ but then she joined the present school and felt comfortable as ‘…here the experience was different than other schools. There was a lot to learn’.

This sense of comfort seemed intangible as many of the teachers were unable to articulate what made them feel comfortable or otherwise. My observations also suggested that teachers looked completely at ease in their workplaces. One of the reasons of course could be that they had been working for a number of years in the current workplaces. It could also be that the teachers had a certain way of evaluating a workplace and they used that to sense whether the workplace would be appropriate or not to them. As I interacted with many of them, it became clear that they were in sync with the school. Their identities reflected an extension of the school where they worked, to the extent of crediting their workplace as the place where they learnt how to teach. A teacher summarized thus, ‘...the experience that I gathered from this
school…that changed me more than the training. Learning has been tremendous here—training hardly scratched the surface’.

This pattern of ‘blending’ into the school system was obvious in many of the life stories that the teachers shared. I felt the need to share more about school systems. One of the obvious ‘cuts’ that I made was the type of school (which has already been discussed at length in 4.2) wherein, the school system denoted the size, structure and process. Apart from these obvious variables, there are certain nebulous characteristics, which, in the literature have been referred to as school culture, work environment, quality indicators, organizational structure etc. When I use the term ‘school system’ I mean an amalgamation of all the above - all factors which coalesce to form a unique way in which the ‘employee’ is expected to work (I have also used the synonym of school expectations in the text). These expectations are rarely expressed or discussed either by the school or the teacher.

I exemplify this further with the example of two schools. One of them, named with the suffix of ‘International School’, was a large school with the pre-primary section of the school nestled within the premises of the primary and secondary sections. On paper it had a separate entity. There were 21 classrooms with an average of 40 children in each for the three levels - nursery, junior KG and senior KG. The school had two shifts - morning and afternoon - which meant about 1200 children in the age group of 2½ to 5½ years. There were approximately 45 teachers, with one supervisor (who was in charge of the pre primary section) who reported to a Director. The owners of the school were a part of the educational trust which ran the school (referred to as Management). The educational trust was started by a successful realty company in a far flung suburb of Mumbai, where the realty company had constructed innumerable buildings in the area. A relatively new school, the classrooms were large, well lighted, airy and painted. The play area was next to the courtyard on the ground floor with portable plastic, colored equipment - a jungle gym, 2 see saws and 2 slides.
The organizational structure was hierarchical with decisions made at the higher levels. There were certain policies which the teachers were expected to follow. I saw some of these policies in action -

- final decision-making rested with the owners (permission for access was finally taken by the owner even though I met all the intermediaries one after the other – each expressed their inability to decide but assured me that they would ‘pass on’ the request);

- teachers were ‘told’ what to do (they were not given the choice of participating in the research but informed that they have to; in another incident, a teacher was asked to go for a workshop without checking for her convenience);

- coordination meetings had to be held once a week (where weekly planning as well as preparation for activities had to be shared); log books of lessons taken had to be submitted to the supervisor (with details about the main lesson taken in the classroom);

- teachers had to stay back for at least half an hour to prepare for the next day (this was mandated by the authorities);

- there was minimum display area and the classroom could not have displays of a particular class (as the classroom was shared by another class);

- teachers teaching at the same level e.g nursery were expected to plan the weekly program together but were responsible for what they did in their classroom (though there was a sense of freedom but the plan had to be done within the week – each division of the level was expected to be at par);

- outdoor play was restricted to specific times (to access the play area children had to go down 2 flight of stairs; roughly 10 minutes were spent to and fro from the classroom with 3 adults – 2 non-teaching staff along with the teacher - supervising);

- one teacher was expected to handle a classroom; there was a ‘floating’ teacher (shared by that level e.g 1 for 6 nursery classrooms) who could be
called in whenever needed (she was in high demand during any messy creative activity time)

- there were non-teaching support staff (who were called ‘bais’) who were called in by the teacher whenever necessary e.g. during any ‘toilet accident’ or for cleaning the classroom e.g after snack time. They were expected to be waiting outside in the corridors so if a child had to go to the toilet, the teacher could call out for them to escort the child.

- teachers had to sign in and sign out (time was electronically monitored – teachers expressed their tension of being on time);

- teachers were expected to attend any session inside or outside the school considered as essential by the supervisor as a part of the in-service training (even on a holiday)

- the supervisor was expected to observe and evaluate the teacher (these were meant to be surprise visits – the teachers were aware that they could be under an evaluative gaze any time)

- routines were set in the form of a time table which teachers were expected to follow on a daily basis (time tables included the specific time slots e.g. song time, concept time, creative activity time, outdoor play time etc.)

- the syllabi was formulated in advance which the teachers were expected to follow (teachers could choose the theme which they wanted to take up but all the divisions had to take the same theme during a period of time; the teachers were not involved in the development of the syllabi; each theme had to be completed within the specified time period; the teachers were expected to finish the syllabi, more so, as the parents were given the same at the beginning of the year)

- teachers were not expected to meet parents without a prior appointment routed in writing through the school diary (the supervisors consent was necessary before the teacher could meet the parents)
• snack time was non supervisory time for the teachers but they were expected to be present in the classroom; children brought their snacks from home.

The above clearly demonstrates certain expectations due to the work culture, hierarchical structure and policies that the school as an ‘employer’ expects from the ‘employee’. It obviously has an impact on the pedagogy. I highlight this to surface the issue of the place of a professional – the teacher – in this system. A teacher in such a system did not have any decision-making powers; she was accountable to the immediate senior (the supervisor) and the Management; her work was bounded within a ‘syllabi’ (which was not co-constructed by her), the time table and the physical infrastructure; she was evaluated within these parameters of ‘following the school expectations’ (a teacher, 2007); her duties were specified and time bound; and the school set the tone for interactions with parents (I found out that the parents of the school had gone to court a few years back and so the policy of parent-teacher interaction was strictly enforced by the school authorities).

I contrast school expectations in another private nursery school cum creche. The school was co-founded by two friends; one of whom was a trained teacher (also the Principal). It was housed in the middle of a ‘township’ (a gated community of young high income professionals with a high percentage of double income families). The area was equivalent to two apartments with a large area in the middle and four smaller rooms adjacent to the central area. One of the doors opened into a shaded outdoor play area with sturdy and well maintained equipment – 2 swings, 2 small see saws, 1 big slide, a trampoline, a sand area and some tricycles/rocking horses. The school area doubled up as a crèche till 7 p.m. There were children from 2 to 4 years of age who came in the morning to attend the center. Many amongst them stayed back in the crèche. They were joined by other children who came back from their respective schools at varied times during the day. The total children attending the nursery school was 70 with 40 children in the younger age group and about 30 children in the designated ‘nursery class’. There were 3 teachers, 1 assistant teacher and 1 non-teaching support staff (referred to as mousi).
Results and Discussion

Some of the expectations that I was able to interpret from what I observed:

- policies were not enforced (e.g. though the owner told me that she wanted the teachers to come at least 10 minutes earlier than the children; she had not been able to enforce the rule – I noticed on many days that one of the teachers came in late)

- the teacher was completely responsible for what she did in the classroom; some form of discussion – which was mostly informal- was done with the other teachers.

- teachers were expected to be a part of monthly planning meeting (held on the last Saturday of the month) when they planned the months schedule (I observed in one of these meetings the discussions were led by the Principal -also the owner - and mostly whatever she suggested was ‘taken up’ without much discussion; teachers shared different ideas for conducting a particular activity)

- teachers were expected to ‘stick’ to the plan for the day especially in terms of the ‘concept’ and ‘creative activity’ (a Principal, 2006) ‘because that was the what changed, otherwise everyday was a repetition’ (a teacher in the school, 2006)

- teachers were expected to take out time during the day to take the children outdoors to play (since the play area was easily accessible, I observed the children went out during play time as well as after they finished having their snack)

- though the nursery teacher handled 30 children there were times during the day when children would be mixed together for some specific activity (one such time was when the Principal took story time)

- teachers were expected to plan and organize one field trip per month for all the children (the children were taken to the restaurant down the road on one such trip – the teacher valued the trip in terms of learning ‘how to behave in a restaurant’)

- teachers informally talked to parents every day mostly when the children were going back home (I observed messages were passed, pleasantries
were exchanged; parents asked the teacher about the child e.g. what food the child had eaten

- the snacks were provided by the school so the teacher was expected to supervise the snack time

In such a system, the teacher was expected to just follow the plan with some degree of ‘control’ over how she transacted the planned curriculum; she was easily approachable to the parents; she was engaged with children constantly; not much was expected of her in terms of contribution to the planning of the curriculum; her accountability to the other teachers was low. Implications on pedagogy are discussed in details in 4.3.3.

This contrast is not true for the type of school i.e. it is not that large schools are more structured in their approach, I observed smaller schools were more structured; one of the large schools had ‘home visits’ as a policy due to which the teacher-family involvement was extremely high as compared to other small schools in the sample.

As I sifted through the data, looked at the videos and heard the views of teachers, I felt that in all the cases, if a teacher was comfortable in the school where she was working, she was willing to adapt to whatever the school wanted from her – the term ‘blending’ seemed to capture this common feature powerfully.

In Sejal’s case, having experienced the school during her training internship made her realize that ‘teaching here was a lovely experience’ and ‘I thought this would be the place if I get a job I would love to do it’. For most of the teachers, satisfaction stemmed from the fact that they believed that they can learn from the school. A conducive work environment may lead teachers to continue in their current workplaces without much questioning. They may assume that this is the best workplace to be and therefore they open themselves to learning on the job. It may also mean that being in a ‘comfort zone’ teachers are willing to mould themselves into the school’s expectations.

Kunali, who completed her training 3 years back, credited the school Management for the ‘training I have got from the school. I know what has to be
done...certain methods I have learnt from other teachers and colleagues...time management...dealing with parents and everything... which are very practical ways which I have learnt from the school. This added to my teaching.'

More often than not, teachers firmly believed that these workplaces had given them the opportunities to become more effective teachers, whether related to handling children, planning activities to help children learn or just learning to teach. This was mentioned by teachers irrespective of their age, experience and exposure to formal training.

Schools as grounds for learning to teach seem to be obvious for teachers who may not have been exposed to formal training. Amongst the participants who were not trained formally, there is ample evidence that they believe that learning informally is powerful. Anuradha shares her excitement, 'If I learn something new and something different, I am all geared up to come to school and just implement that particular way.' Only when she finds a method which is 'more effective and more innovative', and she is 'convinced about it after having implemented it', only then is she is willing to change. She gives an example from literacy teaching,

‘we always used to teach from A and B and C and D and I had to be convinced that no, there are simpler sounds which should be first, like Ba Da Ka La and Ma, these things, they should be taught first and then the vowels will come... this is more effective. It is clearer to the children. That is what I feel. Even I have learnt this...(from workshops)... and we have implemented it. But it took quite sometime to change the whole thing.’

Similarly for Bhumika and Mayura, the lessons they learnt from their workplaces were invaluable. They reiterated that though they knew how to handle children spontaneously, what actually helped them were the demonstrations. What they meant by demonstration was when they informally observed teachers teaching a class. Mayura was completely indebted to the school for having helped her to learn how to do everything in the classroom.

Teachers with formal training also acknowledge the school for their professional growth. Teachers may seek out specific co-workers to learn a
skill. Bhumika shared the fact that whenever she gets any time, she liked to
go and talk to her colleague, who is a mine of information.

‘I used to feel confused in the first few years but I depended on my colleague to
help and advice me. She constantly guided me…I think there is a lot of doing and
learning…then you start to feel confident about your teaching skills’.

Hence, the analysis suggests that early childhood teachers, once comfortable
with their work place are willing to absorb the school expectations. When I
interviewed them, I strongly felt that the participants identified with the
schools that they were teaching in and in many instances, they sounded like a
spokesperson for the school. A case in point,

‘…a school…where my cousin is working…when they heard what system we
follow the principal was quite impressed and she sent her teacher here to observe
and imbibe from our teaching methods. So you feel good that this system which is
so positive for the child…If other schools do follow and imbibe from what (her
workplace) is doing I would be very happy.’(Sejal, 2006)

Kavita explained that she can ‘credit (her workplace) for everything’. She
clarified that as the policies of the particular school facilitated her
professional growth, she was keen to talk convincingly about the school. The
point to note here was that she was convinced of what the school stood for; so
she had the confidence to say ‘if I don’t believe you, you cannot mould me into
your way’. But this did not seem to be the common refrain. For most of the
teachers, it did not seem to matter whether they were convinced or not, but
clearly they seemed to have internalized the expectations of the school. It
almost seemed that teachers thought of themselves as responsible for
implementing the curricula and doing whatever was necessary as an
employee of the school. This complex relationship between the school and
the teacher was difficult to explain. I was not sure whether the teacher
considered herself an employee and the school authorities as the employer
who had hired her to do a job or whether she considered herself an intricate
part of a dynamic system who is impacted by as well as impacts the system.
My sense leads me to believe that the former is truer than the latter.
In some of my conversations, I could feel a deep sense of debt expressed by most of the teachers who were employed (I made the simple distinction of individuals who were paid and individuals who owned the school), illustrated below:

‘Joining (current workplace) was the best thing that happened to me’.

‘I will always be grateful to (Principal) for giving me this break’.

‘The encouragement that I have got from (this school) has made a difference in my life. I will be obliged forever…’

‘My voice had failed completely. It was unbelievable…the understanding and support’

‘I got support from them when I needed it most (problems with in-laws)’.

One participant summed up her commitment to the school and based it on how she and her husband were helped by the Director of the school ‘… so I feel very much dedicated, devoted and whatever word you use…you could say 150-200% more’.

This does not preclude the fact that teachers consider they contribute to the lives of the children and families but as a professional, there seems to be an almost passive and overt acceptance of the school system as being the ‘master’.

Many of the responses somehow illustrated the belief that teachers perceived that they were the receivers while the Management was the giver – be it in terms of accepting policies suggested by the teachers to the management (‘they are progressive, as they accept it and then take decisions about when to implement it’) or allowing the teacher to take up a class she wishes to teach (‘I told them that you give me the nursery as I will do better so the next year they listened’). In my encounters with schools, the implicit beliefs of teachers that they were not the decision makers and the ‘control’ was with the higher ups seemed to resonate in their interviews and their actions. This was regardless of the fact whether the authorities were considered fair and approachable or otherwise. In one of the schools, I sensed a hesitation to talk about the Management, but many of the participants seemed to be favorable towards
their employers. In fact, even when the Management was considered to be progressive, I distinctly heard gratefulness when anything the teachers said was ‘accepted’ by the decision makers. A case in point which was shared by one of the participants pointed out to this unidirectional power:

“We heard they removed two teachers whose language was not good, diction was not good... which was a shock! In all these years we were not used to teachers being asked to go. People have gone because of relocation... It has never been any one asked to go from the school. It came as a shock and we could not take it. So we said we want to speak to you all (the management). We want to know tomorrow you will tell us to please go & what is the reason. What are we working for? They said these (teachers) were not good & we want the best... if you are doing a good job we are not just going to ask you to go. Suppose tomorrow as a teacher you are not performing well you are just taking it easy we will give you a warning & then we will have to ask you to go. Which was fair enough...and the teachers accepted it.’

The teacher considered having a communication channel open with the authorities was enough reason to accept their fairness of the decision; she did not consider herself as being empowered enough to put forth her rights as a professional. One of the reasons could be that teachers do not view their own beliefs, practices, opinions and expertise as contributing value to the system. It could also be that the support that many of the teachers have got from their workplace is converted to a feeling of oneness. Collaborative work environments may lead teachers to not only continue in the school but also feel that they are obliged to the school authorities for the support. It is of deep concern that in the field of early childhood education, stakeholders (in school systems, in teacher education systems, within social systems) have been unable to transmit an unconditional respect and abiding value to the practitioner.

The next part discusses the different ways through which the school gives opportunities to the teacher to learn to teach.
4.3.2.3 Opportunities from school

A commonality which emerged was that all the participants spoke with passion about learning from the school (where they were working), especially from the other teachers of the school. Schools were also places where the participants had found mentors who had shaped them as teachers. Another source for learning to teach was participation and exposure to other professional development opportunities through the school.

On-the-job learning happens through various channels or routines set up in schools. Across all schools, I sensed an atmosphere of caring and collegiality. Teachers interacted with one another easily, cracked jokes, shared their lunches, and showed warmth in their greetings. Even the most reticent of teachers amongst my participants told me that her friends were teachers of the same school. A teacher shared with me that her favorite time of the day was when she was in the school. Others told me that they looked forward to coming to the workplace. Teachers attributed the coordination meetings, learning through observing peers, mentoring and other professional opportunities for learning how to teach.

Coordination/review meetings with the other teachers teaching the same class in large set ups is fertile to the possibilities of exchange of ideas and sharing of activities. It is noteworthy that the coordination meetings are aimed to bring together the teachers for planning and sharing responsibility (making worksheets, deciding on type of activity) rather than for the intention of helping teachers learn. Incidental learning is high as articulated by the teachers. Kunali (a teacher in a large set-up) conversed about the experience:

’SOME and the other morning teacher will sit together & do the weekly planning. Because the other two are new, they will not know… I will sit for planning with her. Then we get it approved by Madam (supervisor). Then they will copy the time-table... we will discuss… I will discuss this activity has to be done. I will write the requisition, & you (the other teacher) bring the material …then we do all the cutting...preparation for the activity...I also make the power point presentation as I am the only one in the team who knows Publisher (a computer program)’
The coordination meetings, in her case, were used as time to plan and prepare for activities to be conducted with the children. In her case, as she is the most experienced teacher (with added competency), she is expected to take a lead. Nonetheless, she shared that many of the new ideas come from the others so it added to her repertoire of ideas.

Pearl summed up the learning from the coordination meetings in an ambiguous way, nevertheless pointing to the importance that she gives to these meetings as a way of bringing in change.

'I learnt when we would all sit and coordinate together and I used to see other teachers in other classes...when we used to sit and talk ...now you have to do this...this way. Now we are going to do it this way, you know. Then you bring in a little creativity...I used to go back to my books. I can do it this way in the class. Then we used to discuss in the coordination. Why don’t we do it this way? Then everyone does it that way, all of us try & do it that way... a little change here and there.'

Sejal reiterates the fact thus,

‘There are some teachers who have learnt a new methodology which we don’t have...like we do the playway...one of the teachers has done the Montessori way. So you appreciate what they know...the way you hold a mat is important...a napkin ...the way it is folded... So if you learn that and where ever it can be incorporated in your methodology if you can do it then this is what you appreciate in other teachers’.

A new methodology also seems to be acceptable. Different qualities from different teachers can also be imbibed easily. In one of the classrooms, I noticed a teacher tell the children that she will listen to ‘good things and not to complaints’. I later enquired about the reason and she unhesitatingly told me that she heard a co-teacher use it and ‘thought it was a good idea so I use it’. ‘Picking up’ ideas from other teachers (within the school) was a common refrain and it almost seemed that teachers decide to pick up the ideas based on the metric of how much it appealed to them individually. There was a sense of ease with which these ideas are imbibed, which was reflected in Sejal’s words:
'Some teachers have the knack of dealing with the parents very well. So that is how you appreciate and you pick up when you are working in a group you learn those similar things and next time when you have to deal with a parent you see that you use the same pacifying tone'.

The belief is that the initial years are important for imbibing through observing or getting advice from other teachers. All the participants were influenced by peers whom they had observed. Sejal recounted an experience of how she learnt through observing her role model (another teacher in the school):

‘…I remember an instance where one child came and took the vehicle away from another child …(it was) happening every day. We used to tell him but he would not listen, and Neena (pseudonym) at one stage decided to just hold that child physically …(he) screamed and shouted and tried to show his physical strength, but she had a smile on her face and kept on holding that child. … she held on to him … till he was calm and then she spoke to him and said this is what we can do and this is what we can’t do. And if you want this, this is the way of doing it. So I learnt from Neena… being firm with a smile… now I do not hesitate being firm when it is required.’

Kunali made it clear that though she was comfortable with her teaching ‘but if I get to know another way of teaching… if a teacher is doing another concept in a different way I will definitely like to learn that. I will definitely implement it, if I feel that that is more effective.’

Thus, it is of little concern whether one is sure about what they are doing in the class. Any alternate way of teaching is easily acceptable by teachers. It seems the onus of their learning goes to what is ‘effective’ in a class or how much the idea appeals to their sensitivity.

Early childhood teachers seem to believe that different ages of their peers facilitate qualitatively different learning. Reema shared that in the small nursery school, there were colleagues of different ages,

‘One is 10 years elder to me, one is younger to me. It is like three generations are working together. So you get to learn a lot of things from all of them. It is like...
from an experienced teacher to a fresher. So that does influence our thinking about where we should change and how we should handle things.’

So, varied experiences of peers seem to influence teachers. The participants pointed out that when ‘freshers’ join, they bring in a fresh perspective. Their ideas are sometimes new and their enthusiasm rubs off on the others. Mamta talked about all the three teachers in her school who when together generate lots of ideas. She looked forward to those meetings.

Undoubtedly, more experienced peers are a source of learning too. They are a source of guidance and help. All the 10 participants were influenced by mentors. In most cases the mentor happened to be a part of the school – either a veteran teacher or a Principal. Through actual observation of the mentor, Mayura picked up cues of how to be in the classroom.

‘Her class …children were enjoying…40 children and 2 teachers…one teacher was mainly outside because she was the coordinator. This teacher was alone handling all the children. Sometimes the children would mess up… but there was always a smile on her face.’

Kavita considers her mentor to be the ultimate because of the kind of mentoring she does.

‘(It) is not I will catch your hand…but I will show the way up to a distance and then I expect you to try on your own … fall on your own … you will still get support from me for each thing that you take up. That kind of support is great.’

She was helped by her mentor to improve her written language ‘She would find mistakes …and say this is not correct. So I try to improve it with reading’.

This notion of a supportive mentor who gives direction and yet gives ‘freedom’ was mentioned by many of the participants. Reema summed up the experience of how she believed that though one can learn by trial and error method, it is important that the direction is given by the mentor.

‘...but the whole responsibility is on me this is how you are supposed to teach, and this is what you are supposed to teach. Now it is up to me how I take it. That is when you tend to learn through your mistakes. Like you try one way and you feel ok now the child is not getting it, you try another way. So it is like actually
you are learning by yourself that this set of children how they are going to learn...so I think that space that was given to me, let me handle thing my way, let me grow as a teacher because I learnt from my own mistakes...and she (mentor) was always there to guide me. So that gave me a lot of confidence.’

The confidence seems to come from getting some sort of feedback from others. I discuss more deeply this issue in the subsequent part of the chapter.

Apart from peer learning and mentoring, participants learn through opportunities provided by the school to develop their ‘knowledge, skills and attitude’ (Principal of a large school, 2006). Many of my research participants suggested that sporadic learning happened through specific workshops which they participated in. Meera, who is constantly on the look out to ‘learn something new’ mentioned seminars and conferences which she has attended. Since she owns the ECE center, she said that she made it a point to find out from various sources and attend any professional development opportunity ‘even if it is expensive’. Bhumika mentioned sources like specific professional organizations (like Indian Association of Pre school Education - IAPE) and individual ‘freelancers’ who organize and conduct workshops. Anuradha was all praise for the Refresher Courses organized by IAPE which clarified ‘the theory behind what I already practiced’. She considered these professional opportunities as her training and credited the professionals for her learning. She shared that the refresher courses had specific themes each year, and were held annually. The workshops were one of a kind; unrelated; skill development – oriented and ranged in duration from a half day to a full day.

The aim of a workshop, according to the teachers, was to help to experience through interactive participation the particular topic. I heard a motley mix of workshop topics – general topics (e.g Curriculum Development, Time Management, Starting a Preschool, Yoga for Stress Management) and more specific topics (Quality Circle Time, Ancient Indian Scriptures, Learning Disability, Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom). I found that most of the teachers were asked to attend these workshops by the Principals / Supervisors. A supervisor (of a large school) informed me that there is an unwritten system of sending teachers to attend a workshop – each teacher in the school must be sent at least once or twice a year.
These are the ‘outside’ workshops but many schools also conduct in house training. In one of the schools, I was given to understand that teachers have to attend a pre organized session once in two weeks (mostly scheduled on a Saturday). These sessions could either be conducted by fellow teachers (e.g. the school counselor may have a talk on how to handle hyperactive children) or by invited experts. The teachers related that the ‘effect’ of the workshops somehow pale as time passes by and ‘though we learn a new way of doing something, unless you remind yourself and keep practicing it… soon it is forgotten. Your motivation has to be high enough to want it in your classroom’ (Bhumika).

Kavita, who was of the opinion that attending these workshops makes one grow as a person, shared a strategy she learnt from one of the workshops:

‘This was a mental exercise that we were told to do at one of the workshops. We were told to make a list & this is what I do myself every week end. I try to remember all the children in my class. And if I am not able to remember the child who is very quiet I say I am doing a poor job or shabby job. And I still need to tighten the screws somewhere. This is the kind of test I still give myself. And we were told that if you miss out any names that mean you are not giving that child enough attention. So you need to be very careful about such things.’

Mayura (who is not formally trained) talked about one of the workshops that she attended on identifying children with Learning Disability and that ‘it was an eye opener for me…I will never forget what I learnt that day’. In my talk with a (trained) teacher who happened to have attended the same workshop, I realized the diversity of impact of the same workshop. The teacher told me that the resource person did not do anything that she didn’t know already. I present this contrast to highlight two thoughts – training exposure may determine effectiveness of professional development and professional training must take into account previous experience. There seems to be a need to define different levels of professional development rather than a jumbled up, open to all, unstructured opportunities to develop practitioners.

My critical assessment of the professional development scene may be due to the fact that I have been a workshop facilitator for many years and through my experience come to believe that consistent quality, deeper engagement and a more holistic approach is necessary for helping teachers learn. One of
the participants brought out the issue of standards in professional development. She considered that she was privileged as there was a well thought out in-service training in her school but that was not the case with many other schools. She felt that having standards or minimum requirement for in-service professional development would help to bring the standard of ECE higher, which she felt was necessary. Incorporating quality measures may be essential.

My observations and conversations with the teachers made me realize that ideas or strategies seem to be easily imbibed by the teachers but rarely was the philosophical reasoning behind what was ‘picked up’ from the workshops articulated. I observed a teacher teaching a Marathi song to the class on a particular day. In the week she had sung English, Hindi and Gujarati songs too. I enquired the reason why she was using four different languages and whether the songs were a part of the syllabus. She explained that she had learnt the songs from a workshop she had attended two years back and she continues to teach the children ‘because they like to hear it’. No other reason was mentioned by her.

Except two, no other participant was able to articulate the ideology of the school (these two teachers were formally trained and the issue is discussed in the formal training section). The answer would mostly be the ‘playway method’. It was interesting to note that the word playway itself was explained by different teachers in different ways.

‘Play is the central feature’
‘…to relate to the child’s own real experiences… that will help him to learn better’
‘Giving children many activities for him to learn’
‘…give enough time to play’
‘Choices which child can make but within limits set by teacher’
‘Child is at the centre’
Teachers interpreted the term in different ways. The theme on pedagogy will discuss this issue in details. One of the reasons may be the non-articulation of the same by the school. ECE centers fail to clarify a stance or position. ECE professionals within the field are also guilty of not communicating basic ideologies and philosophies of early childhood education. It should be of little surprise then that teachers are functioning within classrooms from one day to the next, from one idea to the next, without clarifying the fundamental assumptions, position or stand. They have interpreted these fundamentals in their own way and believe in its appropriateness.

I observed that the expectation and intention of the authorities differed when they talked about informal in-service training. I use the word authorities to mean not only people higher up in the hierarchy but also represent the power wielded by them. In the large schools that I became familiar with during my study, I could ‘feel’ the effect of hierarchy in the way teachers were ‘told’ to do something.

I was privy to one such episode depicting the power dynamics. The Principal asked a teacher to attend a particular workshop scheduled for the subsequent Saturday. As it was not a working day for her, the teacher expressed some qualms about attending the workshop as she had some personal work. The teacher was asked without much kindness that one needs to grow professionally and she could certainly do her personal work later. Are ‘school-decided’ workshops i.e. the decision to attend a workshop driven by the school rather than individual driven effective in professional development? In my experience of conducting workshops, I have seen a certain resistance to professional development in teachers. One of the reasons is probably that attendance is enforced which certainly is a motivation dampener. The thinking that participation ensures learning is probably a fallacy we need to outgrow. It is important to acknowledge that power dynamics and hierarchical structures also shape the way teachers ‘perform’ within the system.
4.3.2.4 Approval from school

An implicit manner in which the school seems to have an impact on their staff relates to the complex relationship between approval-seeking and confidence-building. The teachers reflect a certain sense of dependency on the school towards becoming sure about their work.

The responses of some teachers seem to suggest that becoming comfortable with the children is far easier than becoming confident about how one teaches. On an average, the findings suggest that teachers (with some form of formal training) become comfortable with their teaching two years of experience. The participants who had no formal training seem to become comfortable after a longer period of time. The confidence is boosted by appreciation from the other teachers of the school. When they share their ideas or when another teacher appreciates them for a lesson or when they are evaluated by the Facilitator/Headmistress, there is a sense of reinforcing the way they teach in their classroom. The teachers tend to expect some sort of appreciation from their colleagues and seniors. Pearl clarifies,

‘My second year in this school that’s when I felt oh yeah and that is when I became confident …to share ideas. There are people who are taking these ideas and when they say it is good, then you feel nice, you know.’

Responses of all the participants pointed out to a deep desire for being acknowledged for their work. In fact, many articulated that the appreciation they get from their workplaces was the driver to do their best. Though teachers with more years of experience looked more confident, yet I noticed that the search for endorsement was strong. I completely agree that seeking approval is a human need but I am concerned that as practitioners if we are externally –driven, it may be easy to be ‘swayed’ by differing viewpoints. This brings me back to the same point that if teachers are willing to adapt to expectations laid down by schools, reinforcement of ways to work is dependent on others in the school, does it signal a ‘weak’ professional who is not sure of what she does? If schools seem to be moulding the professional in such implicit and explicit ways, is it an indication that the basic premise of teacher education needs to be reviewed?
Even when there is a certain sense of discomfort as was in the case of one of the teachers, she was willing to ‘let go’ as ‘this happens in other schools also I guess’. She expressed her apprehension of the arbitrary decisions and ‘politics’ taken by the owner of the center. Her concern was that the other teachers could not voice their dissatisfaction as they could easily ‘be asked to leave’ and as the pay is so less, it was not worth getting involved. She gave an example of how the owner (also the Headmistress) would tell the teachers to follow a certain way for doing the activities; and everyone would do it. She herself seemed unsure about alternatives but mentioned that in spite of this issue (interference by the Headmistress), ‘I love to come to school’. A point to note is that though she was not happy with what she was asked to do, she was unable to articulate alternative ways of doing the same activity. It could be that a lack of confidence in how to teach lays a foundation for the school to take over, willingly or wittingly.

All participants that I interacted with conveyed their satisfaction with their workplace. Is it a coincidence that all of them (except Mayura who relocated to another city) continue to work in the organization they joined years back? Though teacher attrition and retention was not a scope of this study, it is worthwhile to ask what makes teachers stay back in particular schools. Are teachers more loyal than other professionals? Or is it that once teachers are comfortable, they don’t want to move out of their comfort zone?

In my interactions with the teachers, almost all of them asked me to give a feedback about how they were as teachers. This led me to believe that most often than not teachers create an evaluative framework, seeking approval from others to decide whether they ‘perform’ well. The approval may be sought from fellow teachers, the supervisor or headmistress or principal, the management or owner, the teacher educators, parents as well as from children.

This was validated by several incidents, two of which I share. In one instance, one of the teachers was involved in guiding children to make Diwali cards (thumb printing). I walked into the classroom with the Principal and immediately, the teacher got up and came towards us. She explained the
activity and how it was helpful to the students (‘fine motor development’). The Principal and the teacher both sounded pleased. In the meanwhile, the children were playing with the paint unsupervised (there was no other adult in the room) which made me worry about the priorities of teachers. When we focus on seeking appreciation can we afford to do it at the cost of our basic job expectation - the safety of our children?

In another episode where there were student teachers present in the classroom, the teacher was busy explaining to them what the activity was (water play). She explained the ‘theory behind it’. After the explanation, she turned to me to ask whether what she had said was correct or not (this was on one of the days that I was observing the teacher). It was of concern to me that in the quest for approval, the teacher may have sent adverse signals to the student teachers.

Teachers are probably looking for reinforcement from others to become confident about what they are doing. I must add here that the two episodes that have been narrated refer to teachers without training. It may be easy to surmise that teachers without any formal training are the ones who need the approval to gain confidence but without doubt my observations tell me otherwise. The participants consider any feedback as valuable to help them decide whether they are ‘doing fine or not’ (Kunali, 2007). This also raised issues about how we have constantly and continuously used indicators to evaluate our teachers (which starts during training and continues into their jobs) without giving them enough scope and space to develop self evaluation skills.

4.3.2.5 The role of formal teacher education

If schools are at the forefront for helping teachers learn, where does formal learning stand? Have school systems ‘taken over’ the mantle of ‘training’ even if it is done unwittingly and arbitrarily? To answer these questions, I looked at how teachers perceived their formal teacher education experiences. Two points were conspicuous from what I heard and saw - (i) overwhelmingly, the teachers believed that teacher training did not train them for the realities of teaching and (ii) teachers with university affiliated
intensive training gave credit to their practice teaching as being valuable. I have deliberately avoided names in this section in the best interests of my participants.

A teacher with a one year part-time In-service training clarified that it had no effect on her,

‘a little bit of child psychology which we learnt, but even that is what I did in college so that was also nothing new to me… the other things I did what everyone else had to do…we did it but nothing changed me there… I remained the way I was’.

This may be understandable as the course is once a week and so may not be as impactful. It was a revelation that during the course, she was working as a proxy teacher initially but did not continue it. The basic premise of in-service formal training is that it goes hand-in-hand with ‘work’ in an early childhood center; the theoretical underpinnings were meant to feed into improvement in practice.

She went on to add that it was in her current school that she ‘learnt a lot’. She felt that children should also have music as she enjoyed the music and piano sessions during her training. She bluntly proclaimed that the training did not train her for the realities of teaching.

Another teacher mentioned that the training did not prepare her for handling a group of children. She credited her internship and observation when ‘you have to be observing the whole class for seven days and three days we were supposed to be observing one particular child’. Observation for just a week was also perceived useful. Though she had trained as a Montessori teacher, her practice did not reflect the Montessori method. Again, she attributed her learning to the school where she worked.

Dealing with Management issues, learning the administrative skills to start and run a center successfully were ideas suggested as add-on to the course apart from making it ‘more real’.

One of them mentioned that she was not really happy with her training (short term pre-service training). She admitted that the ‘right kind of training
would help a teacher’. She believed that training and exposure to children before joining a job would really help the teachers to teach; to know what was supposed to be done in class and to learn how to handle different kinds of children.

Another participant, who had completed her one-year training from a private institute articulated that the training was helpful in understanding the ‘child’s level’. On probing, she seemed uncertain about what she meant, ‘At what level you are teaching depends on the child. The child is the one who decided like this is suitable for my level or not’. The confusion about concepts (e.g. child centeredness) and terms (e.g. playway) was mirrored by many other participants.

The issue of internship was surfaced by a teacher. During her part time training, she had been placed in a particular classroom. The ‘idea was to please the teacher and get the grades… So certain things you have to keep doing because that teacher is sitting there.’ She perceived her training to be ineffective and valued her on-the-job learning more than the formal training. She believed that studying about teaching did not make one a good teacher; until one actually practices it as a part of their daily life. She too mentioned that an effective training would be a boon to teachers.

There were two teachers who had completed their full time in-service training and had university-affiliated diplomas to their name. There was a stark contrast to the way they viewed their training as compared to the other participants, which I have highlighted.

In one case, the teacher strongly believed that teacher education should be mandatory. In her work experiences, trained teachers were better than untrained but the quality of training was what was important. Simply having a certificate did not make one trained to teach. The intensity of the teacher education program was what differentiated two teachers in their workplace. She herself spoke well about her training but clarified that the practice teaching experiences were what helped her the most.
In the second case, the teacher believed that her training was adequate and the practice teaching during training was the most valuable. She raised an interesting issue about practice teaching. According to her, teacher trainees were sent for their practice teaching (internship) to different schools by the teacher education institute. She conjectured that depending on the type of school (formal, academic-oriented or play oriented), during internship, trainee teachers adopt and look for similar schools when finding jobs. She gave her own example about joining the school where she had done her internship during the training as that school 'shapes your thinking'.

Even though these teachers valued their training, both went on to speak highly about their workplaces as the main learning ground. One of them summarized it saying the training college was just a primer; it was the job that actually made one a teacher.

So it seemed that teachers value learning on the job from the school more than their formal teacher education. I discuss the theme in the next part.

4.3.2.6 Summary of theme

Let me summarize the belief systems that teachers had regarding their workplaces:

- Teachers believed that they learnt about their work from their workplaces.
- They believed that they should ‘move on’ to a new job if they were not comfortable (if there was a contradiction between what they deeply believed and what the school ethos demanded).
- Teachers believed that if they feel comfortable in a job, then they should fulfill the school’s expectations.
- They strongly believed that they learn on the job from different sources like their peers, mentors, though observations, professional workshops and meetings.
Results and Discussion

- Teachers valued the feedback, evaluation and approval not only from their peers but also the supervisors/principals and management; which in turn made them feel more confident about their teaching.

- Teachers placed less value on their teacher training experiences and believed that the experience didn’t help in handling the realities of teaching. Practice teaching in intensive training programs was assessed as the most worthy part of the training.

4.3.2.7 Propositions and discussion

I put forth the following propositions and discuss the findings related to this theme:

- Teachers seem to adapt themselves to their workplace. Only if there is a remarkable difference perceived between what the school expects and their thinking, they choose to discontinue that job and move to another school. More often than not, they adapt to their workplaces, without much questioning, as long as they feel comfortable.

The culture of the preschool where the teachers worked was an influential context, according to Einarsdottir (2001). In her study of preschool teachers in Iceland, she concluded that school cultures had a direct and indirect influence on the teachers. She used Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory to explain that the teacher was impacted by the context of the school as well as the interactions within the context, which in turn was nested in the larger culture. This impact could be seen in her beliefs and her practices.

McGee (2006) also recounted the potential ability of a local instructional subculture to influence teacher’s attitudes, beliefs, and concerns and that the ability was significant. Many studies point out to the huge impact of the school culture on the effectiveness of the teacher but I would like to raise the issue of why teachers were more than willing to adapt.

I raise the issue from the perspective of the teachers ‘will’ to adapt as against the passiveness of her adjustment. Though in many of my
readings, researchers had talked of the ‘agency’ of the teacher in what she does, especially in the context of change initiatives; I continued to question the fundamental reason why all the participants would adapt to the schools where they happened to work.

One of the reasons, discussed earlier, had to do with owners who anyway were the decision makers and therefore there was no reason why they should not adapt to the school expectations. After all, they were responsible for what was expected from the teachers. But what was the ‘driver’ for the other participants? I turned towards the socio-cultural expectations to look for feasible answers.

The adaptability of teachers to the environment may reflect expectations of the culture – in India women are expected to adapt to new environments. I raise this issue not as a feminist (though I admit it would be valid to do so!) but as a person who has lived, worked and become acclimatized to different environments. Some of my own socialization also suggested an almost overwhelming emphasis on ‘adjustment’. Adjustment was valued as a characteristic that was appreciable and highly prized, especially in women of marriageable age. The direct implication was to the environment that the girl had to adjust in, right after she got married. So, do teachers echo this adjustment in their work places? Were the cultural expectations imbibed so deeply in the teachers that they found it easy to adapt to their workplaces? Did that facilitate a smooth transition? This could well be a reason.

I wondered whether the act of leaving a job and finding a new one was a pattern. Amongst my participants, most were in the current workplace for a number of substantial years. A fall out was that they would be in a comfort zone and were loathe to change or challenge their work. This may seem like a probable reason but for the fact that I did not observe any complacency in any of them. The passion with which most were involved in the job, the fervor with which they spoke about the children was evident of individuals who enjoyed and were engaged with their work.
An experienced teacher tended to get a job quite easily in the city. There were high chances of landing a job easily after a training course (Sengupta, 2006b). When a teacher believed that the workplace was not the right fit, she was also aware that she could get a job in another school. My interactions with school principals highlighted the issue of the need for good quality teachers who were considered ‘hard to come by’ (a principal, personal conversation, 2004). But the tendency to stay on could be dictated by various other factors like salary, distance from residence, reputation of workplace and a sense of belonging. Was it a coincidence that all of the participants (except one who relocated to another city) continued to work in the organization they joined years back? Though teacher attrition and retention was not a scope of this study, it was worthwhile to ask what made teachers stay back in particular schools.

I felt the need to take up the issue of the mismatch between individual beliefs and beliefs of a system. The data showed that teachers had a particular set of beliefs prior to joining a job and looked only for major value based differences. Many responses proved that teachers were willing to mould themselves to the school system quite easily. Did that mean their own beliefs could be side lined to accommodate beliefs of the system? Studies (Smith & Shepard, 1988; Stolp & Smith, 1995) have suggested that teachers’ beliefs appear to be interwoven with school culture and social climate. Beliefs held by individual teachers were related to beliefs by others in the same environment. Trained teachers could be looking out for a school system which they have been exposed to. Untrained teachers may be more open to develop their belief systems about children, about teaching, about learning after being exposed to the school. Joining a job may not drastically change their belief systems but certainly a ‘blending’ of belief systems took place. It raises the question of whether educational settings are aware of or equipped to take up this responsibility (McGee, 2006), which is discussed in the next part.
Teachers internalize the expectations of the school where they work. They seem to exhibit a deep sense of debt for a supportive environment, almost to the extent of excluding their own contribution to the school system. Power dynamics within school systems may be an additional complexity.

I found a resonance of the above in a study by Muchmore (2002), where she described one of the reasons why she took up the research.

‘As a teacher, I subconsciously thought of myself as a technician hired to implement the policies and curricula that were mandated by the school board or the public law, rather than as a respected professional whose beliefs, opinions, and expertise were truly valued by my employers’ (p. 1).

When I analysed the data, I too sensed the tacit dynamics of power play in the schools. It was easy to recognize it in all teachers, even the ones who held administrative posts. The school structure seemed to indicate a certain hierarchy. The small schools where there were less teachers also had a clear tacit ‘chain of command’ which was more explicit in the larger set ups. I heard the teachers’ voice their gratitude to the schools, especially administrators. I saw the power dynamics play out in small schools where my participants were the owners; so there was an unstated command over the other teachers who were hired. It played out in the way they dealt with or the way their ideas were taken up. In the larger schools, it played out in the reverse where my participants considered themselves as the ones who were hired to do their job and they considered it as their responsibility to do the job sincerely.

To understand how the teacher viewed herself in the school structure, it is necessary to see the “world” (i.e., social reality) through the eyes of the teachers (Makhanya, 2001). My interpretation is that inherently a teacher viewed or ‘compartmentalized’ herself as an employee or an employer rather than as a professional. This had implications for ‘professionalization’ which has been discussed in the subsequent point.
The notion of how one became a good teacher is impacted by the daily work of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). Little, 1981 (in ibid, 1983) identified two norms in school systems - the norm of collegiality (expectation of improving one’s teaching is a collective undertaking) and the norm of continuous improvement (expectations that analysis, evaluation and experimentation are tools to make teachers effective). These norms reflect a collegial work environment; it would be worthwhile for school systems to adopt these norms.

One of the findings related to the warmth and positive atmosphere in the schools. Probably this was a reason for the teachers to become an integral part of the school. Gupta (2006) also suggested community building and extended family feelings that were fostered in many schools and communities in India. Establishing warm relationships with parents could be a natural fall out but not necessarily, as the findings suggested. Joshi & Taylor (2005) believed that teachers could be mentored by the administration or other senior colleagues towards establishing relationships with parents; thus, in a way, behaving according to the ‘ways’ that the school expected rather than with the conviction of what was ‘right’ as a teacher.

When teachers talked about their beliefs and goals, they often reflected the ideology of preschools where they worked (Einarsdottir, 2001). It was true for majority of my participants, who, as I have mentioned earlier, sounded like spokesperson of their school. They reflected the school expectations in their talk and their practice although the articulating the ideology seemed difficult. This may be closely linked to the fact that teachers attribute learning to teach to the people within the school. Others within the school system transmit similar values, attitudes and beliefs to the teachers; unknowingly, they became a part of the system. Sergiovanni (1994) mentioned that preschools have the characteristics of a community where the staff is bound together by shared values and beliefs. The indoctrination may happen smoothly, steadily and unwittingly. This implies the enormous role of the school system and specifically leaders within the system in the ‘making’ of a teacher,
unknowingly and inadvertently. The concept of schools as learning organization (Senge, 1990) reflects a shift in consciousness of this responsibility. As McGee (2006) pointed out, schools need to create time for meaningful collaboration, reflection, and implementation of best practices by teachers.

Another way of thinking was articulated by Barnes (1992) who believed teachers’ interpretive frames (underlying assumptions) were not solely commitments to a personal philosophy or objective conditions at work but the two together created the frames that shape her actions (Barnes, 1992 in Malm, 2006). The combination of personal beliefs and work philosophies could be true for the participants, yet, I believe the latter may have been more dominant in my participants than the former.

- Teachers are open and willing to learn from the school. Peers, mentors and other opportunities for professional development become the sources for learning. They mostly seem to imbibе ideas or strategies, rather than the ideology or philosophy of the school (which is rarely articulated by the school system).

The openness and willingness to learn had been quoted as an essential characteristic of an early childhood teacher in the literature. It is indeed noteworthy that all the participants were learners in the truest sense of the word. There is ample evidence in the literature to support that teachers learn from colleagues and mentors in their work places. Gupta (2006) found that early childhood teachers (teaching the 1st and 2nd Std.) in Delhi considered that they had learnt on the job through ‘encounters with other teachers’ (p.147), workshops and mentoring by supervisors.

The field of Organizational Development is replete with studies which prove that people learn on their job. Jennings, 2006 suggested that 80% of what people need to know they learn informally on-the-job. Peer coaching had also been used as a model for staff development (Dantonio, 2001 in McGee, 2006) to address teacher’s attitudes, beliefs, and concerns and ultimately improve classroom instructional practices.
Schools as contexts for teachers’ learning assumed the prevailing norms and patterns of interaction either limit or promote opportunities for professional development (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). A concern that came to my mind was that if teachers are learning only on the job then was the quality of their teaching dependent on the quality of their peers? This issue was worth examining. Creating collaborative work environments which were geared towards scaffolding of a teacher’s learning could be a feasible answer to address the concern. Hargreaves (1992) suggested that teacher cultures within school systems may have ‘contrived collegiality’. Within such cultures, schools included formal and specific procedures leading to initiatives such as peer coaching, mentor teaching and training programs. A matter which was interwoven was about teachers who may not be readily welcomed into the profession (Bruhn, 2005). In my study, there was a distinct collegial environment but teachers learning in an environment of resistance may be an added complexity.

Another issue worth discussing is the idiosyncratic nature of mentoring (Hawkey 1997). A mentor’s values, assumptions and thinking influence the learner. They could be role models (Maynard & Furlong, 1994) and the teachers could be imbibing through direct observation. They could also have played the role of supporter or advisor (Hawkey, 1998), giving feedback and helping teachers with tips to improve in the classroom. I sensed a deep sense of gratitude for the mentor in all the participants. One thought that was mentioned by the teachers related to the freedom given by mentors for the teachers to evolve. That made me wonder - was it freedom to teach the way they wanted to or whether it was the implied trust that the mentor showed in them which they valued? Nevertheless, the guidance given by a co-worker was believed to be valuable to the teachers.

Another matter is the relationship of the mentor and the teacher. In most of the cases of my participants, mentors that they mentioned were in their current school or the national professional organization. They were either supervisors/facilitators/principal and the presumption is that the mentors had more number of years of experience and were in higher
positions. The added role of the mentor as an evaluator could be implied in the relationship.

In a study by Feiman-Nemser & Parker (1993) on training of student teachers, it was found that evaluation of students’ lessons generally remained restricted to a discussion about the ‘how’ of teaching and did not touch on the reasons underlying their actions. Unless mentors discuss not just the ‘performance’ of the teacher but the thinking behind it, it may not lead to developing either a clear ideology or reflective skills in the practitioner. Since there were no standards for the chosen mentors, it seemed safe to assert that learning depended entirely on the relationship, chosen role (supporter, role model, evaluator or any other) and personal perspectives of the mentors. So a teacher could either imbibe through observation or improve through feedback / discussions or both. It may be important to question how practical knowledge that normally remains implicit (Zanting, Verloop & Vermunt, 2001) can be made explicit in the teacher-mentor relationship.

Teachers learn how to teach when taught the way they were expected to teach (McGee, 2006). Professional development may be possible through informal and formal sources; pointing out to a powerful and intangible role of the school system. Workshops which were arranged for teachers to attend led to the supposition that teachers were not in control of their professional development but the decision making of professional opportunity was dependent on school authorities. There was a sense of fragmented exposure to specific skills and knowledge through workshops; which had implications on developing a clear cut ideology of teaching. If a teaching ideology is clear, then the workshops became means for strengthening, reviewing and reflecting on skills.

A related matter that I found was that teachers found it difficult to articulate the ideology or educational philosophy of the school. Abbate-Vaughn (2004) cited Sharp and Green (1975) to define ideologies as a connected set of systematically related beliefs and ideas about what were felt to be the essential features of teaching. They added the tasks that teachers have to perform, the specific skills and techniques required and
the ideas about how these might be acquired and developed. The ideology of each school was different, yet, neither was it stated particularly nor could teachers explain it clearly. My sense was that the term itself was rarely used in conversations and the undeclared expectations were imbibed slowly by the teachers over years of working, never quite becoming a clear set of ideas. Another reason could be simpler - the teachers had never thought about it as no one had asked them before!

As far as the educational philosophies go, again I sensed ambivalence in the way teachers responded. Some of the teachers mentioned that during their formal teacher education they had studied some philosophers - both Western and Indian - and they really were not sure which philosophy was followed. Needless to say, their confusion was understandable as most schools followed a combination of philosophies. The finding seemed utterly believable as in India coexistence is a way of life. Coexistence at both the physical and spiritual level is evident from the ease with which Indians adapt from different cultures. My contention was that most schools would not have given much thought to the philosophy but thinking would have evolved over the years to ‘add on’ to what was being practiced. The philosophy, according to Gupta (2006) was significant as it seeped into the school curriculum. Since potentially opposing ideologies could affect the work of teachers (Abbate-Vaughn, 2004), it was obvious that ideologies and philosophies must be defined by schools.

It may be worthwhile to ask whether the field was looking out at building a holistic philosophy of teaching in the practitioners or had teaching become an amalgamation of bright ideas to be tried out in the class? A well thought out, comprehensive and stated professional development system developed within the school could be a way forward. It could be that teachers accept ideas easily in the absence of well articulated philosophy or ideology of teaching in the particular school system. It is time for all stakeholders to articulate their thinking, assumptions and philosophies and document the same for giving clear
direction to the field of ECE. Teachers must become an integral part of co-designing such documents.

Schools with a clear commitment to teacher development tied to their vision of education and stated ideology would be most likely to scaffold individual teachers’ growth.

- Teachers seek approval and reinforcement of ways to work from others in the school, which in turn makes them feel confident of the way they work.

In the realm of the professional community all teachers, including veterans, need reinforcement and acknowledgement for their individual contributions (Bhrun, 2005). Seeking approval as a means to gain confidence and working with the aim of being appreciated were two separate though intertwined strands of this issue. Why did teachers look for approval from the school authorities? Could the reasons reflect the power dynamics where teachers have always been considered to be at the end of the value chain? Have teachers become so used to being evaluated (from the time of their training) that they depend on a feedback to be convinced about their teaching? Or is it simply a matter of wanting appreciation – a fundamental need?

There was a lack of standard mechanisms or tools to qualify teacher competence, teacher appropriateness and teacher evaluation. Culturally-appropriate standards with built-in self evaluation mechanisms can help the teacher gain a deeper insight as a professional (MSSRF, 2001).

When teachers were externally oriented i.e. they looked outside for giving them direction in their work; there seemed to be a distinct dependence on ‘others’. As professionals, an unwavering confidence in our work could be a result of deep value of the profession and the professional journey. How can we value or respect ourselves as professionals and not tie it to the sense of obligation towards supportive school environments? It may be a challenge to value ourselves as professionals and continue to be humble enough to improve in our work.
Another reason why teachers devalued themselves was examined by Ayers (1989). He attributed the low status of teachers and its ramifications. An interesting point he observed was that the participants of his study ‘…ironically, each had also internalized aspects of the lowly status and each participates in a subtle self-condemnation’ (p. 134). I witnessed that each teacher was (like in Ayer’s study) surprised that they could contribute to research and one even mentioned that she could offer me nothing as she was not trained.

Schools that acknowledge teachers as professionals and visibly support their development would go a long way towards adding value.

I needed to address the aspect of isolation as professionals. In all of the cases, teachers depicted a sense of community with their co-workers within the schools but there was a distinct lack of meeting, sharing and learning with practitioners from other schools. The time demands on teachers’ lives could be a reason.

- **Teachers rarely value their teacher education / training experiences except for the practice teaching during university affiliated intensive preservice teacher training.**

Muralidharan & Kaul (1993) observed that teacher training in early childhood education in India ranges from 3 months to 2 years. Short, limited duration of training may be insufficient, so, teachers may be forced to learn on the job. Alternatively, teachers without training will need to gain their confidence through informally picking up the different facets of teaching.

Studies by Lortie (1975) and Jackson (1986) found that many teachers teach by impulse and intuition relying on personal experience rather than on reflective thought and professional education. So it may not necessarily be the quality of the teacher education programs but a set of complex factors in the act of teaching that made teachers perceive their training as having minimal effect.

Another reason why teachers may perceive their teacher education course poorly could be due to the gap between training and practice (Sengupta, 2006a, 2007). Teacher education must be grounded in a more
holistic view on what teachers know about teaching (Fang, 1996; Kelly & Berthelsen, 1995; Kusmic, 1994).

Though many studies (Schulz, 2005; Moore, 2003; Pittard, 2003; Bray, 1995; Hawkey, 1995; McDermott et al., 1995; Goodman, 1988) looked into the effects of pre-service practicum experiences on student teachers; working teachers’ perceptions of how beliefs were either reinforced or changed by this experience was not clear. Many studies suggested that practicum provided first hand experience of the multiple demands and dilemmas of teaching (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Britzman, 1991; Calderhead, 1988). Bray (1995) reported that the student teaching experience represented not only the preliminary step for the developing teacher but also was a critical component in any teacher education program; which seemed to be the case in the current study, too.

Regulation and standards in teacher education seemed to be the need of the hour (Swaminathan, 1998; Datta, 2001). Professionals need to collaborate to bring about change in both quality and quantity of teacher education (Sengupta, 2007). Otherwise, it might remain a dream to expect value-addition through training. The results also implied the need to strengthen and spread good quality training programs across the city (and country) with intensive practice teaching.

Conversely, I raise another concern. If formal training is not of value and informal training was a matter of chance, who decided what was ‘appropriate’? A valuable insight from Cochran-Smith (2004a, 2004b) questioned the view of how teacher education programs were blamed for the failures and “irrelevance” in schools as though teachers, teaching, and teacher education programs were each independent agents and alone could accomplish equity.

The reality of few good quality programs implied the need to look at schools as partners in the training of teachers. The sharing of responsibility may be a perfect antidote to the ‘blame game’ between schools and training institutes. A more holistic and articulated approach requires universities and schools to engage in a collaborative dialogue to
enhance the potential of both institutions (Flores, 2006). It may be time to create different collaborative models towards creation, sustainability and scalability of a work force for the schools.

The finding that as long as basic values were not disturbed, beliefs of teachers about how to teach and work were strengthened and impacted by the school system made me leaning towards what Feiman-Nemser (1983) suggested, ‘Growth in effectiveness is less a function of individual characteristics and more a reflection of the opportunities and expectations that surround teachers in their work’ (p. 24). This finding asserted that nursery teachers were moulded by the education or school system in which they functioned.

The next section presents the analysis regarding the curriculum and pedagogical practices of early childhood teachers.
Another theme that became obvious as the analysis progressed was the emphasis early childhood teachers placed on 'lessons for life' (Sejal). Teachers believed that the transmission of values as a goal of education was even more vital than academic learning.

Teachers in their initial interviews talked about the holistic development of children (including personality development), but on probing there was a wide consensus about the dominance of socio-emotional aspect of children in their thinking. Analysis clearly indicated that teachers believed that the socio-emotional goals (with a value orientation) were always at the back of their mind. The essence was brought out by Kavita in the following manner:

‘If you want to teach them (children) you have to live with them, you have to understand them ... I could be teaching them by not even teaching them anything. By how am I communicating with an adult I am teaching them this is the way you need to be polite... I am doing snacks this is the way you need to be humble enough to give snacks... I am still teaching them...when I am asking them to sleep I am teaching them you need to be quiet a minute. So I feel teaching is happening at every instance.’

The invisible or tacit nature of teaching values was underscored by her. Teachers’ prime concern seemed to be teaching these tacit values to young children. What struck me was the pervasiveness of the concern and its direct integration into what is done in the classroom. In trying to understand the pervasiveness of this deeply entrenched belief system in early childhood teachers, I took refuge in looking at teachers’ articulation of what they think were the goals for children and teased out pedagogical practices which supported the belief. Their practices seemed to further their commitment to help children learn these life lessons. I have divided the theme into two aspects:

4.3.3.1 ‘Lessons for life’ manifested in pedagogical practice:

4.3.3.2 Revisiting curriculum and pedagogy
4.3.3.1 Lessons for life manifested in pedagogical practice

What did early childhood teachers believe were the goals for children? These belief systems were the fundamental drivers of what teachers did in the classroom. The participants shared that the overarching goal was of being prepared for life (lessons of life as referred by one of the participants). Many cited them as life skills, foundational values or what children should carry from here into their adult life. When they were teaching, this was always at the back of their minds. The lessons for life were delineated from the analysis:

- To respect others and self
- To imbibe ‘Indian’ values
- To become caring individuals and show concern for others
- To become sensitive and confident adults
- To become emotionally healthy human beings
- To become disciplined and organized adults
- To develop a learning ‘attitude’

A point to be noted here was how teachers were creating an ‘ideal’ adult and the emphasis on ‘becoming’. The teachers were visualizing how the child could become an adult with certain qualities, worldview and attitudes. Their conversations reflected the surety of the power of these early years – as if they were certain that the three year olds in their classroom could ‘be set on the right track’ (Bhumika). The belief is deeply anchored in the significance of the early foundation years in the formation of an adult.

Apart from the lessons for life, there was another goal that teachers articulated – children should be intellectually stimulated and learn basic readiness skills, which they called the ‘academic program’. Though this goal was mentioned in passing by all, it did not sound like a primary concern for most teachers. In fact, the significance of academic learning paled in front of the other value-laden goals for three year olds.

I observed that teachers in their day to day interactions as well as during the transaction of the curriculum, would ‘slip in’ these instances or even
moments to further the aim of transmitting values. When the observations were analyzed and interpreted, it did seem that the teachers were paying more attention to teach lessons for life rather than to teach the goals mentioned in the much touted syllabus. The finding suggested that incidental learning as mentioned in most theoretical treatises was believed to be far more important than the other expected learning in the nursery classrooms. This claim can be backed by what teachers articulated and what they enacted. Sejal confided that,

‘you know, I think the academics is the last thing that is important at this stage. What is important is that he is happy…his emotional well being…his physical well being.’

Mamta reiterated,

‘What more do you want except a happy child? You know I would be happier when my child is happy than if he knew about dinosaurs…when they lived and what they ate…and it is ok you give information to children but it is not only information that is needed.’

Another teacher pointed out the inevitability of the children learning literacy and numeracy,

‘…the kids anyway learn how to read and write…why pressurize them now? There is a lot they have to learn. When they are older …they are involved with academics…adults don’t invest so much time…now is the time to teach them values…to develop their personality’.

She made the point of the critical period for teaching values to the children and not holding the maxim true for learning to read and write. Her classroom did have the usual ‘readiness activities’ to prepare the children to read and write but I saw a laxity in expecting completion of work she gave children. The point was illustrated during observations.

The children were given puzzles. I noticed that when a particular child would complete a puzzle either she would ask another child to ‘share’ or the teacher, if around, would exchange the puzzle with another child. The teacher constantly kept up a commentary that we must share the puzzles. On more than three
occasions in 10 minutes, I observed that the teacher completed the puzzles for the children before exchange.

Learning to share was mentioned as the reason for doing so. It would be worth pointing out here that the teacher in question had undergone a full year of pre service training. My interpretation that completion of puzzles was not considered as important as the value of sharing seemed relevant in the context.

The detailed explanation of the goals and their manifestation in practice follows:

a. To learn to respect others and self

Teachers want children to develop self respect and learn to respect others. Each teacher emphasized the same idea in different ways. Kavita wanted the children to become good individuals and to respect others,

‘…not only for the high authority but for themselves and their brethren. Very often they do not respect themselves and that to build into children in this day and age is very important.’

She gave an example of respecting one self,

‘What do I mean by respect for yourself? Not watching too much T.V. How are you not respecting yourself? You are not respecting your eyes which are a gift of God. So this is only by showing them that this is the link … we can hope that they might imbibe such qualities’.

She laid focus on linking values to the concrete experience of watching T.V., which most three year olds could identify with in today’s social context. T.V. viewing was pervasive in young children and many of the teachers expressed deep concern at the amount and content of T.V. watching by children. She reiterated this to her class on one day when a child was seen rubbing his eyes. She took that as a cue to tell the class that they should take care of their eyes as God had given it to them as a gift and how when we watch T.V. our eye muscles get tired.
Sejal reinforced the idea that how one spoke to children and respected them was absolutely non-negotiable. She strongly believed that ‘even a child who is a one year old needs respect’.

How teachers handled toilet accidents in the classroom underscored the maturity and the notion of respect. In one nursery, I observed a child had wet himself. The child sitting near him called out to the teacher. She moved towards the child, realized what had happened and immediately turned to the class and said it was ok. She asked a child sitting near the door to call the ‘bai’ (support staff) and asked her to take the child. She continued with the class after mentioning that ‘sometimes these things happen. Remember to be nice to him’. It was a perfect example of how the accident was treated in a matter-of-fact way. In a conversation with her, she explained that it was important that the child not feel humiliated or embarrassed ‘…because if he has wet himself. It is fine. Not oh! Now what did you do? Don’t you know that there is a toilet here?’. She also laid emphasis on how the other children should not make the child feel bad. She concluded by saying that the incident was an opportunity to teach children so many values.

The teacher not only handled the incident sensibly but saw it as an opportunity to teach values to all in the classroom. Obviously this was not a planned part, yet, the teacher used it to further the latent curriculum.

b. To imbibe ‘Indian’ values

I heard the word ‘Indian’ in many conversations. I realized that the teachers would refer to many values as ‘our values’ or ‘we all believe’. On probing, it became clear that teachers saw these values as related to the socio-cultural context. In her interview, Mamta talked animatedly about the Indian scriptures. She had studied them and felt that it was important to integrate them in the curriculum especially for the nursery children as ‘this is the right age to expose them to this facet of the Indian culture’. In her school, every morning children recited Sanskrit prayers. She was proud that children could recite them and shared how small children could sit with their eyes closed during the time. She believed that it was important as it gave them a sense of quietness.
Anuradha underlined the importance of character building as one of the goals of education (she was inspired deeply by Swami Vivekananda’s philosophy). For her it translated to children learning things like caring for others, being honest and getting along with others. One day a child came in with a bandage on her knee. She called the child out and told the class

‘We all have to take care of her. She has got hurt. We should play gently and not push her. Otherwise it will hurt her more. We will all take care of her, ok?’

She later explained that it was important to inculcate this value. Otherwise, according to her, people become unmindful of how their actions effect others. She related concern for others as a character building strength.

Mayura referred to the interconnectedness in our society – how each one was dependent on others – whether one is family, extended family or just friends. She believed that it was essential to teach our children to be social and that they were part of a community. When the community needs them they should be there and obviously the people in the community will always be willing to help in need. The class, she said, was a microcosm of the community and so we should encourage social behaviors within the classroom.

I noticed how teachers handled conflict between children. Mostly, they would listen to both the children and then tell both not to do what they did (the negative behavior) and then would ask them to say sorry to each other. The last step always involved making the children hug each other. On enquiring about this typical procedure, many articulated that forgiving others was an Indian virtue and resolution of conflicts was essential to the well being of society.

I saw similar social skills being reinforced in different classrooms. Two children wanting the same toy were told to play together. Many a times, it did not resolve the issue but nevertheless, there was an insistence of sharing and caring. An innovative way in which a teacher solved a conflict resonated the idea of adjustment – two children wanted the swing and were pulling it in opposite directions. The teacher came and made both of them sit on the
swing (which was small so they had to squeeze in). She commented that sharing was easier than fighting.

Kindness was another ‘Indian value’ (Bhumika) which was encouraged in children. I asked her why she considered it Indian. Her response was that in India we value kindness – towards old people, towards friends and relatives. She gave examples – we learn kindness for the elderly as we are expected to live with grandparents / extended families; we learn to be kind towards others as Indians consider themselves to be a part of a large set up of relatives and friends -social functions like weddings are opportunities for inclusion. Her idea was that the social set up demanded the virtue of kindness. Reema summed it up,

‘They learn so many things like to take care of somebody...how to respect...how to help and share their things...all the values which are basically a part of the Indian culture’.

c. To become caring individuals and show concern for others

Practitioners hoped that children would develop social skills. Their goals included care and concern for others. I wanted to know why teachers felt the need to be caring. I was met with puzzled looks as most of them were unable to articulate the need to show concern except to say that they hoped that children would learn to be caring. When I asked why, the responses confirmed to me that this was not a planned or conscious practice but they believed that caring adults made a better world.

So if teachers wanted children to become caring adults, what did they do to further the idea? There was never a time when teachers verbalized care but my field experiences made me realize that there were enough practices to support the belief of care and concern.

I found that the teachers genuinely cared about the children they were with. I heard this reiterated in the way teachers expressed their rewards of teaching. For most of the teachers, the moment when a child comprehended something or responded to the teacher or ‘listened to’ (Mayura) them were the most satisfying. Overwhelmingly I heard voices which sounded respectful and
caring. It could be argued that due to the researcher effect I saw no untoward experience in any of the schools which made me believe that a teacher was unresponsive or callous towards one or more children. I hasten to add that children were disciplined by teachers during the days I observed but I felt that at no time was there an indifference or uncaring attitude of teachers.

A case in point was an image which lingered in my mind.

On a particular day during the typical Mumbai monsoons, due to heavy rains, a parent was delayed. The school was over; the children had all gone except for a single boy in Sanaa’s class. His eyes were brimming with tears. I followed Sanaa as she came back holding the boy’s hand back into the classroom and sat with him in one corner next to the window. For more than half an hour, she continued to sit there with the child, reassuring him that his mother would come soon; talking calmly and soothingly; till she handed him to his mother (worried, fraught and wet!).

When I questioned her later, she simply told me that at that point of time, that’s the least she could have done; and that as a parent, she would have expected the same from her child’s teacher. It seemed to be a natural way of handling the situation.

It was important to recognize that she could have opted for a number of alternatives like asking the support staff or maybe taking the child with her to the staff room especially as she had other work to complete before she left for home; but she chose to sit with the child believing that it was important.

Paying attention to the needs of children and being sensitive to them seemed a natural way in all the schools. If children were crying, there was some teacher who would respond. Even in cases where the strategy of ignoring the behavior was being utilized, I could feel the alertness of the teacher towards the child. The children who were as young as 2½ years were picked up, hugged, patted, smiled at; in short, the teachers physical interaction with children was high (the point is discussed in details in the next section).

I saw another reflection of caring in the interactions of teachers with other adults (I have made a mention of this in 4.3.3). There was an easy-going familiarity of the teachers within a school. I overheard teachers share
personal stories with their co-workers. I also sensed a feeling of unity. I saw it reflected in the way the other teachers in a school would go out of the way to let me and my participant interact.

d. To become sensitive and confident adults

Early childhood practitioners certainly wanted children to turn out to be confident, sensitive and responsible citizens of their country. One of the participants valued sensitivity and connected this goal to her early experiences. She went on to give the example of her own school teacher - how she called her ‘abnormal’ and that rankled even till now. She started to cry as she narrated the incident and told me ‘I never want to be that kind of teacher. I want each child to become a sensitive child…so I have to be sensitive…otherwise I may hurt the child for life’.

Her life experiences had made her believe that it was important to be clued on to others and avoid any hurtful words. In her practice, she came across as a serene person who would not be upset even when the whole class was ‘not in control’. I always heard her speak rather softly to each child. She acknowledged that she consciously tried to imbibe this quality in children and she hoped that as a role model, it would be worth it even if, at times, the class was out of control.

Pearl echoed her sentiments. She recounted a similar story during her adolescence of a teacher who doubted her ability to pass and said so in front of the entire class. Her learning was,

‘The negativity that…many teachers have, that should not be there. That is what I feel. You should not say something like this which will put the child off. You know that…see this has still remained in my heart and I can tell you this… This one has affected me…I will not say this even to my child. Or even to any kid in my class.’

If you were a 3 year old in her classroom you would hear a lot of praise. She tended to say ‘good’ easily and liberally; she smiled at children when they responded, she wanted the children to ‘feel important’ as according to her,
'You keep saying good...whatever...may be they have been trying a little. Even the word ‘good’ makes a lot of difference. See, sometimes these children don’t understand big, big words. Even saying ‘wow’...and if you also tell them...wow...wow...you must have seen Akshay (name changed) saying this whenever I take the attendance...'.

Attendance in Pearl’s class was a long drawn affair. She would call out each child’s name and wait patiently till the child responded verbally. Each child was appreciated for the effort. Akshay, one of the children, who was ‘intelligent and smart’ would copy her (Pearl seemed proud of the fact that he had picked up this habit from her – ‘it will help him when he grows up’). For Pearl, making each child feel important and value their efforts was the way to propagate the life skill of making them sensitive and confident human beings.

Teachers considered that confidence made children independent. Reema gave the occasion of the Annual Day function,

‘The reason why we have our annual day...to clearly boost up their confidence...to make them independent. All these small goals are attained and I think by the end of the year we see change in nearly 80% of them...The change is always there. In that one year completely we see a change.’

Clearly teachers were aiming for these ‘changes’ in children. Mamtatook the children out every Friday and she believed that apart from the knowledge, children learnt to be more confident and independent. Any field trip was an opportunity to be sure of self.

Sejal made a distinction between confidence and intelligence by giving the example of the children who pass out from her school,

‘Lot of them have that self confidence. You know they may not be the toppers. It is not always that intelligence has anything to do with confidence.’

In her classroom children were given choices. As they came in, I observed how the children went to whichever corner they wanted to – doll house (typical house stuff like utensils, bed, dressing table, dolls etc.), blocks (two containers full of different shapes, colors and sizes), pretend play (different
clothes and accessories), reading corner (with an array of books on shelves),
toy area (including puzzles, hammer and nails, stuffed toys etc.) or the
outdoor play area (with outdoor equipment and tricycles etc.). As the day
progressed, children were called in small groups of 3-5 to do various
activities like painting and ‘writing’ a story (the children would draw and
told Sejal the story which she wrote on the paper). The children could go
back to whatever they were doing. There was a gentle reminder from the
teacher to do the teacher-directed activity. Otherwise, the children made their
own choices.

Sejal was certain that these child-friendly practices were helpful to children.
She felt that decision making gave children the certain confidence which was
needed to make them into good citizens of the country.

f. To become emotionally healthy human beings

Sejal in her interview gave the core idea about what she would like children
to do – trust others – and how daily interactions were amenable to giving
these lessons to children. She placed emphasis on teaching them these
lessons. In her words she clarified that the goals were,

‘…those little things...like when the children trust you and they just leave them
selves to you. When they are crying and you pick them up and take them in your
lap at that time I do not think anything is more important than that hug. I think
those little things are far more important because you have taught them that you
can trust adults…you go to your high school and you trust the teachers
there…even in the outside world. That is what basically I think those things if
you teach them I think you have taught them lessons for life.’

Bhumika considered that it was important to assure happy experiences
towards building a positive attitude for children as ‘his attitudes towards…
other things in life… is formed at this stage’. Many of the teachers believed that
the centre should be a place of fun where children were happy.

One episode which happened during my observations related to a child who
was crying as another child had pushed him. The children were in the doll
play area and both wanted the same doll. I noticed how the teacher handled
the situation by talking calmly to the child, ‘If you cry, teacher does not know what you want. Finish your crying. Then tell me what happened.’ She picked the 3 year old, sat with him on a chair and waited patiently till the child stopped crying. In the mean time, some other children, distracted by the crying came over to look at or touch the child. She did not say a word but responded non-verbally to the other children (she later said ‘they were showing concern’). The child stopped crying and she let him get down and go. A little while later, she sat next to the child and talked softly to him. Later, she qualified the importance for helping children to express and verbalize their needs, something which she said she had learnt from the school (current workplace). This example exemplified the facets which the teacher considered worthy – concern for others, responding to others, affirming feelings – which goes towards the ‘emotional well being of the society’.

As Bhumika concluded,

‘Making them happy, independent and emotionally stable individuals...that is the basic goal...as I told you because this nursery is so important...because their attitudes are formed here’.

Thus, teachers wanted children to become caring, sensitive, independent, respectful and emotionally healthy human beings and these goals somehow seemed to be integral to their practices.

g. To become disciplined and organized

Teachers across board wanted children to learn discipline and what many referred to as ‘become organized’ adults. In trying to interpret this goal I broke my mental models of discipline. It took me a while to appreciate that early childhood teachers referred to discipline as a value – ‘a framework to support life’ (Darshana). During the course of my study, I came across many episodes where little children were ‘disciplined’. Though I have not been a witness to any form of corporal punishment or even physical assault on a child, I am well aware that in schools across the country, it is not uncommon. But the voices of the early childhood practitioners echoed the need to discipline the child.
Let me illustrate a common enough incidence in a classroom

‘Alika has hit Kush. The teacher calls her, holds her hand and asks her why she has hit Kush? She tells her that what she has done is wrong, that teacher is not happy with her, that in the morning she had hit another girl (she asks the assistant teacher who the other child was. When she informs her, she continues). “You pushed Priya also in the morning. If you continue this behavior I will tell you to sit in the corner; there is no need to cry, I am not going to be effected by your crying; if you hit anyone else, you will sit in the corner whole day and all the children will say ‘haw! Haw!’ ( a gesture of being shamed)”. She asks Alika to apologize to both of them. She leaves her hand and Alika walks away; she goes to Kush and says sorry and then to Priya. The teacher makes them hug each other and looks satisfied.’

The process of disciplining the child with negative threats and eliciting negative emotions has always been considered to be inappropriate in the literature. When I showed the video clip to the teacher to draw out her beliefs about discipline, this is what she told me:

‘It is the responsibility to love others so therefore not to hit them...That is the responsibility. The child should understand his responsibility also. If we will make him understand from right now like small, small responsibilities then he will grow up in that way’.

She brought to light the perspective that discipline means learning responsibility. She strongly believed that the nursery class was the ‘right time’ to make them learn to sit in a place (a common enough reason to discipline children):

‘I am using most of my energies in disciplining them because this nursery is not the age where I will be doing big concepts ...but the main factor is disciplining, manners...it is my job...at least when he goes to Jr.KG he must be able to sit. He should learn because he is expected to do that...’.

She acknowledged that children loved movement but she was also sure that the practice of sitting quietly had to be initiated gradually. Discipline was looked at as a gradual process of learning with a focus on informing children the acceptable and non-acceptable behaviors. She seemed to be taking the
Another teacher explained discipline in this way:

‘…following instructions is what they will learn and listening is also very important. Like the way they should eat in class we tell them not to drop it down and we tell them about small, small things and these things you know play a very important role. They say, “My teacher said this”. Like we tell them don’t throw, don’t hit, don’t do this, don’t do that, I mean we have to do it.

(So you are saying that the children should be learning from what you tell them..)

Yes. And the teacher has to be patient...children are children...they cannot learn be so systematic and I don’t expect them to be at this age. But then they know that now you have to stand in a line - they are moving towards being disciplined and organized’.

She called being disciplined in life as an important life skill which helped one not only as an individual but also helped the society. She believed that if everyone takes up their own responsibility, the country and the world would be a much better place.

Teachers used both positive and negative terms liberally in their explanation about discipline like ‘learning responsibility’; ‘learning to listen’, ‘learning to sit’, ‘learning to share’ as well as ‘learning not to hit’, ‘learning not to push’, ‘learning not to throw...at others’.

I saw a difference in the methods that were used. As in the previous example, the teacher used threat (sit in a corner) and shaming (children will say haw) (this was the only instance of a teacher handling an issue using these methods) but another teacher shared that one must be firm in a loving manner so that the impact on the child would be long lasting. A strategy Kavita sometimes used was of telling the class at the beginning of the day to ‘behave well as we have a visitor’ (I was the visitor). She linked discipline also to a larger idea of avoiding threat to get someone do what you want them to do. So as teachers, it was her responsibility, to pass on the big message of self
discipline, while nurturing the self esteem of the child. She was the only teacher who articulated a strong philosophical reasoning.

Most teachers wanted children to sit during a teacher - directed activity like story telling; but did not insist on the same behavior during some other activity (‘like cooking’ Kavita). I actually saw teachers being quite lenient. Only when a child would harm another child, they were taken to task. Otherwise, another teacher would step in or the teacher would pick up the child and make him sit next to her (while continuing with whatever she was doing). I saw instances of teachers using non-verbal actions to approve or disapprove behavior. One of the favourites of majority of the teachers was silence. If children were creating a ruckus, she would suddenly become silent and still. This always seemed to work wonders. The young age of the children was mentioned as a reason for being tolerant.

Verbal reprimands were common like ‘please sit’ to ‘teacher will be very sad if you hit again’. The consequence of the act was informed to the children like ‘when you hit someone, they get hurt’; ‘if you don’t share, no one will want to sit next to you’; ‘if you shout, your friends cannot hear what you want to say’, ‘if you push others, you will have no friends’. Sometimes, the consequence was related to the effect on self and sometimes the effect on others. It had to be noted that social exclusion was considered a dire consequence and was repeated often enough with the catch phrase ‘what will others say’ (the others could be peers, parents, teacher, other teachers, and imaginary people).

Another teacher linked the typical routines that were followed in the school as helping children to ‘anticipate the expectations’ which in turn, led to more children settling down. Some of the punishments that teachers talked about was sending a child to another class for a day, making him sit in a corner (I was not privy to either of these), ‘show eyes’ (which happened quite often) as a gesture of disapproval, ignore the behavior, avoid paying attention to the child but one common refrain was to patiently keep telling the child over and over again. Teachers also referred to the idea that the child determined what one should do and that rarely did they use the same strategy for each child.
Another strategy was the use of praise and appreciation for approving behavior. Another belief clearly was about reinforcing positive behavior. In Sanaa’s words,

‘Praise really motivates them to do a lot. They have put in their best……if I say something bad next time they will not do it… Even if it is bad … maybe I will not give a good remark but I will not say anything… because they should not get the idea that bad work is also good.’

She referred to the authenticity of the praise, which I heard many other teachers also echo. I heard and saw appreciation in the form of verbal (wow, great, lets clap for her, I’m so happy) and non-verbal actions (smile, silent look of approval, hug, picking up and kissing the child, pat on the back, tousling the child’s hair, clapping).

So, teachers considered that they would want children to become ‘disciplined’ adults and hence, it was important to differentiate between behavior to be avoided and behavior to be reinforced. Teachers used a variety of methods and strategies but acknowledged individual differences. The whole purpose was to inculcate discipline as a value.

h. To develop a learning ‘attitude’

Teachers expressed the intention of wanting children to learn what they called ‘an attitude of learning’ (Bhumika). This seemed implicit and yet, ambiguous. Teachers tried to explain it as ‘when they grow up, they should want to study’, ‘openness to learn new things’, ‘a way of looking at learning’ and ‘learning how to learn’.

I enquired the significance of developing this attitude. Mayura told me

‘As an adult you can do anything in life if you have this one quality…it can change your life…it gives you confidence and raises your self esteem’.

Bhumika described that it was important as it helped to expose you to all aspects of learning and not just in acquiring knowledge. Sejal believed that teachers could model this attitude. She gave the following example,

‘… we as teachers are also learning, it is not that we know all. If we have that attitude I am sure somewhere it seeps down to the children. Yes, even aunty does
not know. If they ask a question...why is the sky blue? If I do not know the answer I may say –”I am going to look up I will read a book and get back to you as to why”. So they know that we also do not know everything. We also want to learn...wanting to learn is important’.

Most of the teachers related the idea of encouraging questions in children as a way to build up this attitude. I heard and also saw many teachers practice it. Sejal told me,

‘We are happy when they ask questions. We are happy to answer. Those are the things that we encourage and which I think stays on for life. Those are life skills. That is what we want them to do when they grow up...speak your mind. If you do not like it, say what you want. Expressing yourself is important for building an attitude towards learning’.

Mamta also talked about answering the questions that children asked. She believed that if children were snubbed, they somehow never took any active interest in learning but became passive students. She gave the example of schools where children were not encouraged to ask questions as teachers were intent on completing their lesson so children were less motivated to learn.

Anuradha’s contention was to ‘enhance the way the child is looking at things’ as that was what counts. Sejal saw the larger picture of relationships and school climate as having an effect on how children develop this life skill.

To summarize, it was clear that early childhood teachers considered that teaching values to children was of paramount importance. There were enough practices to support these belief systems. The next section attempts to present some common ‘snapshots’ to substantiate the finding that the goals for children are reflected in practice.

### 4.3.3.2 Revisiting curriculum and pedagogy

The above section proves that the way children were handled was amenable to passing on the values. There was a sense of what I would call long term goals as being the main driver, nevertheless moments were valued and
seized as opportunities to further those goals. The teachers in the different schools were active and passionate about working towards the long term goals in the immediacy of the classroom.

My contention was that the latent curriculum was considered far more important than the manifest curriculum. Moreover, it seemed that the latent curriculum permeates the transaction of manifest curriculum.

I have taken the idea of the latent and manifest curriculum from Bloom (1972). He differentiates the two in terms of content of education as subject matter which has to be learnt (manifest) and the intangible lessons that students learn (latent). He laid emphasis on the latent curriculum, which is rarely spelt out:

‘Indeed, the latent curriculum is in many respects likely to be more effective than the manifest curriculum. The lessons it teaches are long remembered because it is so pervasive and consistent over the many years in which our students attend school. Its lessons are experienced daily and learned firmly. It is probable that the lessons of the latent curriculum are learned so well because they are spelled out in the behavior of the students and adults in the school and are only rarely verbalized or justified.’ (p.343)

Obviously the connect I made was between the stated academic program (the manifest curriculum) and the lessons of life (the latent curriculum). The next section attempts to showcase both the manifest and the latent curriculum along with the pedagogical practices. I extend evidence that latent curriculum dominates manifest curriculum. In other words, belief systems of teachers regarding what they want children to become (goals for children) is what drives classroom practice.

Understanding the curriculum and pedagogy

What happens in the classroom? Were the teachers practicing what was arguably the ‘subject matter’? Were the teachers’ beliefs about what they wanted children to become the basis for their actions in the classroom? How did teachers enact the beliefs in the classroom as a part of the curriculum? What were the ways in which they ensured that children learnt the goals?
The above sections portrayed enough reasons why I felt that the latent curriculum in a way dominated the manifest curriculum. When I analyzed the practices of teachers, many of the practices seemed to centre on furthering the latent curriculum i.e. teaching values. I struggled with how to present those reasons in a logical sequence. I also struggled to tease apart the strands of the curriculum as manifest and latent. After much agony, I submit the difficulty of trying to make a complex process look simple.

I also questioned whether my looking at curriculum was enough or whether I ought to portray the pedagogy to understand the practices. Teachers have a great deal of knowledge about pedagogy (Mortimore, 1999) and yet the literature is replete with educators’ and researchers’ views rather than voices of the practitioners. I revisited the concept of pedagogy with fresh eyes as I realized that it was difficult to ‘typically’ categorize pedagogy and practices of teachers.

I took a broad and inclusive definition of pedagogy to put forth what I gathered and interpreted from the data – Any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999). I believe that teachers know and have often learnt the hard way what works in the classroom and what doesn’t. I have consciously resisted the idea of categorizing my analysis in terms of teacher style, class management, organization of activities, teaching methods etc. Teaching practice is complex and not easily relegated to neat, consistent descriptors that comfortably categorize the sharing of information and interaction among participants in a classroom. I take recourse in putting forth five dimensions which captured the curriculum and pedagogical practices of early childhood teachers. It is a selection but the attempt was to be as broad-based as possible. I have also chosen to show case each dimension with some specific examples.

The dimensions were:

a. View of the child
b. How teachers view their roles
c. Relationships and interactions
d. Snapshots from the curriculum
a. View of the child

How did my participants view the child? Did they have well developed beliefs about the child? Much had already been explained in the earlier theme but I took this opportunity to sift out beliefs which concern children as a ‘learner’. As I analyzed the data, I was convinced that teachers had strong, lucid and rather firm ideas about how children learn. Some of the common beliefs that I could discern were:

- Each child is unique and worthy of respect. Each child has infinite potential. Each one’s potential must be nurtured. Each one has her own pace of learning.

- Children are a part of the social group and need to learn social norms and ‘acceptable’ behaviors. They must learn to share with others. It is critical for children to learn values and social skills at a young age.

- Children learn when they are ‘told’ by the teacher/other adults. Repetition is necessary for children to learn. They also learn from role models.

- Children learn through experience and practice. Hence, they should be given enough opportunities to learn.

- Children learn when they are comfortable, safe and secure.

From the above, I garnered that teachers viewed children on two continuums:

- The individual child and the social child – at one end was the expectation that children should develop their individual qualities like independence, responsibility, discipline etc. and the emphasis on one to one interactions and at the other end of the continuum was the insistence on sharing and concern for others and enabling them to become a part of a social group.

- The active learner and the passive learner – this was seen in the way teachers expected children to listen when knowledge was being ‘given’ and at the other end was the belief that children will learn on
their own if they are comfortable and there are learning environments created for them.

The most important belief seemed that respect for a child is ingrained in the consciousness of teachers’ minds. The child was seen as a person who ought to be protected and cared for. Though teachers acknowledged the uniqueness and infinite potential (linked probably to the divinity of children as written in ancient texts), there seemed to be a sense of nurturing the child in an environment where he could ‘bloom’. The adult-child interactions were considered amenable to children’s learning, especially learning of values. The early years were important as they were critical years when children could imbibe values. Modeling was considered the optimal way to inculcate values in children with an equal and strong emphasis on ‘telling them’. Though giving choices to children was important, there was a sense of ‘setting limits’ so children knew what to do and what not to do. Appreciation or disapproval was a direct response to children’s behavior. The core view was that the child could be molded to become an ‘ideal’ adult but the basic responsibility was on significant adults to ‘lead the way’. The nursery children were viewed as being on a journey of gradual learning and so there was a tendency to be indulgent towards them.

Teachers did not seem to discriminate amongst children irrespective of age, gender, social class or appearance. There was a sense of equality in the way they handled them or interacted with them. I observed teachers dealing in a consistent way with different children. In the diversity of the classrooms, teachers viewed children as just children. Children who caused disruption or distractions in the classroom would get attention but I also noted that one of the most common strategies that teachers mentioned was ‘to ignore the child when he does something wrong and praise him when he does something positive or does not do something negative’.

How teachers viewed the child can be described through the example of how teachers handled any child who came in to the school for the first time.
**Example: Dealing with ‘new’ children**

There were child centered strategies that were used by teachers. I highlight a strategy of how a teacher handled the entire class when a new child joined.

I saw Sakshi sitting demurely in one of the chairs next to the teacher. I was unaware that she had joined as a new admission just a couple of day’s back. The teacher on some pretext would murmur something to her (which I was unable to hear). She later explained that it was most important how children became an integral part of the classroom. I observed that she would dictate to another child to hold Sakshi’s hand. She even told the class that it was Sakshi’s 4th day in school so we need to make her feel happy. She said that we should make her feel nice by being friends with her.

Pearl underscored the need to make the child feel a part of the class. To do so she went out of her way to make the child feel comfortable. How the entire class was taken into confidence denoted the significance of socializing. Her aim was to make the child feel included in the group as much as to work at other children to include the newcomer.

Anuradha attributed her natural instinct in handling new children as she felt that she knew the ‘pulse of children…the cause of the child’s discomfort and I have my own way of dealing with it, and I tell you… if not 100%, in 99.9% I have been successful in that.’

When I wanted to know what strategies she used, she said,

‘There is no particular method that I adopted, it comes from within, and I know exactly why the child is crying and what is required to be done. This is… I think over the years by handling the children it has come, because you need immense patience. When a 2 year old child comes to school you know they are traumatized… so naturally, they are leaving their parents and all. That assurance… at least it takes quite sometime…quite a few weeks it goes on…to even pacify the child that there is nothing to worry in school. That we all are parents here, and you are going to have lots of fun.

So the underlying belief was that leaving parents is traumatic and therefore patience is needed to assure the child that it is fine. Note the
importance of giving time for the child to settle down and the insistence that others in the environment can make the child feel comfortable. She went on to add that that she recalled few children with whom she had to sit for 3-4 months before they settled down.

’So this is where at times I get little irritated that I can’t take my class because I have to sit, nobody else can really manage them except me. So somehow or the other you know I have become specialized in handling these difficult children.’

I reckoned that sitting with such children patiently was the unstated strategy.

Other teachers mentioned the need to minimize the separation anxiety by allowing parents to sit in the school (which was a strategy followed by 7 out of the 10 schools in the sample) for the first few weeks. The spotlight was on easing the process. Most teachers expressed strong feelings about the difficulty in the separation. An unstated rule was to make the transition from home to school as smooth as possible. I heard 50% of the teachers say that in their experience, they remembered schools had asked many parents to withdraw their child if it seemed to be having an adverse effect on the child. Many teachers expressed a deep concern about parents sending children as young as a year old to ‘so-called playschools’ and the demand from parents to take in younger children. All agreed that before the age of 2 children should be at home and they should be gradually weaned into the school system. Parents and teachers both need patience because ‘this is not about the number of children who cannot adjust but the long term effect on the child’ (Anuradha).

Another facet about children which emerged was what teachers referred to as ‘the far-reaching influence of the parents’ (Kavita). The significance of the effect of parents clearly was a known parameter within their work. Reema explained that the children were here for only 2 hours a day. So parents had a more pervasive influence.

The need to protect and care for children seemed all-encompassing. When talking about new admissions, teachers clarified that till the child
felt safe, secure and comfortable; they would not be interested to learn the academic program. Even if it took 3-4 months for children to settle in the class (on an average the ones who are ready, they settle down in a week’ Anuradha), that part was considered to be an important part of the latent curriculum. It emerged teachers believed it was their duty to make the transition smooth.

So teachers view the new admissions as needing their care and protection. They view their role as facilitators in the process of transition from home to school environment. They were mindful about the anxiety of separation and were willing to give time for the settling down process.

b. How teachers view their roles

The above gave a hint about how teachers view their role when children come for the first time to school. A larger question is how did teachers view their role in the learning process? The view of pedagogical approach is usually linked to the view of the child. But the view of pedagogy is also strongly related to how teachers view their role in children’s learning.

Teachers used a combination of roles to play in children’s learning. Though I was wont to demarcate dominant roles for each teacher, my analysis told me otherwise. Each teacher used varied techniques to help children learn or as they put it, ‘to teach’. Each technique had different epistemology and demanded a specific role of the teacher. Teachers seemed to be darting in and out, handling instances and activities one after the other, seamlessly moving from one technique of teaching to another. A typical day in a nursery could have the following:

- Children were free to choose any activity during free play
- During song time, there was a focus on repetition and movement
- During free conversation communication was emphasized rather than literacy
- During story time complete attention was demanded
‘Concept learning’ meant passing knowledge so that children could ‘get’ the knowledge

Didactic teaching happened during ‘learning the alphabet’

Active participation was encouraged during creative activities

So the role of the teacher would change from one activity to the other. I delineated three main roles which nursery teachers played

Teacher as responsible for modeling acceptable and appropriate behavior: Teachers believed that children learnt behaviors from role models

Teacher as one responsible for imparting knowledge: teachers believed that children need to be told what they need to do, how they need to do it and when they should do it. They considered that they were the ones who should give that knowledge – even values were knowledge that needed to be ‘given’ to children.

Teacher as a guide and /or facilitator for children’s learning: Teachers believed that children must be given freedom to do specific activities where they can make a choice. They thought of themselves as guides or facilitators in the process of children moving from one level to the other. They also believed that children learnt through their senses and so it was important to design experiences. Mamta explained the significance of organizing a field trip where,

‘...one has to keep eyes and ears open. Because they are learning, they can learn any and every time you are moving around. When we are going to the vegetable vendor how he keeps his stock...how do the vegetables look and feel...so many sensory inputs. The child is learning all the time.’

One of the teachers told me,

I feel if you have three hours in a day one activity can be a teacher directed activity but 2 hours in the day should be a child centered activity or child directed. There should be choice given to a child. When we say child centered means the child chooses the activity... But after that if I am now moving to
The above example sounded contrary. Here was a teacher who was shifting from one activity to the other and clearly harboured opposing assumptions of how children learnt in either of these activities. In a developmentally appropriate curriculum there would be kudos for the child-centeredness and distress at the didactic demands of a subject-oriented activity. I saw this repeated in many classrooms across the city.

Another teacher firmly told me that it was important to give choices to the children but it should be bounded. Therefore if sometime the teacher does not give choices, it was ok and that may be the best in those circumstances. She insisted that the teacher was the best to decide when to give choices and when not. When I probed further, she recounted her logic,

'When I teach a song in class, I don’t give them a choice. They just have to learn it. I decide where to take them for a field trip as that is what is the syllabus…we decide what they will be served for snacks. There is a whole workforce who is concerned and taking decisions on their behalf…we spend so much of time planning. But yes, I feel choices can be given in the way you allow them to ask questions. The activity corners you set up for them, the book they pick up from the shelf, the colour they choose to draw with, whether they want to play the game or not. The choice is within certain limits but nevertheless it’s a choice.'

The implication of her logic was that the larger limits of what children did was ‘set up’ by the teacher (and other adults) so the final call was the teachers – when to allow children to choose.

One pedagogical principle that became clear was it seemed that there was an emphasis on ‘here and now’. It seemed that teachers seized moments as opportunities to teach children what they had at the back of their mind. It was an unconscious process. Many teachers called it ‘natural’ and ‘spontaneous’. This spontaneity made them shift from one role to the other easily and without any conflict. So in a way, the activity
or instance demanded a certain role and teachers were willing to move from one role to the other. I could assert that a combination of roles were willingly played by teachers as long as they were certain that it would help them achieve larger, long term goals for children. It can also be asserted that teachers adopted a role based on the activity. This point is also taken up in the next section. But before that let me share the role that teachers seemed to consider paramount – that they had to play the role of modeling behavior which they wanted children to learn.

**Teacher as role model**

The teachers’ saw their role in building the attitude of the child and without an exception believed that children learn when they see those values in their role models – their teachers. In the section on discipline, teachers’ view on modeling acceptable behavior was amply demonstrated. Values that teachers felt could be modeled was trust, respect, being caring and sensitive. Some other examples which I witnessed related to teachers’ belief that children learnt though imitation and identification – imitation of others in the environment (especially the teacher) and identification as they considered teachers to be role models.

Anuradha gave the example of how concern for plants could be modeled. She showed the garden – a single row of plants and trees – proudly to me and shared how in the 25 years since the inception of the school, no child had ever plucked a single leaf

"We have a garden but nobody even plucks one leaf. We think they don’t understand but they do. How we go and talk to the plants. How we go and water the plants...we show our love. We show them, we talk to them. These are the small little things, I am talking about. They are very tiny things, but this is what, this area if we neglect ...the magnitude of the whole mistake becomes very, very big you know."

She emphasized the criticality of the early years for learning implicit values. Another issue she paid attention to was the seating arrangement. She felt that children should be able to see clearly what the teacher does therefore she must ensure proper seating arrangements. She talked of the
importance of the teacher in getting them into the habit of sitting in an appropriate place.

’If you do that see children will sit there. They know that the teacher has told me to do this, so I have to do this. There are no two ways for children… they look up to you… they will not defy you in any way.’

She expected that the co-teachers should sit with the children so that children could learn where they ought to sit. During my observations, I noticed that she would direct co-teachers to actually do whatever she wanted children to do. Having the luxury of a robust adult to child ratio, she wanted the adults to be a part of the class so ‘children could imitate them’.

According to Pearl, it was important to be confident in the classroom as children looked at the teacher as a role model as ‘… I want to pass it on to these children…. tomorrow my children should be that confident that they can also come out and talk.’

In the many months of my data collection, I saw the centrality of expressing emotions. Teachers seemed to be completely transparent about their feelings and were quite open to sharing – either directly or indirectly – with the children. They would express love, anger, frustration, concern and other emotions easily. Preschool teachers (to me) seemed to be passionate and expressive.

I found it prudent to share these examples as they reflect instances of positive emotional expression – again a value that they treasure. This also illustrated the modeling of appropriate behavior. Love and happiness were expressed through smiles & loud laughter; appreciation through a pat on the back or a hug or a kiss; group hugs were common; frustration was expressed in the form of ‘I feel like going out of the class’; anger was mostly expressed verbally through phrases like ‘teacher is very, very angry. If you are not going to listen, I will not give you (the next activity)’. There were instances when negative emotions did surface but overall the predominance of positive emotions was visible. It would be difficult to assert that the classroom climate was always positive as I
must take into account my presence and yet, I don’t recollect a single point where I felt that a child was fearful of the teacher. As mentioned earlier, episodic evidence of children being disciplined were sprinkled in a number of classrooms but the evidence tended towards positive discipline rather than negative discipline.

In my early years as a teacher educator, I had come across teachers who would scream loudly when they felt the class was going out of control. I neither observed this behavior in any of the schools or the teachers. I must add that I saw a number of times what teachers referred to as ‘out of control’. On probing, teachers thought that it was ok ‘if children made a little noise’, ‘they are too young’ or ‘my screaming is going to send a wrong message. It will show them that you too should scream when things don’t go right’. It would seem that early childhood teachers were aware of the implicit messages that they send through their actions. Kavita summed the idea by saying

‘If we are going to scream over their voice...what am I achieving?... by telling them that it is ok to scream? You should practice what you want them to learn’.

Teachers also used role modeling of what they wanted children to imitate. One example was of a teacher picking up a small book and (with some exaggeration) and turn the pages gently. She pretended to fold the book, then muttered, no, no and held the book with care. I saw the children had all forgotten the book in their hands and were looking at her keenly. She then pretended to finish reading the book, again kept it back lovingly. Then, she dropped it (as if accidently), she quickly picked it up with the usual ritual of respecting the book (touching the book to the head to show respect for the God of knowledge). She moved away but I observed that the actions were duplicated by a number of children. This was book reading time and the teacher had just finished giving a silent ‘lesson’. She later suggested that as teachers we sometimes forget the profound ways in which we can help children learn. She added that she was aware that what she chose not to do in the classroom was also learning for the children.
Another role modeling that teachers resorted to was the act of asking questions and then answering it themselves without really expecting anyone to answer it. I saw this in a number of my participants and wondered why. Kavita helped me to understand,

‘When we question we still know maybe the answers are not going to come. We won’t get 100% answers. We may get 1 or 2 who are participating in the conversation which is fine but by me answering them so I judge that at least the children are listening to that & next time that I ask such a question they will know how to answer. That means there is a question and an answer follows. That could be one of the ways of looking at it.’

To summarize, teachers believed that they role modeled values and were instrumental in helping children imbibe values. Anuradha in her inimitable way put across her teaching as,

‘…that the whole thing is so spontaneous… so integrated… .... So I just put forward the whole thing. I don’t know. I don’t know why I teach, but I teach, because I love to… and then I bring along everything… all these values and all.’

c. Relationships and interactions

A dominant discourse was that of interaction, communication and response. Relationship with others was viewed as central. All children were considered different from each other and yet, there was a focus on getting along with others, showing care and concern for others, helping others and being treated as one big group. None of the teachers laid much emphasis on the physical environment but did refer to the climate of the classroom. There seemed to be respect for children which was manifested at times by considering children as being equal partners in the learning process and sometimes there seemed to be a clear hierarchy where children were ‘told’ what and how.

Teachers used their voice effectively to converse, to acknowledge, to respond, to affirm and to disapprove. Discussions with individual children as well as with the group were valued by the teacher. It was looked at as a way to stimulate their thinking and opportunity to learn.
In this section I highlight relationships with others in the school environment and relationships with parents but before that I give an example of how teachers use language in complex ways to communicate.

**The complexity of language**

There was an emphasis on connecting with children; which the goals for learning literacy were considered incidental. There were an unbelievable number of languages that I heard teachers and children use. The typical cosmopolitan nature of the city with immigrants from all over the country resulted in children having different mother tongues. Even though all the early childhood centers were English medium schools and English was the medium of instruction, I heard teachers using Hindi (the national language), Marathi (the state language), Gujarati, Punjabi, Bengali, Sindhi, Kannada, Tamil and maybe some more which I was unable to identify.

All the teachers told me that they wanted children to learn to communicate, to speak up, to express themselves. For most of them, this was their first experience outside the home and in two of the schools, children were first generation learners. Reema clarified that certain children couldn’t follow English as they were not comfortable with the language. Hence, ‘we try to come down to their level…talking in mother tongue or Hindi’.

The use of mother tongue versus the medium of instruction has been a topic of lively debate for many years in the field. Practitioners seemed to have developed their own formula – a typical way in which they seem to solve dilemmas – by combining both the ideas. They continue to use English mainly but they substantiate it (I should add liberally) with other languages.

I was intrigued at the interplay of languages but gathered that teachers followed three principles –

- To communicate with individual children, speak in regional language or language she understands
- For giving instructions to entire class, speak in English and repeat in national language

- Reduce the use of national language as children become more comfortable with English

The last principle was verified by data collected at the beginning and end of an academic session in the same class. I wanted to know why teachers considered that mother tongue usage was valid in the preschool. One of the teachers told me,

'I feel mother tongue should be allowed in Pre-School. I am not saying 100%. Of course what we do like nursery, Jr. then we make the usage less. But if a child is telling you something please do listen to the child. You cannot say please speak in English especially when adult is around. The idea is to communicate...not just correct usage of English'.

If the child didn’t understand the instructions then the teachers had no compunction to speak in whichever language was demanded. I also recorded two occasions when a teacher in the school called out to another teacher to help to communicate with a particular child. When talking to parents, teachers would switch from English to Hindi mid-sentence if they perceived that the parents were not following them.

**Relationships with others in school environment**

Teachers were alert about the messages they were sending through their interactions with other adults. 50% of the participants articulated that it was important how one spoke with adults especially the ‘bais’ (support staff). Bhumika made the point clear,

'If we speak with respect, they will learn to speak respectfully to the bais at home, the driver, the watchman...all those who help us in the community.'

She gave the example of her son’s school where she was shocked when she saw a Principal slap a peon in front of children and parents (it was about 15 years back). She had to have long discussions with her son to ‘unravel the harm’. For her, handling such issues was of greater significance than academic goals.
I recount another episode of a teacher preparing for the children to come in at the beginning of the day. She was drawing a large circle in the open area behind the rows of colourful tables and chair in the classroom. She looked at her work, seemed dissatisfied and went to the door to call out for a support staff. One ‘mausi’ (support staff) came in to help. They used a thread pulled tight between the two of them to for drawing a proper circle, one of them at the centre and the other drawing the circle. The mausi kept up a conversation with the teacher:

‘Aaj kya karna hai?’ (What will be done today?)

‘Bacche circle mein activity kerange’ (The children will do an activity in the circle)

‘Aacha. Song kerenge?’ (Ok. Will they do a song?)

‘Nehin. Circle ka concept karne ka hain.’ (No. We will do the concept of circle)

I share this to highlight two distinct points from the conversation – the matter of fact, respectful way in which the two related with each other and the use of so-called technical English terms in the conversation. By now, many children had trickled into the class and the teacher cheerfully continued to greet them. I heard the mausi tell one child that she was making a circle for them. She later qualified that she does recognize that the children learn ‘quietly’ from the way she speaks with the mausis.

All except one teacher expressed their satisfaction about the support staff. One teacher expressed her concern at the way children were handled by the support staff. She was of the opinion that all the non-teaching staff in the school should have orientation programs to understand their deep impact on children. The concern reflected the deep sense of caring those teachers felt about children and the realization that other adults also have an impact on children’s growing up.

Mamta learnt that the way she spoke with the bais was picked up by the children,
‘...now days I have even started noticing some of the children...the way they call out the maids... they call out the way I do. And I get so hurt. Why is this child calling out like this? Then I realize I am using my authoritative voice on them, because I want the maids to do work fast. These children are picking up that. So then definitely that is of much value to me... I have to be responsible for my actions... as children pick up and use it.’

Mamta reflected on the impact of her actions and clearly chose to avoid actions which may lead to a negative behavior in the child. Interacting and talking as a way to teach was a tacit belief according to the findings.

Relationships with parents and families

Relationships with teachers seemed to be matter-of-fact. All teachers recognized the deep impact of families, even more than the influence of teachers. I saw a continuum of teacher-parent relationships.

One of the schools – a large set up – encouraged family participation and involvement. Teachers, including my participant, made regular home visits to children’s houses. The teacher was proud and happy to have a close relationship with the families as it helped her to understand the children in her class in a more holistic way. She was mindful of the changes happening in particular children’s homes and took measures to mitigate negative impact. She gave the example of a child whose father was unemployed and the mother was expecting the sixth child (‘I try to give Prerna extra attention in the class’). She attributed the home visits for making her a more mindful, sensitive and understanding teacher.

‘It (home visit) helps me to understand the child. When you understand the child even at a little level you can give them something & I think that they must have gained something from me...If you can give that physical warmth even for a second to someone it is well worth it’.

As the school had a high number of first generation learners, she also talked about strategies that she shared with the parents to improve the child’s language thus, avoiding the belief (of parents) that the child should be send for tuitions. I noticed the teacher was approachable and parents could freely talk with her. Her interactions seemed informal and
there was an implicit equality in the partnership. She was of the view that there should be more time allotted during parent-teacher meetings so that the child benefits from this warm and caring relationship.

I take another large school to highlight a different parent-teacher relationship. The teacher shared that if parents had to meet the teacher, they had to request for an appointment. It was whetted by the authorities before giving permission. In the previous years, the parents of the school had taken legal action for a matter related to the increase in fees. It had led to some complicated issues. The teacher told me that she met the parents during what was called the Open House when parents were invited to meet the teacher to know the child’s progress. A time structure was imposed so that all parents would get an equal time to interact with the teacher. The meeting was formal and mostly the teacher gave information about the child’s development to the parent. If the parent enquired about any issue, the teacher would answer. Mostly there was a tendency to give advice.

However, most of the other schools tended to be towards the positive end of the continuum. I saw warm relationships between parents and teachers. A time when there would be a relaxed informal time was the time when children were going back home. As mentioned earlier, I heard many parents enquire about what the child had eaten. I saw teachers being patient but not really staying for more than 10 minutes (most had to do preparatory work for the next day). I also heard teachers ask parents why the child was dull today and to let them know the reason. Some teachers admonished the parents for sending their child to school when he was unwell. Sometimes teachers appreciated the child in front of the parent. Overall, there were more of positive interactions (confirmed by the teachers) than negative.

Teachers also revealed that during the annual day or any other function; they were helped by the parents. In one center, parents on a rotating basis were supposed to send snacks for the entire class. I heard the teacher tell the children, ‘let us all say thank you to Pratik. His mom has made soft idlis for all of us. Pratik, please tell your mom that we liked eating them’.
Parents’ cooperation was generally lauded except by one teacher who seemed to be unhappy with the ‘parents of today’ who no longer acknowledge the contribution of teachers in their child’s life. She was skeptical about the deteriorating attitude of parents. This was an isolated case but all the rest seemed satisfied by the cooperation of the parents.

The teacher’s concern may have stemmed from what she called ‘the elite parents who think they are paying you but don’t realize the importance of the teacher’. Many years in the field had probably led to a comparison and she was unhappy about what she felt was ‘the attitude of the young parents’.

Majority of the teachers expressed one common concern: that of children being exposed to the adult world too soon. The conveyed unease at the amount of T.V. /movies/computer that parents allowed children to watch without realizing the profound impact on their behavior and personality. The teachers were bothered by the lack of space and time for children to play. They believed that if parents could spend quality time with the children, it would do a world of good. They seemed to have articulated these concerns to the parents. Many believed that parent education was important and were already conducting sessions on a regular basis.

d. Snapshots from the curriculum

To explain the curriculum and pedagogical practices of early childhood teachers, I used the strategy that is often used while observing classrooms. A particular activity is observed from beginning to end. I have chosen typical time slots during the transaction of the curriculum as in many of my conversations with the teachers; they viewed the day in the form of the time table. It was important to recognize that issues of curriculum, pedagogy, syllabus, time table, activities, methods etc. seem ambiguous and interchangeable terms in the minds of the teachers.

Greeting time

The time when children would enter the classroom in the morning was an informal time which teachers admitted they enjoyed. Each school
seemed to have a particular way of welcoming the children. In all the schools I saw teachers present a minimum of 5 minutes before the first child came. In one of the small schools, the teacher came in late but there were other adults (including the Principal) who were around. Some schools insisted on the teachers coming in half an hour before the official start of the day. These rules typified large set ups rather than the small centers.

As children came in, I heard teachers greet them. The most common way was to say ‘good morning’ but it could also be a question like, ‘Did you get wet in the rain while going home yesterday?’; ‘Who came to drop you?’ or it could be a statement ‘Pinky is looking great today’; ‘What a smile!’ or it could be an instruction ‘Go and keep your bag in place’; ‘Lets go out to play’. I saw all teachers responsive and relaxed.

Sanaa shared that she felt that this time was ‘their own time …they can be to themselves and do what they want. We have to give them that much time’. In the same breath she also added that the time was ‘used’ for children to learn these small things – how to greet the teacher, how to keep your things in place, how to interact with the friends. She was also conscious of the fact that the children were not from affluent families and these ways build up discipline in them,

‘…because it starts from now, from nursery ..... & if it is not taught in nursery then it is not learnt at higher level and then very difficult to teach as they grow up. That there is some sort of discipline which has to be followed…so the basic training has to be given in nursery which is the most important thing.’

Some teachers were expected to be near the gate when children came and some schools expected them to be in the classroom. For schools where children needed some supervision to reach the class – if the class was not on the ground floor – then there would be enough support staff to help children to climb the stairs. Some schools had bags with the handbook/diary and the snackbox which the children carried. In one of the schools, where children were not carrying any bag, I noticed that they directly went to the outdoor play area or rode a tricycle.
Some teachers insisted on making the children keep their bags and/or water bottles at the correct place. I wanted to know why? They shared that this was to bring in a sense of responsibility and discipline in children. If they do it in small doses, when they grow up, they will learn to take responsibility of their own things. Therefore even if it took them a month to let children get used to keeping the bags in place, it was worth the effort.

Greeting others was considered as a way to show respect to others, especially adults. Teachers shared that for the nursery children, this was a greater learning than literacy or numeracy. They were aware that the informal conversations that they were having with the children were useful to help children learn language skills like expressing, listening, vocabulary building etc. It was also seen as a time for children to express their emotions. Sanaa gave some examples – ‘they may have had a fight with their mother maybe for not finishing their breakfast or maybe excited as they had gone to the beach during the weekend – I get to hear about it and they feel good that teacher has listened to me’.

The teacher looked at the time for children to share and express their emotions and also a time for affirmation.

**Snack time**

Another regular feature in the schools was the snack time which was devoted to ‘teach values’ (Mamta). Out of the 10 schools that I visited, 7 schools provided snacks to the children. Snack time was an elaborate affair lasting 20-30 minutes. Teachers mentioned the importance of the time slot - children were not supposed to waste food, they were supposed to respect the food, they were supposed to share; they were supposed to help out in giving the snacks; they were told about healthy food; they were given the responsibility to eat on their own.

Some of the values which teachers mentioned were to be learnt during this time – food is God, wasting food is akin to disrespecting God, have the humility to serve others food, wait for one’s turn, respect your stomach by having healthy food not junk food, say thank you to God for
the food, and appreciate the person who has made the food for you. One must remember that in India young children were mostly ‘fed’ by their mothers as there is a high concern amongst parents about their child being a ‘poor eater’. For many of these 2-3 year olds, school was probably the first place to experience eating independently. Teachers made sure that they gave less food to children so they finished and didn’t waste, taking particular interest in each child. The teacher was alert and attentive to how much a child was eating. In the centers where children brought their own ‘tiffins’, the teacher made sure to appreciate who ever finished their food.

Reinforcing the value of eating nutritious healthy food, I discerned how Pearl moved around and commented on the tiffin. Any homemade food like sheera, pohe, idli would get a positive comment as she believed ‘that was more nutritious than junk food’. A school policy was that junk food was not to be encouraged in the tiffins (I found this was common in other ECE centers too). When I asked her whether she did it consciously, she affirmed and added that she told the parents to give any type of homemade food, even if it was chips, but she would avoid praising the child if she/he did bring chips.

I also heard a teacher becoming stern when one child informed her that today he did not want to eat. After persuading the child to ‘try out’ the snack, she finally fed the child (albeit forcefully) but he did eat. The insistence on eating may have stemmed from the fact that parents invariably asked the teachers how much their child had eaten that day. It would be a common query when a parent would come to pick up their child from the centers especially the small schools. I also saw that when a child would run to the mother after school, she would take the child’s bag, open the snackbox and see whether it was empty or not. There would be an appropriate reaction – smile if it was empty or a frown if it was not. I was intrigued by this behavior of the mothers but I shared it to strengthen the idea that food is central to child rearing and hence probably gets its due in the school.
Concept time

Most teachers believed that teaching concepts to children should be done when they were ‘fresh’. To understand concepts, I asked teachers to explain what constituted ‘concepts’. I heard the same catchphrase – a part of what children must learn – some characteristics of concepts that emerged were:

- ‘what children should learn at this level’ (level-appropriateness)
- ‘school expects us to teach the concepts’ (choice of concept not with teacher)
- ‘the syllabus has to be finished’ (a demand that has to be done)
- ‘basic knowledge that the child should know’ (synonymous with knowledge)
- ‘it is part of the curriculum and of course we must do it as it is important for him to learn later concepts’ (building block for later knowledge)
- ‘a theme which children can decide to do if they are interested and curious about it e.g. we did water after hearing about tsunami)’ (choice of concept student-initiated)
- ‘it takes time sometimes 3-4 weeks for children to understand and engage with the concept. Daily we take a step…one step at a time…seeing that children are following it or not…repeating…reinforcing…using different teaching methods…’ (focus on pace and methods of learning)
- The concept should be taught when children are fresh and alert (implications of the intellectual nature)

On reviewing the ideas of the teachers, I realized that they viewed concepts synonymously as information, theme, project or syllabus-oriented topics. Further review distinguished another feature – the way the construct was viewed also revealed the pedagogical practices. Let me illustrate by two contrasting examples:
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The topic: Difference between boy and girl

The teacher tells the children that someone has come to meet them today. She builds up the excitement. The children settle down on the floor. The teacher uses readymade puppets. The children are completely engaged. She uses voice modulation changing voices of the two ‘actors’ The main sentences that the actors speak (the following is a shortened version):

Puppet of boy: Hello! What is my name? oh! I forgot! Yees, my name is Bunty. What am I wearing? A pant or a frock? I am so sad. I don’t have a friend? I am so small. There is no one who is as small as me who can play with me? No, you are big (gesturing at boy in class). I want a friend!’ (the puppet is also used for telling specific children to sit down)

Teacher: Do you want a friend (asking Bunty)? Will you share with him? Close your eyes …here is your friend

Puppet of girl: Hello! I will be your friend. My name is Babli.

Both: We are so happy…now we are friends.

Puppet of boy: What are you wearing?

Puppet of girl: I’m a girl so I’m wearing a frock and my hair is also long.

Teacher: Bunty is a boy and Babli is a girl. Say bye to them now.

The teacher tells the children to turn towards the display board which already has big pictures of the parts of the body. She requests everyone to sit down, goes to the (teacher’s) chair and picks up the child who is sitting on it and puts him down. She asks the class to repeat after her the different parts of the body. There are two big (about 25 inches tall) cut-outs of a boy and a girl. She looks at them and says, ‘hoooo! They are not wearing any clothes. Lets make them wear clothes. She takes a cut out of a frock and asks who will wear the frock – Bunty or Babli? The children reply ‘Babli’. She sticks the ‘clothes’ – pant shirt and frock on the two cut outs. She instructs that the girls will make the girl wear the frock and the boys will make the boy wear shirt and pant. She gives out the elaborate cut outs (about 7 inches tall). The boys are told to go to the assistant teacher on one table and the girls where she is sitting. She gives out the cut outs of the girl to the children who surround her table. She holds a basket which contains the
frocks. She hands it over asking children to choose between the pink and the orange. After they have done the needful, she tells them to go and wash their hands.

The second example of another trained teacher teaching what she named as a concept:

The topic: ‘night and day’

The teacher puts up a chart on a portable display board. The chart is black with silver cut outs of a half moon in the midst of many stars. There are about 20 children already sitting in front of her. She switches off the lights in the room. She looks at the children and says:

Let’s sleep (putting both hands on one side of the tilted head)…Let’s go to sleep…can you all go to sleep…come on…all of you…lie down...(directed at a particular child)...Ria move a little so Rohan can also sleep.

She takes out a second chart which is blue in colour with a golden yellow circle with rays denoting the sun and replaces the earlier chart with the second one. She tells the children ‘wake up’ and starts to sing (she gestures to another teacher to switch on the lights)

‘What happened? First it was dark and it was night time now the…. (pause) a child jumps up and says sun! …yes, the sun has come out now. All the children get up and start to jump. She finishes the story. The children continue to jump. Some of them come and touch the charts. She lets them touch and feel it. She gets up to get some pins and asks the children to help her display the two charts on the board (at children’s level). The reading corner has been opened and some of the children move there. Two children are fascinated with the charts and continue to touch it. She asks them whether they like the charts. When they respond with yes, she asks why? They giggle. The teacher says that she likes them because of the gold and silver color which shines. Then she moves away from the charts.

These were illustrations of how two teachers interpret the concept time and the variance between them was highlighted. I saw contrasting snapshots similar to this example in my observations.
‘Social’ curriculum

The recorded syllabus had a component of what Mayura (2007) called the ‘social curriculum’. I captured practices to denote that there was a high acceptance of diversity as a way of life. Schools acknowledged an unbelievable number of festivals and each festival was celebrated with equal enthusiasm with the three year olds. In most schools, there would be a joint celebration where children in the pre-primary classrooms (in large schools) and all children in the smaller set ups, would get together for a short while. Festivals which were celebrated include Holi, Easter, Baisakhi, Gokulashtami, Janamashtami, Raksha Bandhan, Independence Day, Diwali, Christmas, Id and many others. (One teacher even shared that as soon as one festival ended, they had to start preparing for the next one). The diversity spanned across regions, communities and religions. Each festival entailed at least a day devoted to some knowledge and rituals of the festival. There was a tendency to have ‘matching’ creative activities. An illustration, during Independence Day celebrations, three year olds invariably were involved in making the flag.

More often than not the children ‘experienced’ what the festival meant to the particular community or religion i.e. during Holi – what did people do? How was it celebrated? Schools let children play with colors and in one school, with colored water (which the children enjoyed!). Teachers never asked children whether they would celebrate it at home. There seemed to be an almost ‘silent’ curriculum for teaching tolerance by adopting festivals of varied communities and religions as one’s own. I extrapolate an observation when Kavita used the conversation starter of Holi to teach some do’s and don’t’s:

I was in Kavita’s class just before the festival of Holi. Children were milling around her, there was a pleasant cacophony and all the children seemed to be talking at the same time. Kavita was responding to whoever caught her attention. One child shared that he threw water balloons. Immediately Kavita responded (children were attentive and the hum softened),
‘Let me tell you a story. When Kavita teacher was small, she was going with her brother on a motorcycle. Someone threw a balloon with stones and it hit teacher (pointing at her forehead). She had to be stitched. So don’t throw balloons at people, especially from the top of the building. It is wrong (making a cross with her fingers). The police can come and catch you also. Will you remember?’

A child asked about water balloons and she replied, ‘you can throw water balloons at your friends near you, who want to play with you’. She went on to talk about non toxic and natural colors (writing in big print letters on the blackboard n-o-n t-o-x-i-c and then n-a-t-u-r-a-l underneath), how to make them (‘ask mummy to give you beetroot or you can buy from the markets which are made from the flowers’). The children were looking excited and they surrounded her. It was time to wind up for the day and Kavita had used the 5 minutes before they went down to ‘teach necessary truths for the benefit of our society’.

What became apparent was how a comment by a child was immediately converted into an opportunity to extend the social curriculum. The wrongness of the act as well as the possibility of negative consequences was passed on to the children, both ideas used by many teachers in the classroom.

Similarly, I saw teachers use Diwali to talk about not lighting too many crackers as ‘we will all keep coughing, because what we light from the crackers goes back in to the air’ (Bhumika). I recount a personal incident which shows the ‘power’ of what happens in nursery classrooms. When my daughter was in nursery, the teacher told them the story of other children who made the firecrackers (the issue of child laborers). In the past 10 years, she has never asked us to buy her crackers.

Apart from festivals, there were other functions like Annual Day/Parents Day/ Annual Concert, Sports Day functions etc. which were common in the schools. All the teachers valued these in terms of giving children confidence and helping them to learn a palette of knowledge – learning songs, learning to talk in front of so many people, learning to say
dialogues sequentially, learning to align movements with others, learning to help each other and so on. There was a strong element of fun but the teachers admitted that ‘a lot of blood and sweat went into making it a success’ (Darshana). Principals would show me photographs of the shows proudly. It was probably meant to showcase the school also.

4.3.3.3 Summary of theme

I summarize the belief systems (and practices) of early childhood teachers regarding goals for children, learning and teaching:

- Teachers believed the overarching goal for children were the ‘lessons for life’ or tacit values necessary to become an ideal adult. They believed that the early years were critical for children to imbibe these values and attitudes. Teachers believed that they were responsible for transmitting these values. Role modeling and ‘telling’ were adopted widely to further this goal. Teachers considered it far more important than the academic program.

- Teachers viewed discipline as a value which children need to learn gradually to differentiate between acceptable and non-acceptable behaviors.

- Teachers’ pedagogical practices were directly connected to this belief system or in other words, teachers’ beliefs about goals for children permeate their practices.

- Teachers believed that relationships and interactions are vital to communicate tacit lessons.

- Teachers believed that each activity had to be conducted in a particular way. They moved from teacher-directed to student-initiated activities seamlessly without any conflict.

- The socio-cultural influences were visible in the transaction of curriculum and pedagogical practices adopted by the teachers.
4.3.3.4 Discussion, conclusion and implication

I put forth the following propositions and discuss the findings related to this theme (I found it difficult to delineate the discussions for particular findings due to the interrelatedness; so the discussion is common):

- **The latent curriculum is driven by the goals that teachers have about children.** These goals are related to lessons for life that teachers want children to imbibe in order to become ideal adults. These goals were considered more significant as compared to the manifest curriculum (stated ‘academic learning’) in nursery classrooms.

- **The curriculum model and pedagogical practices used by early childhood teachers in the nursery classrooms had strong socio-cultural and developmental influences which reflected an inclusiveness of educational philosophies.** They viewed the child to be worthy of respect and considered him both as an active as well as a passive learner. Teachers viewed their role as modeling behavior, imparting knowledge and facilitating child’s learning. Interactions and relationships were valued as learning encounters, probably echoing the cultural ethos.

Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) ideas about the social processes of learning that enable humans to appropriate culture led to socio-cultural theories of teaching and learning viewed primarily through social interactions. Within these theories, multi-faceted roles were played by adults (and peers) to support children to construct new understandings and develop dispositions towards learning. This dialectic process was reflected in the findings of the present study.

Rogoff (1998) emphasized the learning activity within relationships, where those with knowledge or experience lead the learning of others; which, in turn recognized the importance of the social and cultural processes. Teachers in this study valued the interactions and relationships as learning encounters, which gave credence to the influence of social and cultural factors in transaction of the curriculum.

Recent approaches to curriculum encouraged a critical stance as to the theories and values underpinning curriculum (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999;
Canella, 1997). Researchers have brought out the contextual and cultural-boundedness of complex curricula (Ross, 2000; MacNaughton, 2003; Joseph, 2000).

Every school had, what Bloom (1972, 1981) named, the manifest and the latent curriculum. The curriculum may be understood as denoting all of the knowledge, skills and values that children were meant to learn in educational establishments and for many alternative purposes curriculum was defined to include all of the hidden and/or unintentional learning as well (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). The latent or hidden or unwritten curriculum was characterized by informality and lack of conscious planning as against the manifest curriculum which had explicit and consciously planned course objectives (Wren, 1999). The latent curriculum had long been considered to have an all-pervading effect on children.

The finding of the present study brought up two aspects regarding the curriculum. Firstly, nursery teachers considered the latent curriculum far more significant than the manifest curriculum. Secondly, the latent curriculum was considered for transmitting the lessons for life.

The findings of the present study were supported by Gupta (2006) who found that in Delhi, teachers, Principals and teacher educators indicated the most important aim of education to be the teaching of values and attitudes. She made an interesting point about values, ‘...these concepts were being termed values by teachers in India. This itself is an indicator of the “value” or importance attached to these learned behaviors in India in terms of how the individual is viewed in relation to a larger group outside of himself, whereas the same learned behaviors in the West are grouped under the socio-emotional development, which indicates an inward psychological look into the development of the individual in relation to himself/herself” (p. 59). In India, it was considered perfectly natural that teachers would emphasize values in their classroom practice, influenced by the Hindu worldview (ibid, 2006).

Early educational experiences of children were culturally situated and reflected the deeply held cultural values and beliefs of the culture (New,
1999). In the study, in Italy the features of the early childhood programs revolved around social relationships, a key cultural value apparent in the culture. It would not be amiss to suggest that in India children were ‘taught’ that they were a part of the social group and therefore, must follow some norms, mores and expectations.

In the classrooms, a lot of time and attention was spent by the teacher on encouraging the child to share, show concern about others and respect others. She also spent time responding to particular behaviors with a clear message of whether the behavior was approved or otherwise. Discipline was looked at as a way to help children understand the difference between behaviors that were socially acceptable and what was not. Teachers were clear and honest in pointing out the difference, a finding which echoed in Gupta’s (2006) work. From the responses of the teachers, I gathered that they expected a certain ‘code of conduct’ from the children and were willing to remind them over and over again towards following it. The core idea was that the children should develop desirable values. Jackson (1968) suggested that discipline problems may occur for students who have difficulty following and internalizing classroom rules and daily routines.

Since the latent curriculum was by nature more spontaneous and less explicit, does it make sense to shed its hidden nature? It’s a question we must ask as a nation if we need to legitimize the way our teachers teach in nursery classrooms.

Apart from transaction of the curriculum, who sets the curriculum was a concern. Connelly & Clandinin (1988) had focused on teachers as the main curriculum decision-makers which came out clearly in the study. I inferred from my observations that majority of teachers confused the time-table or the syllabi with the curriculum. There was a distinct fuzziness associated with the terms. In most of the schools, the syllabi was set and recorded. In many of the schools, the student Handbook/diary repeated the syllabi year after year. The ‘planning’ which teachers were expected to be a part of, was scheduled at the beginning of the academic term and regularly during the term; but the focus was on the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’. Pre-set content was rarely
Kumar (1992) brought the need for the teacher to be a co-designer of the curriculum,

‘Curriculum development is a social dialogue – the wider its reach the stronger its grasp of the social conditions in which education is to function. The only way to expand the reach of curriculum deliberation is to include teachers in it, and this is where the problem of curriculum encounters its greatest challenge in the culture of education in India. In this culture the teacher is a subordinate officer. He is not expected to have a voice, only expertise’ (p. 14).

Batra (2005) argued that radical change in the school curriculum without changing the central reality of teachers in Indian classrooms can do little to alter educational processes and outcomes. Active deliberation about not just ‘how to teach/the best way to teach’ but also ‘what to teach’ builds a sense of ownership. In the present study, curriculum development seemed to be dictated by schools. It would be ideal if teachers became involved in the process of curriculum development and schools allowed spaces for them to do so collectively as well as individually. It would also lead teachers to view their contribution beyond just the ‘ideas’ needed to make the lessons interesting. I lay stress on the point as standardized curriculum seemed to be slowly seeping into early childhood centres. The notion that standardizing curriculum was a way towards control of quality needs to be debated by practitioners and professionals. Tobin (2005) in his argument on quality suggested that ‘a good start would be to drop the word “standards,” which implies a one-size-fits-all solution to questions of practice’ (p. 434).

Grundy (1994) identified curriculum as a series of phenomena that are constructed and reconstructed on a moment-by-moment basis during pedagogical relationships. In the study, teachers used interactions that arose during the class hours to further the curriculum. Spontaneous moment by moment events seemed to be interpreted by teachers to promote the goals that they had for their children. The belief that interactions mediate learning had also been found by other researchers (Hedges, 2000; Bennett et al., 1997). Claxton (1990) suggested that the sources of children’s knowledge (what he
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called ‘implicit theories’) came from first-hand experience of the physical world, experiences in the social world and both the explicit and hidden curriculum.

In a study of early childhood programs in Mumbai, Datta et al. (2007) found that teachers used two types of pedagogical practices stemming from the developmental and the socio-cultural perspectives. The typical time slots during the day were allotted to activities like song time, story time, concept time, snack time, free play time, clay/block/puzzle time etc. The teachers followed it if resources were available. It was the system prescribed by the NGOs /government under whose aegis the centres were being run. There were also certain practices like celebration of festivals which were typical of the social landscape.

The findings from this study also pointed to similar practices in private sector. Teachers easily used specific time slots which were reflective of the developmentally appropriate paradigms suggested in international documents and research. The teacher education system had adopted this perspective and it was evident in the thinking of the teacher educators and the teachers who had completed their training (Sengupta, 2006a). The perceived gap between what was ‘taught’ during the training and the realities of the practice was discussed by teachers and teacher educators (ibid, 2007; Kahlich & Dorminey, 1993). One of the ideas was the need to rethink and re look at classroom practices to understand the assumptions of revealing ‘why we do what we do’ (Sengupta, 2007), which seemed to hold true for my participants too.

It was important to understand the assumptions as definitions of roles become specific. For example, teachers in an active learning paradigm (which was reflected in certain activities e.g. setting of corners, routines etc.) were meant to ‘give children a sense of control over the events of the day by planning a consistent routine that enables children to anticipate what happens next. A central element of the day is the "plan-do-review sequence," in which children state an intention and make a plan, carry it out during work time, and then reflect on what they have discovered and discuss it with
the teacher and other children (review)’ (OECD, 2004). Although activity-based learning was repeatedly mentioned by teachers, the plan-do-review sequence was not observed in any school. The reasons for any practice or set of practices need to be clear for teachers to get an overarching picture.

The teachers moved from one theoretical perspective to another with ease. It begged the question, but why do teachers need to understand or even articulate the theoretical or philosophical assumptions in their pedagogical practices? In trying to clarify I stumbled upon more questions. One was whether practitioners and professionals (including teacher educators) were speaking the same language. Were our frameworks of understanding common or different? A case in point was how teacher education programs have over the years adopted and advocated ‘free conversation’ as an essential element. In the observations of what the teachers called ‘free conversation time’, I didn’t notice much difference between the nature of conversations or interactions between the teacher and the children during this allotted time or during other times e.g snack time. Since, interactions were a natural part of the day, the time allotted for the activity seemed meaningless but it continued to be a part of the manifest curriculum. In discussions about early childhood practices, there seemed to be a dire need to recognize paradigms and assumptions. Otherwise, practitioners unwittingly adopt features based on, in this case, developmental philosophy, without realizing the redundancy of doing so.

An interesting analogy was given by Harste et al. (2004) when they studied trainees in a teacher education program. They found that the greater the understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, the more seamless the curriculum. They clarified with examples which suggested that teachers who were able to organize curriculum around themes as opposed to disciplines were able to flow from one activity to another as opposed to moving from subject to subject. I related this idea to my participants and found that there was some difference between the teachers who were able to connect their activities within a sound philosophy and who were not. Interestingly, there was a correlation between the teachers who had
completed full time university affiliated courses and who were able to connect some theory to their practice.

It had been suggested that opportunities for critical reflection on practice were needed to help teachers articulate and resolve the dilemmas created by the imposition of prescribed programs on personal educational principles (English, Hargreaves & Hislam, 2002). In the case of the teachers in my study, the imposition of the manifest curriculum and the developmental tradition recommended for delivering the curriculum could in some ways be looked at as an imposition. Maybe the word was too harsh but it would be useful to consider that ownership and assimilation of the developmental paradigm in its totality - the philosophy, basic assumptions and principles - was seemingly low. Could that be a reason why the academic program was not considered to be as important as teaching values? Also, out of ten participants, just two of them had undergone an intensive training program. They were the ones who were more clear and comfortable with the reasons for adopting the manifest curriculum. Obviously, intensive teacher education could contribute to confident practitioners.

It could be assumed in a scenario where teachers either had no training exposure or minimal training that they would continue with the traditional way of teaching. Though ‘teaching as telling’ was considered as a valid way to help children to learn, what came out clearly was the easy acceptability of both the didactic and the constructivist approach. Again, our sense of co-existence may extend to our thought and actions. It might be useful to understand how and why teachers use the two approaches towards resolution of a common goal, which was unclear in this study.

It might be useful to realize that different approaches may actually be an ideal way to transact the curriculum. I quote from Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva (2004), whose research project followed the progress of approximately 3000 children, aged three plus, in 141 pre-schools across England:

‘We have found that the most effective settings combine the provision of open-framework, free play opportunities with more focused group work involving direct instruction. This more balanced approach would
therefore appear to be the most desirable model to promote. Direct instruction is not harmful; it is the balance that is important’ (p. 726).

Consequently, working out the ‘balance’ may be an imperative.

Gupta (2006) identified three different discourses which contributed to what she called the ‘sociocultural early childhood postcolonial curriculum’. These were influences of the Indian philosophy, the legacies of British colonialism and the ideals of American progressive education. Probably because the curriculum she observed was of the primary classrooms (1st and 2nd grade), there were such distinct and noticeable influences. My participants were teaching 3 year olds in nursery classrooms; although there seemed to be a clear indication of socio-cultural influences, I hesitated to categorize them as influences other than the developmental paradigm (activity-based, focus on sensory development, activity corners, providing first hand experiences, free conversation, concept/readiness activities etc.). The fact that even though a number of rhymes continued to have British influences, there was a deliberate attempt at creating more meaningful and contextual songs, stories, materials and activities. Teachers in the study recognized the need for having songs and rhymes in varied regional languages and all the stories were adapted (in fact, in the schools I observed a high number of ‘Indian’ storybooks). I do agree that these influences were a part of the schools but the ‘hybridity’ (Gupta, 2006) may be diluted in nursery classrooms.

An added complexity was, what Kahlich & Dorminey (1993) called the ‘rhetoric of education’ (p. 9). Many teachers used the appropriate sounding terms with little and sometimes contrasting understanding of how the language played out in the classroom. The ‘fuzziness’ tended to overshadow the meaningfulness of activities.

On the other hand, when teachers were talking about the goals for children and the ways in which they furthered the goals, I heard conviction in their voices. The surety about teaching the lessons for life and the fervor with which teachers talked was starkly observable. It gave credence to the fact that the incidental learning was clear, specific and teachers knew how to ‘teach’ them to the children as compared to the academic learning.
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Weikart (2000) in a detailed study of different curriculum models suggested that using specific curriculum models that support children’s initiative was essential for long-lasting benefits. He added that a validated curriculum model must be based on a valid theory or beliefs:

‘It’s carefully thought-through organizing principles need to form a logical system, which then becomes the basis for making decisions about day-to-day program operation and practice (setting up the learning environment, daily routine, adult-child interactions, logistics of teacher planning, nature and extent of parent involvement, organization of learning activities, resolution of conflicts, use of technology)’ (p. 70).

Our early childhood teachers need to work on, individually and collaboratively, on the above. Teachers who can theoretically justify their practice are much more likely to accomplish change (Harste et al., 2004). Their voices need to be a part of creating a document to give direction to the field of early childhood education, as ‘a preschool curriculum model must be able to be documented if it is to be understood and used by a wide range of individuals from different educational and social backgrounds’ (ibid, 2000, p. 70)

It was found that teachers used praise liberally in the nursery classrooms. This finding was contradictory to what Gupta (2006) found in her study and attributed the resistance to praise as a part of our culture. It may be worthwhile to remember that the children were about 3 years old and that could be a reason to be appreciated freely by the teachers. The other reason could be the focus on nurturing the self esteem of children through praising them for the effort that they put in. Teachers linked praise to self esteem and were more than willing to use it as a reinforcement strategy in the classroom. Even for ensuring that children continue with acceptable behavior, positive reinforcement was used. Most frequently, positive reinforcement strategies were used to teach, maintain, or strengthen a variety of behaviors (Zirpoli, 1995 in Duncan, Kemple, & Smith, 2001). Although some early childhood teachers may be reluctant to endorse the use of reinforcement, they often
unknowingly employ reinforcement strategies every day in their classroom (Duncan, Kemple, & Smith, 2001)

The findings implied that teachers were going beyond the so-called dictates of the conventional developmental paradigm. It made me wonder about what teachers called the ‘natural’ or ‘spontaneous’ ways of handling children and situations. Did they value what Goodfellow (2003) called their practical wisdom? Was it appreciated by other stakeholders? The hidden dimensions of professional practice (practical wisdom) need to be carefully documented and promoted (ibid, 2003). That would give a sense of value to the teacher and her work.

Talking of valuing the teacher brought up the issue that I wanted to discuss – the strong feeling within the teachers that they were proud of what they were doing in the classrooms. Pride in being a teacher, according to me, was different than being proud of the practice of teaching. The teachers were content in their workplaces but were equally isolated from what was happening in other schools. They felt that what they did was ‘right’ since the evaluation was done within the school. Teaching had always been considered an “idiosyncratic process” (Bullough, Knowles, and Crowe, 1991, p. 187) and in the current study, teachers seemed to walk their own path to learning the idiosyncratic process. There was rarely any motivation to discuss and debate with other practitioners about their work. Time could certainly be an issue but my contention was that neither did I notice the motivation nor the learning spaces for such interactions to enrich their practice. Sharing could be a way to not just learn from others but also reflect on one’s own practice.

With no real repercussions for any of their teaching behaviors, teachers may feel free to do as they see fit leading to self inclusive practice based on beliefs and experiences (Bruhn, 2005). Teachers’ value validation for their teaching from administrators but deep reflection could also lead to a more realistic self-assessment of one’s own practice. Being proud of one’s practice was positive but it must be tempered with a more realistic self-appraisal. Could we address the issue of isolation by creating time and space for professional interactions, discussions and debates with other practitioners on difficult
classroom issues or resolution of dilemmas in teaching? Could we use such platforms to not only substantiate our own understanding of what is culturally appropriate but also create a sense of community and support for teachers?

What was considered developmentally appropriate in one country might be considered inappropriate in another (Jambunathan, 2005). Dahlberg, Pence & Moss (1999) suggested the idea of different languages which captures the possibility of different perspectives, different meanings, different paradigms; that there are different ways of thinking about and understanding issues, different ways of ‘doing’ early childhood work. The developmental paradigm had enough reason to be critiqued but improving our practices based on new information (Sanagavarapu & Wong, 2004; Gupta, 2003; Hoot et al., 1996) continues to be a challenge. Our teachers need to be prepared to develop their own culturally responsive philosophy of early childhood education and teaching (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). Perhaps the insights from the findings could help us to look inward and not just outward for solutions.

In the documentation of international perspectives on early childhood care and education, voices from India were rarely heard. The oral tradition had for long been the bane for our strangely silent literature. Yet, work in the government, voluntary and private sector was equally laudable and unimpressive. Sharing of best practices by practitioners in the field could become a movement, which could serve the dual purpose of giving a much-needed fillip to committed teachers.

No culture is monolithic in its belief systems (Hsueh & Barton, 2005). There may not be a single early childhood curriculum but understandings of curriculum should continue to evolve with documentation of certain common features (New, 1999). As Ogbu (1994) advocated that we need to recognize cultural frames of reference of others; that would help us to appreciate multiple perspectives. Even within our own country, apart from the much-hyped urban-rural diversity, there are multiple frames of reference. We would be enriched by sharing and learning from other views. Then, delineating common features may help us to appreciate and be proud of ways that we
handle our children, ways we use to help them learn and ways in which we teach them.

Fleer (2006) suggested the identification of cultural tools to support professionals to re-imagine new landscapes for early childhood education. It could happen through serious reflection by teachers and collaborations with stakeholders. Appropriateness need not be an outside-in construct but ensured through inside-out processes. The way may be long and arduous but at least it will be a way we have figured out for ourselves.

We have discussed beliefs of teachers both from professional as well as cultural perspective. Research on teachers’ beliefs needs to become relevant and meaningful not only to researchers, but also to teachers themselves. The next theme deals with the meaning-making of beliefs by the teachers through reflection.
The last theme emerged from the processes followed during the study to gather data. The objectives of the study were grounded in an interpretive paradigm. I revisited the objectives so as to clarify why the theme was worth presenting. The broad objective of the study was to understand the belief systems of teachers. An additional objective was to look at the classroom practices of the same teachers, video record the practices and use video clips to elicit connections between the teacher’s beliefs and her practices. What I had hoped was that showing the video clips to the teachers would trigger what Schon (1983) called ‘reflection-on-action’. The simple process, according to me, would make it clear whether teachers were able to connect the underpinning principles of their practice and also whether there could be a match (or mismatch) between what they said and what they did. This ‘simple’ process turned out to be the most complex, which necessitated the need to unbundle reflection as a theme. After analysis and interpretation, I present aspects of reflection to bring out the complexity:

4.3.4.1 Methodological issues

4.3.4.2 The ‘I’ in the reflection

4.3.4.3 The variable of teacher education

4.3.4.1 Methodological issues

a. Choosing language as a form of representation

A reflective practitioner was considered to be one who became aware about her practice, could analyze as well as ruminate over it. I felt that the teachers could have found difficulty in articulating their reflection. Different representational contexts could have been valuable to get deep insights from the participants. Language as the only form of representing limited their thinking. Use of metaphors or visual representation could
have helped them. A case in point was the response of a teacher regarding how she handled children who cried in the classroom. She said,

‘...it’s spontaneous...natural...there could be many reasons but I don’t know...I just do what I feel is right at that time’

Maybe other forms of representation would have elicited some underpinning principle which she failed to articulate.

Another teacher said,

‘What do I tell you...probably it just was a response...I don’t know...’

Some times I sensed that the teacher would look at the event rather than look at it as a practice.

‘The child was crying...yes...maybe I don’t know the answer...I don’t remember why...’

I had to constantly clarify in subsequent statements or questions to think in general rather than specifics. I felt this was the case with all the teachers. This made me think whether as teachers one tends to emphasize the ‘here and now’ rather than look at it at a deeper level. Eisner's (1997) claim that alternative forms of data representation have enormous potential for enhancing our understanding of complex educational phenomena may hold true in the case of reflection. The forces guiding teaching decisions often go unexamined due to their elusive nature and the absence of appropriate research tools (Briscoe, 1996; Freppon & MacGillivary, 1996).

Pictorial representation, according to Johnson (1989) focused attention on experience and on teasing out connections in knowledge held tacitly. Drawings could provide an excellent forum for reflection, bringing hidden nuances to light (Weber & Mitchell, 1996); surfacing how teachers make sense of their work and stimulating ways to deal with teaching dilemmas (Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1991; Francis, 1995).
b. Use of video as a tool for reflection

Majority of the teachers told me that they were watching a video of themselves for the first time. One of them told me,

*It looks weird...seeing myself...somehow...I thought...it doesn't match what I have of myself in my mind. It's a little...unnerving...'*

The hesitant response made me realize her discomfort. What I could not fathom was that when initially I had mentioned to her about recording the classroom practices, I had heard enthusiasm. In her case, I could not proceed showing the video clips (she seemed relieved as soon as I switched off the laptop) so I continued to ask her questions based on the list that I had prepared, taking care to explain as much of details as possible. I was taken aback when I saw her answering spontaneously and with zest. It made me wonder whether teachers need to be ‘ready’ to ‘look inwards’. Was the discomfort due to the ‘facts being presented’ or was it that it was easier to think of the issue rather than one’s role?

Hers was an extreme case of discomfort while watching herself in action. But I noticed that teachers generally did not focus on themselves when they were viewing the screen. Let me give an example. The scene was of children playing outdoors. The teacher was making the children do different kinds of races – waddle like a duck, hop like a rabbit, gallop like a horse and so on. I wanted her to reflect on the time of the day and the place of the activity. As soon as the video started to play, she was excited about what was happening, taking the names of the children, talking about the other people who were watching, a parent who came to drop the child etc. I felt it was unfair on my part to expect her to focus on herself. It could be that teachers were used to noticing others, predominantly children and so it was natural to do the same while watching the video.

c. The critical effect of the researcher

I was aware before I started my data collection that there was an inbuilt power dynamic set between ‘people from different worlds’ – between researcher and practitioner; between knower and doer; between teacher
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educator and teacher; between theory and practice – and I took care to minimize the difference. I did so by clarifying my goal – to understand teachers; by being completely open and genuine; by building a rapport; and through words and actions conveying an unconditional positive regard for individuals.

In hindsight, the initial interviews, my observations and the video recording went as smoothly as was possible. It was in the subsequent interviews which were primarily meant to be reflective dialogues that I encountered what I later realized was ‘the unconscious criticality effect’.

The criticality effect of the researcher could be in terms of the spontaneous interpretations of what teachers were saying – a quick, easy-to-explain way out (note that I am the one who was leading and I effectively put my words into her thoughts) as well as the in the framing of the question. I deconstruct a dialogue to illustrate what I meant.

What according to you is the best way for children to learn?

I think there should be no force as such…no force at all…because there are some children who learn gradually. There are some children who will do it fast, fast. Just the way you want.

… so the pace may be different for different children. So as a teacher, doesn’t it bother you?

It doesn’t. We do not… we do not call the child out & say ….. We do not have exams so it is fine. It is ok if the child says ‘A’ even a little later as long as he learns ‘A’ like all the kids.

So I hear you saying that everything is a process. Each child picks up according to his or her own pace.

Yes.

My limitation was that I did not see the contradiction in what the teacher said, not at that point of time. In the first response, although she talked about the different pace of learning, she also said ‘there are some who will do it fast, fast. Just the way you want’ signifying that she wanted children to
learn at a fast pace. The second question purports the critical element when I asked her ‘doesn’t it bother you?’ with an underlying implication.

I would like to surface that this was a conversation after ‘understanding her’ through the interviews, observations, after going through the videos and examining them. I already had a clear picture of what she believed (or so I thought) and I wanted to bring the element of the principles of her practice. Obviously, it was a failure to initiate any reflective thinking in her.

As I looked for other instances, I realized that when I became aware, I was asking less leading /closed questions. It came as a surprise to me that I could fall back into an evaluative mode, especially when there seemed to be direct ‘evidence’. It was a valuable lesson towards making me more reflective.

d. Time given for reflection

Another lesson I learnt was that it was difficult and unfair (on my part) to ask teachers to reflect immediately. That did not mean that they were not responding but probably thinking about a practice over a few days would have made a deeper impact. I heard answers which suggested that this could have been a barrier to reflection.

‘I really haven’t given it a thought. Yes, I do it. Maybe I should think about it and tell you later.’

‘It’s all so spontaneous…it just comes naturally…you need to give me some time…this is difficult.’

I did not impose upon them but the next time when we met or talked, it was quite difficult to get them to remember the same incident and get their views. A more long-drawn schedule with regular meetings initiated at the participants’ behest could have worked out. I also analyzed that the process of reflection needs to become a continuous process especially if teachers were not used to the process.
e. The need to justify

As I showed the video clips to my participants, I heard a spontaneous justification of what was shown. There was an almost immediate response defending the particular action (sometimes with a slight note of belligerence). I commented to one of the teachers that I had observed her clapping and saying ‘very good’ to children often and why she considered it important. I reproduce her response:

‘Yes. Because of that one “very good” they start saying yes, teacher (during attendance)...so what is wrong in saying that very good? Now everyone says “yes teacher” even if I do not say the “very good”, they have now got into that habit’.

Another example was when I asked a teacher how useful was the co-teacher to her. I showed her a video clip where she was calling out to the co-teacher for some help (and the co-teacher was not around). She told me that the co-teacher helped her with the filing and during the creative activity she would handle a group. She justified the action of not being present at that time ‘probably because she doesn’t understand – she’s not trained, you know’. For me the idea was to trigger off thinking on why she had needed the help of the co-teacher at that point in time and the role that each one played in the classroom.

That was another lesson I learnt. Viewing a video clip was not enough for communicating to the teacher that it was an action which I would like her to ruminate upon. I took to explaining the context and what she could focus on. That created confusion in my mind – was it right to ask her to focus on her action or should there be a sense of discovery about the act?

Another example was a shot of the teacher stopping in the middle of a ‘lesson’ and directing an expression of exaggerated pout at a child who was hugging the child next to him tightly (the other child looked discomfited). When I asked the teacher to comment, she said,

Yes, I don’t get angry but that day he was too much...very distracted and he hit (another girl)...
I found it difficult to reconcile her look to anger. She didn’t have anything else to say about the scene, which made me feel uncertain.

As I went through the experience of initiating reflective dialogues, I was convinced about the significance of facilitating reflection. It’s a skill that needs practice.

4.3.4.2 The ‘I’ in the reflection

After analyzing the responses during the reflective dialogues, it became obvious that many teachers were not too sure about the ‘why’ of the practice. I asked a teacher about how she asked questions to the children and then answered them herself.

*Generally what happens out here is the children are not coming from a background where they speak a lot of English,*

(Ok..)

*So lot of times when we question ourselves we still know maybe the answers are not going to come. We won’t get 100% answers. We may get 1 or 2 who are participating in the conversation which is fine but by me answering them so I judge that at least the children are listening to that & next time that I ask such a question they will know how to answer. That means there is a question and an answer follows. That could be one of the ways of looking at it.*

Notice the last sentence – the probability of the response. Again, it was not about what she did but the issue being discussed. This was common for all the participants.

This finding was supported from the fact that many of the teachers were unable to provide meaning to the activities that were a part of their practice. Some used terms which were like the rhetoric, as a part of the lexicon e.g. playway method, all round / holistic development, development of all domains, child-centered approach, child rights etc. It was difficult for them to articulate an accurate understanding of the terms. Many mentioned that their theoretical learning had faded over the years.

The tendency to think of a logical answer seemed more pertinent rather than looking within to understand what meaning it had for the teacher. One
teacher also mentioned that the initial interview was good but ‘thinking about why I took a lesson in a particular way... somehow... difficult... going back to it I have to think why... this interview is more difficult’.

I felt that many teachers were not willing to see their role in the video clips. An example:

In one of the video shots, the children are doing printing on paper. The teacher takes up a child’s hand, dips the hand into the paint and then guides the hand on to the paper. The child is busy looking at his hand. Since the impression has not come out too well, the teacher guides the child’s hand through the same process. She tells him to look at the paper saying excitedly, ‘see! See!’ The child is more interested in seeing the paint slowly rolling down his fingers.

When I ask the teacher to comment upon the shot, she talks about the child, the creative activity, the significance of doing fine motor development and the child being fascinated by the paint. But she does not mention what she did or why she did it. I remind her gently about guiding the hand. ‘You have to do it sometimes’, she says and leaves it at that.

Again, I failed to spark off a conversation, a common issue (and rather frustrating, I must admit).

4.3.4.3 The variable of teacher education

As I said earlier, teachers were not used to the process of reflection. They told me so many times. Only two teachers were comfortable with the process and understood the depth of the process. As one of them shared with me,

‘During our practice teaching, we were meant to observe the teachers in action and then analyze, talk with her, ask her and learn from her reflections.’

The two teachers had undergone intensive university affiliated full time training courses. Both the teachers were comfortable talking about a lot of issues, thinking and responding and delving deeply in trying to understand what was the ‘driver’ for particular practices. I illustrate the point with an example. I asked one of the teachers to comment upon her apparent relaxed manner of teaching. She explained that even during her training, her
supervisors told her that she ‘looked’ relaxed though she never ‘felt’ so
during her practice lessons. She distinguished between being comfortable
about handling children (which she always was) and being comfortable
about teaching (which she had become over the years). She said that probably
it was a strength to want to be with children and therefore she was
comfortable with them. She also mentioned about the times when she felt
discomfort –when she had to use any other language to communicate with
the class. She was not comfortable using any other language except English,
and there were many times when she had to fall back on Hindi or Marathi.
Those were the times that she would consciously try to relax.

Such detailed reflective dialogues were a rarity. Both the teachers attributed
that the training had made them become aware of what they did in the
classroom and they try to ‘better’ themselves through their experiences.
Obviously, intensive training especially a one-to-one conversations with
supervisors were useful to initiate reflection. Both also mentioned that
reflection was encouraged in their school during meetings. They also thought
that when they were helping ‘new’ teachers and explaining to them, many of
the issues became clear to them too. These two teachers were also the ones
who were able to connect a certain philosophy to their teaching which other
teachers were unable to articulate.

4.3.4.4  Proposition and discussion

Teachers need to invariably make efforts to ‘make sense’ of what was
happening in their classroom with due awareness about underlying
assumptions. Without making such efforts, teachers would fail to make
appropriate decisions. It is important because sense making and meaning
making can empower teachers to think and move beyond the uncritical
acceptance of any knowledge (Hao, 2000).

Sumson (2000) in a study with teacher trainees found that 8 out of the 18
student teachers failed to become reflective over a period of one year. She
discovered four influences as barriers to reflection. The influences included:
(i) a lack of commitment to teaching;  ii) a lack of commitment to reflection;
(iii) an epistemological perspective of received knowing; and (iv) a
perception that the learning environment of their teacher education program was unsupportive. In the case of the current study, the teachers’ commitment to teaching was evident and they perceived a rather supportive work environment. The basic assumption about receiving knowledge from others could have been a reason. Two ideas support it – one, teachers have themselves gone through an education system which was teacher directed and the second reason could be that teachers were used to constantly being ‘evaluated’ by others. My participants articulated an expectation of getting feedback from me, especially when I showed them the video clips. It could also be that the teachers were not used to the self analysis.

Another reason applicable could be a lack of commitment to reflection. For the teachers, being part of a research study was a one-off activity. The act of reflection could be commitment which they may not have seen as ‘useful’ in their workplace. Except two teachers, there was a tendency to ‘complete’ the conversation.

I found an innovative way in which Harste et al. (2004) had divided stances of teachers along different dimensions. I took the dimension understanding the teacher as a reflective practitioner. They stated that the different stances could be (a) Is reluctant to submit own beliefs about schooling to critical reflection (b) Reflects narrowly; more interested in how she or he looks than in children’s learning (c) Some evidence of using reflection as a tool for professional growth and educational critique (d) Reflects on student learning as a vehicle for understanding, generating, and evaluating practice (e) Uses reflection for purposes of rethinking schooling

I saw evidence of the same two teachers having a stance of reflecting on student learning to improve practice; in the other cases there did not seem to be any matching consistent stance of the teachers.

- **Reflection could be difficult due to methodological issues; yet, teacher education enabled teachers to become reflective**

There were probably enough methodological constraints in the study to hinder smooth reflection of the teachers. These issues were a result of the
design of the study. The fact that I used video as a tool for eliciting reflection had both advantages and disadvantages. On hindsight, use of other forms of representation could have been helpful to understand what teachers thought and believed in. A longer engagement with the teachers could have enabled deeper reflection.

Notwithstanding these issues let me also bring to the fore that there were two teachers who were enabled towards deep reflection because they had prior experience initiated during their teacher training. Without doubt the message was that learning to reflect should not be considered to be an on-the-spot thinking but entailed a kind of getting used to what I did and why I did it. Training seemed to move teachers towards being reflective practitioners. A point to note was that although there were other teachers who had done training for an equal duration of time (1 year); they mentioned that during their training there were no ‘reflective exercises’. This lays credence and validity to the intensity of the training. The implication was that intensive courses which were backed by the University were high on quality.

Another methodological concern was the act of facilitating and structuring reflection. It may be a learnt skill. First of all was my learning that facilitating and structuring reflection needed a certain framework for the assessment of reflective practice within the discipline. The researcher effect on the act of reflection was profound. Sumsion (2000) called it the process skills of an outsider to enable teachers to develop the necessary capacity and capability to help themselves in the future. Teachers need to know they can help themselves, but whether they can achieve this without the help of outside assistance is questionable.

- Reflection may need a courageous stance to confront self; so teachers need to be willing and ready for reflection

Elliott (1989) has explored the difficulties of establishing the conditions which enable teachers to develop their reflexive powers; he argued that ‘expert' intervention can be resisted and self-reflection can be inhibited in the presence of an authority figure. Confrontation must therefore involve a sensitive balance between challenge and support, with the outside facilitator
Acknowledging that the teachers' reflections and professional development constitute a significant educational process for the teacher educators themselves. Those supporting teachers must relinquish their expert status and adopt partnership roles as facilitators and collaborative learners. Thus reflection needs confrontation and collaboration, but collaboration requires the appreciation that studying one's own professional work is no straightforward matter and adopting the reflective mode is not simply a cerebral activity.

As we study our teaching, we are studying the images we hold of ourselves as teachers. Where these established self-images are challenged, questioned and perhaps threatened in the learning process we may experience feelings of instability, anxiety, negativity, even depression. This is especially so if the 'self' we come to see in self-study is not the 'self' we think we are, or the 'self' we would like to be. Thinking about our work in self-evaluation can thus be a highly charged emotional experience, one from which we may be tempted to retreat, thus endangering further learning. If on the other hand, we have the support of caring, sensitive and interested critical friends 'to help us through the potentially dangerous processes of self-evaluation, we are more likely to remain open to further learning and professional development' (Dadds, 1993, p. 287).

Day (1999) posited that teachers need to confront their practice which assumed a certain coping ability towards self confrontation. Teachers should be willing and able to act on their reflection (Sumsion, 2000). Alternatively, the opportunity to reflect on themselves in relation to complex teaching situations may be liberating for the teachers as suggested by Black & Halliwell (2000).

- **Social and collaborative reflective spaces may be a better way of encouraging reflection**

Day (1999) said that if teachers were ‘to extend their knowledge about practice over a career, (and thus gain the possibility of increasing their professional effectiveness), they will need to engage alone and with others in different kinds of reflection on both their own thinking, the values which
underpin this and the contexts in which they work. To do this they will need intellectual and affective support. They will need to be both individual and collective inquirers’ (p.26).

Creating an opportunity and time for joint reflection and inquiry of teachers’ professional practice helped teachers in their work. Convery (1998) also argued that reflective teaching required an approach that is social and collaborative rather than individually introspective.

Gimbert (2000) explored how learning communities could be used to create a safe and non-threatening environment towards collaborative reflection. She demonstrated how personal meanings from experiences could be created to foster 'best' teaching practices, argue about theory-practice divide and contemplate school culture. The use of these learning communities could also provide the necessary interactions between practitioners. These spaces could fill the much-needed gap between practitioners, which seemed to be non-existent. It would not only lead to individual reflection but also give credence to collective and multiple voices. As a group, teachers could get to hear and respect multiple perspectives. Malm, 2004 added that tendencies towards continuity or change in education depend to a great extent on the ways in which teachers are able to critically reflect about how they think and what they do.

Critical reflection had been considered the distinguishing attribute of reflective practitioners. Tobin (1990) had emphasized that reflection, in and on action, can lead to change. Critical reflection involved critical inquiry, the conscious consideration of the ethical implications and consequences of teaching practice, with self-reflection, deep examination of personal beliefs, and assumptions about human potential and learning (Larrivee, 2000). Teacher beliefs may continue to be unchallenged unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, which may help them to examine their decisions, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations. Approaching teaching as a reflective practitioner involved infusing personal beliefs and values into a professional identity, resulting in developing a deliberate code of conduct. The result may be critical awareness of knowledge needs (Black &
Halliwell, 2000) and being motivated to search for knowledge that would help teachers ‘to be the teachers they want to be’.

The complexity of reflection was brought to the fore through the above theme. The next chapter presents the summary, conclusions and implications of the study.