CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The early childhood teacher was the central figure in the study. The first chapter aims to locate the research study in the global and Indian context. The socio-cultural-historical influences on the field of early childhood education are surfaced to introduce the macro-context of a study.
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1.1 The global context
Education opens up a world of opportunities, reduces the burden of disease and poverty, and gives greater voice in society. For nations, it opens doors to economic and social prosperity, spurred by a dynamic workforce and well-informed citizenry able to compete and cooperate in the global arena. Investment in education is considered as a key factor in sustainable development, linked to economic growth, poverty reduction, improvements in health, and an information revolution. Education is seen as a means to effect changes in society and a way to disseminate knowledge and develop skills, for bringing about desired changes in behaviors, values and lifestyles. Education is the most effective means that society possesses for confronting the challenges of the future (World Bank, 1996; UNESCO, 2000).

The field of early childhood development can be located within this framework of education and its significance. Early childhood development encompasses the care and education of young children from birth to age 8. These early years are considered critical for children’s development as well as the foundation necessary to develop their full potential.

The history of early childhood care and education (ECCE) around the world related to the parallel development of two kinds of services for the young child to meet different needs and aspirations (documented from the 1840s). One was the demand for childcare and the other was oriented towards implementation of well-conceived educational philosophies like that of Owen, Froebel and Montessori (Haddad, 2002). Caldwell (1989) argued that the current division of services into childcare and early childhood education had legitimate historical origins, but the political-cultural-economic events that marked world history during particular periods led to the adoption of integrated approaches to early childhood. The events represented remarkable changes in societies in the past decades. These changes included urbanization, industrialization, globalization, technological advancement, political and economic changes etc. (Myers, 2001). These manifested in significant effects on the environment in which children grew and developed.
The demand for early childhood care and education arose due to participation of women in the labor force in high numbers. The changes in the family structure, such as an abrupt erosion of extended families, a sharp decline in birth rates and the rise of single-parent families resulted in a need to develop alternative settings to socialize and educate the young child (Haddad, 2002); the education dimension was particularly designed to enrich experiences for children above the age of 3 years.

Moreover, the field has been in the spotlight especially due to certain global events which have underscored the importance of the early years. Some of these events were:

- the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989) which led to the adoption of ‘Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood’ in September, 2005 (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child);
- United Nations Development Program which created the Human Development Index, 1990 (indicators for children were included);
- the global commitment to education at the Jomtien World conference on Education For All (EFA), 1990 followed by
- the Dakar Framework for Action on EFA (2000) which articulated the goal of expanding and improving comprehensive ECCE, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

To sum up, the global events and socio-cultural changes over the past century and notably in the past decades influenced the field of early childhood care and education. Three perspectives for a detailed understanding of the field are dealt with in the next section.

**International perspectives in ECCE**

Early childhood has been of interest to many philosophers, researchers and educationists from multiple disciplines - psychology, human development, sociology, anthropology, neurobiology, social work, health, law and economics with research conducted by health professionals, psychologists, sociologists, educationists, linguists and increasingly cultural theorists, amongst others (Dockett & Sumsion, 2004). Epistemological perspectives seemed complicated, probably due to the disparate approaches to theory, research and practice that reflect profound
disciplinary differences. In order to understand the field, I looked at three perspectives which have ‘fed’ our understanding. These are the dominant developmental perspective, the child rights perspective, and the socio-cultural perspective. The emphasis on the first perspective is intentional as it has informed research, policy, practice and formal teacher education in India.

**The developmental perspective**

The enduring belief that the early years were the formative, critical and sensitive years in the life span of an individual’s development had influenced thinking in the field for many centuries. Educational philosophers and scientific research established that the first five years – referred to as the foundation years - required attention to the health, education, nutrition and psycho-social development of children; which was essential for the future well-being of nations. The significance of early childhood care and education inputs in the realm of child development and education was widely acknowledged and accepted.

The establishment of an indelible link between educational experiences in the preschool years and later school learning created a provision for it becoming an essential reality in a child’s life. Insightful studies in the field of early childhood recognized the importance of investments in the period and the role they played in building human resources, generating high economic returns, reducing social costs and helping in achieving greater social equality (Datta, 2001); in short, to justify the cost-benefit analysis of early childhood interventions in terms of socio-economic returns of investments mostly aimed at policy making (Campbell & Ramey, 1991; Schweinhart, 2005).

Emerging evidence from the field of neuroscience further agreed that those years were very significant for brain development which provided the base of development of competence, coping skills, learning, behavior and health (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The main goal of early childhood education was to ensure the optimal, integrated and balanced development of young children; their roots were in theories and research spanning the biological and social sciences, notably developmental psychology. Extensive research evidence showed the positive impact of early interventions and the long term
effects of high quality early childhood education, and indicated links between the educational and care processes on the one hand and children’s development outcomes on the other (Swaminathan, 2000), especially for children from low-income families (Barnett, 1995; Frede, 1995).

The above perspective of ECCE is a reflection of the dominant Euro-American way of thinking which has heavily influenced constructions of children and childhood. These discourses have dominated and perhaps colonized the world of early childhood education (Dahlberg et al., 1999). In fact, the postcolonial theory (Gupta, 2006; Viruru, 2005) had questioned the omnipotence of the dominant Western tenets within the early childhood education paradigm.

To sum up, the dominant Western perspective supported by developmental research proved that early intervention enhanced all round development of the child which established not just short term but long term effects towards making children more productive members of society (UNICEF, 2004). It focused on the foundational features, the strengths and the vulnerabilities during the early formative years rooted mainly in theories of developmental psychology.

**The Child Rights perspective**

Another aspect is the Human Rights perspective which laid down that children have the right to develop to their fullest potential; therefore the responsibility to protect children’s human rights is enough reason to invest in early childhood development (Myers, 1995). The core idea was recognition of young children’s universal rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) was ratified by 192 countries which bound them legally to honor children’s rights (Arnold, 2004) with mechanisms for international accountability. The processes of monitoring, reporting and discussion were expected to become a catalyst for local, national and international debates around key policy issues (Santos-Pais, 1999).

A distinction between the developmental perspective and the human rights perspective was political consensus (Woodhead, 2006) based on ethical and
legal principles. A rights-based approach fostered a vision of citizenship whereby the citizen (child) was a holder of rights (Liwski, 2006). Human rights perspectives respected children’s capacity to make decisions. This decision-making was reflected as a common idea between the constructivist (developmental) and child rights paradigms—that children actively engage with their physical and social environment, constructing cognitive models to make sense of the world. Yet, it is a challenge to interpret children’s rights in practice (Woodhead, 2006). Pedagogy revolving around basic child rights is nebulous, dependent on societal interpretation and rarely articulated in the literature.

To sum up, the Child Rights paradigm was a universally endorsed and ethically sound perspective but even though it may sound simple, interpreting these rights into early childhood practices was a challenge which needed to be addressed.

The socio-cultural perspective

A third perspective is the socio-cultural paradigm which considered ‘early childhood contexts and processes as shaped by human action, profoundly social in character and at all times mediated by cultural processes, including competing cultural views on young children’s needs’ (Woodhead, 2006, p. 20). The shift in focus from individual children to a greater awareness of the larger contexts in which children exist led to critiquing the traditional narrow knowledge base of the field that was heavily grounded in developmental psychology (Dockett & Sumsion, 2004). This perspective, though prevailing in the social sciences, came out strongly when the dominant developmental paradigm specifically the ‘Developmentally Appropriate Practices’ (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) were critiqued. Although followers of Piaget had emphasized the child’s individual construction of knowledge, due to increasing attention to Vygotsky’s (1978; 1986) theoretical framework, educators were beginning to understand that ‘making sense’ was a profoundly social process, one in which culture and individual development were mutually embedded (Bowman & Stott, 1994). The social
constructivist theory of Vygotsky elaborated that stages of development were embedded in social practices as much as in processes of maturation.

Cross-cultural, ethnographic research in early development and child-rearing practices also provided evidence of the significance of the cultural context (Whiting & Whiting, 1975; Super & Harkness, 1986) with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory as a framework. His theory posited that social phenomenon should be analyzed with reference to the ecological context in which it occurs. Bronfenbrenner described children’s development as occurring within a series of nested systems, each of which was embedded in larger settings. Factors at each level of the system could influence and be influenced by other levels of the system. At the centre of this model is the biosystem (the child). Next is the microsystem (the immediate settings where the child participates e.g. family, classroom), then the mesosystem (influences that occur between microsystems e.g. relationship between parents). In the next level, the exosystem (influences on the child from settings that do not include any members of the microsystem setting e.g. social policies established by policymakers). The macrosystem includes the larger, overarching social, political and cultural influences, which affect other levels of the system. Last, in Bronfenbrenner’s current conceptualization, the chronosystem represents the changes in systems level variables across time. The ecological framework was used extensively to understand differences in cultural contexts.

Rogoff (1990, 2003) had also drawn attention to young children’s engagement with a range of settings, relationships, activities and skills through which they acquire culturally-specific competencies and identities. This socio-cultural perspective reiterated the cultural assumptions and relationship patterns between all stakeholders as well as it’s reflection in ECE curriculum and practices. Tobin (2005) asserted that cultural differences should be respected but ‘it is not clear in discussions of best practice in multicultural contexts whose culture(s) are to be respected’ (p. 432).

Sociocultural theory offered the field some different ways of thinking about the nature of learning. Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) challenged individualistic orientations placing centre stage ‘learners in the context
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of... (their) lived experience of participation in the world ...’ (ibid, 1998, p. 3). Focusing the lens on the communities of practice that occur within nations rather than on individuals was helpful for seeing more broadly the ways in which communities were formed, maintained, and spoken about (Fleer, 2006).

The review of latest researches in early childhood education suggested that there was a significant increase in the focus on socio-cultural issues and approaches (Dockett & Sumson, 2004). Focusing on social and cultural contexts in early childhood education added new and complex dimensions to research and practice.

To sum up, the field of early childhood education has been enriched and challenged by three perspectives, each having their own set of challenges. Keeping this as the background, I offer a more in depth view of the Euro-American tradition of constructivist paradigm and its manifestation in practice. It is vital in understanding the dominant discourse of early childhood education in the Indian context.

ECE practices and challenges

As mentioned earlier, historically, early childhood education had been informed by constructivist and developmental theories of learning (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2006). Dominant thinking in the field had come from the Western countries; hence referred to as the Euro-American perspective (Viruru, 2001; Gupta, 2006). Early years pioneers such as Froebel, Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, Steiner, Erickson etc. extended educational thinking and produced the bedrock traditions with a child-centered focus, with adult as advisor and facilitator.

Over the past two decades, due in large part to the influence of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), the field of early childhood education had seen a great deal of change in its educational practices. The concept of DAP (NAEYC, 1994) expected in early childhood schools was based on research and practice about child care, how children learn and developmental needs levels. DAP echoed traditional child-centered values reinforced by Piagetian theory, emphasizing respect for universal stages of development; young
children’s natural play, exploration and activity-based learning; and the guiding, supportive role of the skilled practitioner.

The practices espoused reflected an interactive, constructivist view of learning. Developmentally appropriate programs were ones in which children of all abilities, ages, races, cultures, religious beliefs, socioeconomic, and family and lifestyle backgrounds felt loved, valued and competent (Kostelnik, 1992). Developmentally appropriate active learning practices reflected:

- Knowledge about how children develop
- Methods which were appropriate for age and experience of children
- Sensitivity to individual and cultural variation.

DAP emphasized the treatment of children as individuals with the ability to make choices about their educational experience (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

DAP soon became a standard for measuring the appropriateness of the programs. The concept of quality as a benchmark to demarcate appropriate and inappropriate practices emerged. There was growing consensus regarding the importance of early education which invariably led to increasing numbers of children being exposed. At the same time, the warning bells regarding the quality of the educational experience surfaced. Research clearly indicated the significance of quality yet it stood in stark contrast to the disparate system of care and education available to children. The programs for preschoolers varied widely in not just quality but also in content, organization, sponsorship, source of funding, and government regulation (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). The methodology being used in the preschools also came under scrutiny. Leading early childhood experts warned about the wisdom of overly didactic, formal instructional practices for young children (Elkind, 1986; Zigler, 1987). A growing research base suggested that short-term academic gains were offset by long-term stifling of children’s motivation, social development and self-initiated learning (Hart, Charlesworth, Burts, & DeWolf, 1993; Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, and Milburn, 1995; DeVries, Reese-Learned, and Morgan, 1991), thereby proving that the concerns were warranted. In a way, the tension between child development versus preparation for schooling (Cochran, 1993), which pitted a holistic view of childcare
against the desire to prepare children for the cognitive and social challenges of primary school continued to be an unresolved challenge.

Cohen (2008) used Foucault’s perspectives of discourse as regimes of truth to evaluate the document (DAP) that was accepted as authoritative truth. She recommended that early childhood educators must not rely on prescriptions to inform pedagogical knowledge of the social and cultural contexts of the children they teach. DAP was reviewed and revised (culturally appropriate practices were added) but the critique continued (Grieshaber & Canella, 2001). However, the philosophy had infiltrated into the thinking of educators and continued to shape teacher education, including in India.

To summarize, meeting the needs of the world’s children contributed immensely to global prosperity through optimizing individual human potential. Without doubt, the field deserved the due recognition - notwithstanding the challenges. The next section looks at the Indian scenario.

1.2 The Indian context

India is the second largest democratic country in the world. With a rapidly growing population of 1 billion (Government of India, 2001) which include 158 million children below the age of 6 years (ibid, 2002), it is a diverse, complex and large country.

In India, the early years of a child’s life were meant to imbibe sanskars (values) and social skills with an attitude of lalayat or indulgence (National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, 2006). Traditionally, child care practices were a shared responsibility in large families and much of the care was done informally. Factors like increased women’s participation in workforce, advent of nuclear families, rising urbanization etc. which had an impact across the globe, also influenced India.

During independence, preschool education was in the hands of a few voluntary organizations which continued in the 1960s with a welfare oriented approach. The national voluntary organization, the largest of its kind in India, the Indian Council
for Child Welfare (ICCW) launched in 1952, initiated programs for children as well as set up the Balsevika Training Program. The 1970s marked a shift from welfare to development and, the child welfare services were expanded to health, education, nutrition and other sections. A significant step was the adoption of the National Policy for Children in 1974.

Early childhood care and education received a major impetus in the Indian context when it found it’s much deserved place in the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986/1992, as the earliest stage of education. The NPE explicitly recognized the importance of ECCE (the nomenclature was introduced in the policy itself) and emphasized the need to invest in the development of young children from birth to 6 years (the years preceding formal school entry).

In 1992, India ratified the UN Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC). By the end of the century, the government had articulated significant impacts of ECCE in the Working Report on Elementary and Adult Education, 10th 5 year plan 2002-07 and National Plan of Action, 2003:

- as a crucial input in the strategy of human resource development;
- as having critical linkages with enrolment, retention and learning outcomes of children, specifically the psycho-social stimulation, physical readiness for schooling, nutrition and health care;
- as helping in group socialization, stimulation of creative learning and enhancing the scope for overall personality development;
- for countering the physical, intellectual and emotional deprivations of an inadequately stimulating family environment in deprived sections of the society;
- for improving enrolment and retention of girls in primary schools by taking over the sibling care responsibility;
- as a much needed support service for working women.

The progress in the field to a certain extent faced a roadblock when the government implemented Article 21A which made elementary education for 6-14 year old children a Fundamental Right, excluding the 0-6 age group. ECCE was included as a
constitutional provision but not as a justiciable right of every child through Article 45, which said ‘The State shall endeavour to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years’ (Working Group Report on Development of Children for the Eleventh Five Year Plan, 2007). It is unfortunate because in a way it freed the government from the responsibility (Swaminathan, 2001). The minimum standards for ECCE printed by NCERT were also not officially endorsed (Datta, 2004); hence, there were no regulatory mechanisms for the programs offered to young children of the country.

Early Childhood Education in India

In the Indian context, ECCE services target the 0-6 year old children. Within the 0 – 6 year old set the 3 – 6 year old children comprise a sub set that was the target group for preschool education. There seemed to be a decrease in the age of enrollment in the ECE centers corresponding to three years prior to the age for formal schooling (5 ½ years). The past two decades have seen an unprecedented growth in the number of centres providing services to children in this age group.

In India, as in other countries, the early childhood care and education system was divided into two different components, namely, child care and preschool education. Child care referred to full day programs provided for children of working parents. Preschool/early childhood education (ECE) usually referred to programs that were more educational in their focus (Boocock, 1995). The preschool education component had varied nomenclature like nursery, kindergarten/KG, Montessori, playschool, playgroup, pre-nursery - mostly catering to the ‘preparation’ of children for formal schooling/ Grade 1.

ECCE services in India were diverse in terms of the age of the children covered, programmatic content of the services, teacher standards, quality checks, budgetary inputs and free/paid service. Differences seemed to be co-related to the service provider – the government, non- profit organization or private sector. The public sector covered only 22% of children in the age group of 0-6 years (Khalakdina, 1998). There were no figures about the private sector, which was estimated to be possibly as large as the public sector, while the small NGO sector about which also there are no accurate figures, offered a variety of models. An overview of each sector with more details about the private sector is presented in the next part.
**Government sector**

Public, government sponsored programs were directed towards the disadvantaged community. The Government of India promoted expansion of ECCE facilities through the centrally sponsored Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), launched in 1975, which provided integrated approach for converging basic services of child care, early stimulation, learning, health, nutrition, water and environmental sanitation. The National Five Year Plans had subsequently emphasized the expansion and strengthening of ICDS as the key approach for ECCE. In addition to the ICDS, ECE facility was available to children through various government or aided programs. Notably amongst them, a flagship program was the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), where provisions were made not only ‘for greater convergence of preschool education initiatives, specially of ICDS, with that of primary schooling but also of setting up Balwadis as PSE centers in uncovered areas, training inputs for stakeholders, organizing awareness and advocacy campaigns in favor of importance of PSE and the like’ (Government of India, 2007).

Government programs, specifically the universalization of ICDS, reflected the child rights perspective. Early childhood intervention programs were planned and implemented to address many of the rights included in the Child Rights convention (Datta, 2004).

**Voluntary sector**

Voluntary organizations had also implemented programs to reach out to children prior to India’s independence in 1947. Voluntary services were provided by organizations referred to as NGO (non-governmental organizations) which had certain common characteristics—voluntariness, non-official status and non-profit making motive (Khalakdina, 1998). The organizations mostly had an informal structure, and emphasized interactions with the children and the family. They worked in small communities or groups of villages or even in several States depending upon their infrastructure, personnel and funding (Allibana, 1983). Robinson & Riddel, 1995 estimate 10,000 to several thousand NGOs working in rural India. Most
offered crèches / balwadis or play schools for the community along with programs to train personnel.

Amongst the diverse NGOs, some made a mark in the field in terms of offering innovative and successful models like the ‘Meadow School’, Mobile Creches, SEWA, Nutan Bal Shiksha Sangh and Andhra Mahila Sabha (Khalakdina, 1998; Aide de Action report, 2000). Many of these experimental models were successful as they developed from the socio-cultural context to meet the demands of the beneficiaries, reflecting the validity of the social and cultural perspective (Datta, personal conversation, 2008). The flexibility and close interaction with the community were the main strengths of the programs run by the voluntary sector. Regulatory processes were non-existent except for specific NGOs (e.g. Pratham). Obstacles to dispensing services were related to funding and partnership with the government. The challenge had always been the scaling up of these innovative programs.

Private sector

Innumerable private, fee-charging nursery schools which cater to those who can afford them in urban and semi urban areas, which have gradually percolated to rural areas as well (Government of India, 2007), is another sector providing services to young children. In the urban context the number of centers is difficult to pinpoint, as there had been no policy for registration of centers. According to the National Focus Group (2005), the estimated number of children enrolled in private sector initiatives is about one crore. Thus, a substantial number of children in the 3-6 year age group are being exposed to some component of early childhood education. The private initiative remained unrecognized by government and was not an integral part of the educational system of the country.

There were wide diversities in the ECE programs in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, staffing, goals and quality issues. The field of ECE had been deeply influenced by the Western developmental perspective, as explained earlier. This was evident from the review of not only the curricula of the teacher training institutes but also the ‘syllabi’ of EC centers (Sengupta, 2006).
The National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2000; 2005) presented curriculum guidelines for the 3-6 year age group. Since the ECE centers do not come under the ambit of the State, curricula across schools varied in detail and prescription though the articulated common goal was holistic development of the child. There was a clear emphasis on literacy and numeracy learning along with social, emotional, physical and creative aspects. Cultural traditions were rarely articulated except in terms of celebrating festivals.

The pedagogy favored was clearly a play-and activity–based pedagogy. The teacher was meant to support and facilitate learning in children rather than overly direct. An informal approach was encouraged. The adult-child ratio was dependent on other factors. As was evident, the developmental philosophy was the underlying theme in creating the curriculum guidelines. Colleges of Home Science with attached Early Childhood Centers have played a vital role in perpetuating the developmental perspective in the private sector. These colleges offered courses in Early Childhood Education which created the work force in the private sector.

Challenges

Often what is practiced in the name of preschool education is not necessarily what has been envisaged in the National Policy (Minimum Specifications for Preschools, 2000). The main reason for the academic thrust had been the perceived need to prepare children for formal schooling. This demand by schools to give admission to children who had some form of preschool experience created the niche for private players.

These schools continued to have no monitoring or regulatory processes. Observations at these centers showed that most of them had no understanding of child development or pedagogy related to children (Datta, 2000). The consequence was that there was a great deal of “miseducation” in the name of early education (World Bank Report, 2000). The curriculum was often a downward extension of the academic curriculum of grades 1 and 2, instead of a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Not surprisingly, this phenomenon had several adverse effects on the young child, all of which could have latent and cumulative effects on the child’s
overall development (World Bank, 2004). Schweinhart & Weikhart (1995) commented that goals of early childhood education should not be limited to academic preparation for school but should also inculcate skills for decision making, problem solving and cooperation in children.

Another worrisome trend in the private sector was the burgeoning of pre-nursery /play school centers catering to the under threes. This was a direct response to the growing need for alternative childcare arrangements demanded by working women in the urban areas. These, just like the nursery schools, most often than not were academically and developmentally inappropriate (Kaul in World Bank Report, 2000; Kaul, 1993).

Continuing the unabated commercialization in the field, a number of “franchisee” schools following a structured curriculum joined the bandwagon. With no licensing requirement, most programs were generally run by untrained personnel and with inadequate facilities, with insistence on formal teaching of the 3 Rs (ibid, 2000; Khalakdina, 1998). The curriculum was supposed to “feed into” preparation for admission tests to higher classes in other schools which led to extending the primary curriculum down to the two year olds, through play group or pre nursery classes.

Researches proved that it was the quality of the program was the most important determinant rather than the mere attendance of children in these programs and ‘poor’ quality may be harmful to children (Belsky & Cassidy, 1984; Swaminathan, 2000). In the minimum specifications for pre schools (NCERT, 2000), with regard to the admission procedure, the document clearly stated that it should not involve any evaluation of children. Datta (2001) suggested that the role of all stakeholders – the practitioner, the government, the researcher, the parents and the networking organizations–must converge to lead towards the common goal of quality in early childhood education.

Thus, though the quantity of early childhood programs increased tremendously, there was much to be done regarding the appropriateness of the programs. The current concern regarding quality in early childhood programs focused on the variables in terms of their impact on developmental outcomes of children. The developmental perspective prescribed the structural and process variables as the two
major components that create quality of a program (MSSRF, 2001; Howes et al, 1992). However, Tobin (2005) in an ethnographic study demonstrated that quality standards were cultural constructs and therefore, should not be imposed. He noted the dilemma that cultural differences should be respected but ‘it is not clear in discussions of best practice in multicultural contexts whose culture(s) are to be respected’ (p. 432).

To sum up, there was great variation in the private sector with some undesirable practices. The overarching issue of regulation clearly stands out as a panacea to the challenges faced by the field. In effect, it may be safe to assert that the concept of quality in ECE programs was also within the framework of the developmental perspective. As a field, we have followed the dictate of the Western tenets right from what we expect professionals and practitioners to do, to how we evaluate them. The next section reiterates the pervading discourse in the training of staff to work in ECE programs.

1.3 Teacher education

Teacher education (also called teacher training or capacity building) needed to build a quality workforce. Training systems for early childhood educators were not well developed and were hardly emphasized in ECCE programs (FORCES, 2005). Opportunities for training were limited (Datta, 2004) and there was an absence of norms for staff qualifications, remuneration, and guidelines for the recognition of ECCE staff as teachers.

The diversity in ECE initiatives across the country was also reflected in the variety of training programs. Some of these were:

- pre service courses (being run by different state owned and private institutions either affiliated to Universities or privately owned);
- in service courses (exclusively meant for formal training on the job or specific intervention based training inputs); and
- distance learning courses offered by Open Universities.
NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training, NIPCCD (National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development) and various other State-specific SCERTs (State Council of Educational Research and Training) contribute to the professional development of early childhood educators and grassroot-level workers. The Certificate or Diploma (both graduate and post graduate) courses have diverse nomenclature – ECCEd (Early Childhood Care & Education), NTT (Nursery Teachers’ Training), Montessori Training being the well known ones.

The National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) was established in 1995 as a statutory body to achieve planned and coordinated development of the teacher education system throughout the country and to ensure norms and standards at all levels. Standards for teacher educators (those individuals responsible for the development of future teachers) were also a part of the norms. The aim was to emphasize on enhancing teaching skills through high quality teacher training and the accreditation of centers. Currently, 124 NCTE recognized pre-primary and nursery teachers training courses with an intake capacity of 5938 students in the country (NCTE web site) were registered.

The accreditation of teacher training in India faced roadblocks. An experience of the researcher is narrated as an example. In Mumbai, during the early 1990s there were more than a dozen private training centers which were affiliated to the University of Mumbai which offered the Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCEd), a full time one year intensive pre-service teacher training course. Since the universal norms of NCTE were imposed on them, majority of the institutes de-affiliated from the university and continued as private institutes offering the same diploma. Currently, a single institute offering the University Diploma as a 2 year course (which had been stipulated by NCTE as a criterion for accreditation) was accredited. A plethora of private teacher training institutes have mushroomed in the past decade. A number of training institutes had originated attached to ECE centers for reasons of convenience and economics.

The lack of regulation and monitoring had led to teacher trainees being offered varied models to become ‘professionals’. The duration ranged from 6 weeks to a year; part-time to full-time (variations like once a week to 2 hours a day were observed); pre-service (before joining a job) to in-service (while doing a job).
Curriculum included practice teaching and theory lectures with the pedagogy ranging from highly didactic to a discussion-based interactive pedagogy (Sengupta, 2006). Again, it may be enough to point out that there was no guarantee of quality in the institutes.

Makhanya (2001) recommended that teacher training needed to pay particular attention to the interpretation of the role of the teacher. The role of the facilitator/scaffolder from the developmental perspective and the role of an ‘equal partner’ in the learning process from the child’s right perspective were confounding. The socio-cultural perspectives focus on validating practices which were ‘cultural’ added to the confusion. As a teacher educator it was easy to advocate the merits and demerits of the views but converting it into a set of classroom practices was neither undertaken nor documented (Sengupta, 2006a). Hence, the question of who would train the trainer remained one of the unspoken questions in the field.

There was a divide between the researchers and the practitioners, which reflected an overarching gap between theory and practice. Most student teachers passed out from institutes without feeling that they could handle the realities of the classroom (ibid, 2006a). The courses were a way of ensuring a job in a ‘convenient’ school rather than a preparation for professionalism.

The greatest lacuna in the field was the absence of appropriately trained teachers in all sectors and at all levels. Although professional organizations like Indian Association for Preschool Education (IAPE) - a national voluntary organizations of professionals in the field of ECCE with the aim of enabling development of practitioners - called out for a diversity of training models to suit the diversity of ECCE models (IAPE, 2003), lack of regulatory or licenture mechanisms have continued to be a hindrance. An attempt at networking between different NGOs had led to setting up of the Maharashtra Board for Early Childhood Development (Datta, 2002). The objectives envisaged were advocacy, research, and development of database. The regulation process identified and debated was meant to set into motion the following: (a) To set standards for early childhood programs (b) To set a regulatory mechanism (c) To execute regulatory mechanisms through processes like registration, accreditation, supervision and monitoring towards recognition of quality programs (d) To develop resource persons to monitor training programs.
The process, deliberated by stalwarts in the field, stalled due to the lack of government support and lack of funds to initiate the process (Datta, 2002).

Another step was the creation of a National Forum to standardize the measurement of quality in early childhood programs (MSSRF, 2001) with the goal of initiating the development of a process and strategy for the improvement of the quality in India with the use of culturally-appropriate rating tools. Both the efforts were inclusive of programs as well as teacher education. In all of these issues, a common thread was the central figure of the teacher – the one person who could bring in change in the scenario. I spotlight the teacher in the next section.

1.4 Conceptualizing the teacher

Teachers and what they know about their craft have been the focus for social and behavioral researchers for over fifty years (Good & Brophy, 2000; Eisenhart et al., 1988). They have been called the main actors and accepted as the most important factor to determine the quality of the program. The widely cited Teaching for America’s Future (NCTAF, 1996) report indicated, “A caring, competent, and qualified teacher for every child is the most important ingredient in education reform” (p. 3).

Teachers were recognized as the centerpiece of educational change; active and powerful change agents who had the power to make a difference, both individually and collectively (Castellano & Datnow, 2000; Hurst, 1999). There was no one prescribed way to view the role of the teacher in an early childhood classroom. Early childhood teachers brought their own unique strengths and learning styles to their teaching. A caring responsive teacher was expected to play certain roles and responsibilities in a supportive environment such as: (a) to set up the classroom using her knowledge of child development, knowing fully that children had diverse learning styles and multiple intelligences, (b) to observe each child in various settings so as to learn more about each child, (c) to promote a sense of fairness through open, supportive approaches to problem-solving, and create a sense of community to develop confidence and self-esteem in children, (d) to foster an integrated dynamic approach to curriculum by providing concrete opportunities for
children to play, explore, experiment and recreate their experiences, (e) to build partnerships and to communicate effectively with each child's parent (Katz, 1995).

The professional role of the teachers was described as a planner of possibilities, a guide, ethnologist, researcher, and co-constructor of knowledge (Malaguzzi, 1994; Phillips, 1993). Saracho (1988) examined the roles assumed by an early childhood teacher and the results indicated that there was an approximate balance in the teacher's roles as curriculum designer, organizer of instruction, and counselor/advisor. In this view, although "teaching as telling" (Lieberman, 1995; Meier, 1995) was still a part of the educational process, it was only a part. As Bruner (1996) observed, 'Even if we are the only species that “teaches deliberately” and 'out of the context of use,' this does not mean that we should convert this evolutionary step into a fetish'.

In this environment, the role of the teacher was neither to dispense information nor rely solely on the child's maturation; rather, it was to enhance children's development and learning by collaborating with children in joint activities, chosen to fit the child's level of potential development, or to use Vygotsky's (1978; 1986) term, the "zone of proximal development." Thus, teachers were expected to "produce" the ideal citizen of the twenty-first century, not only teach for understanding but also complete the syllabus efficiently (Novick, 1996).

The teacher was responsible for transacting the program and transmitting the goals of education to the children. This mammoth responsibility was to be done within bounded time and resources. She was also expected to be responsive to the child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical characteristics and development (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001), which determined the quality of a program.

Hence, the teacher seemed to be carrying the entire load of making the program experiences appropriate, successful and valuable for the child. She was supposed to play different roles decided by researchers, planners, policy makers. Clearly the teacher seemed to be struggling with the load. In the past three decades, there has been an upsurge in trying to understand teachers, their thinking, their attitudes and their beliefs with a concern that training experiences did not guarantee a standard, good quality workforce.
To summarize, the chapter painted the background on which the present study is situated. The next chapter presents the relevant review of literature about why belief systems are important to understand, their impact on classroom practices and the need for the teacher to become a reflective practitioner.