

# Charity Begins at Home: Doing Gender Inclusivity in Teacher Education

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## Abstract

*The policy discourse in teacher education is replete with clarion calls to institutions and individuals, respectively, to prepare and become teachers who are 'humane' and 'inclusive'. The present paper flips the reality on its head to investigate how inclusive are the conceptualisations which are driving the vision of a teacher in recent discourse on teacher education policy frameworks. Specifically, the paper seeks to focus on the construction of gender in National Curricular Framework for Teacher Education-2009 and gauge how much inclusive this construction is. The inquiry is premised on the assertion that any discussion on gender inclusivity in policy frameworks must firstly, examine how the policy discourse itself posits gender, and secondly, whether and how it recognises and addresses teacher embodiments. As the present inquiry is based on textual articulations in a finite form as encapsulated in NCFTE-2009, the methodology adopted is qualified as a discursive textual analysis. Findings reveal that NCFTE's vision displays a recurrent commitment to the values enshrined in the Constitution of India and it is against this backdrop that the concept of inclusion is seemingly framed too. It is in its charting of the topography of social exclusion in education that NCFTE makes evident its recognition of and concern for inter alia gender-based exclusion. NCFTE displays a clear intent through curricular suggestions and policy rhetoric that teacher educators and teacher trainees alike need to engage with gender as both an area of study as well as of self-scrutiny. A closer scrutiny however, reveals a tendency to abridge the entire gender conundrum to mean girls only. A biological essentialist underpinning too is evident as the framework conflates sex with gender, and fails to recalibrate the discourse of gender.*

*Key words: Teacher Education, Gender Inclusivity, Heteronormativity bias*

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### **THE INVESTIGATIVE CONTEXT**

The policy discourse in teacher education has repeatedly posited the goal of preparing 'humane' and 'inclusive' teachers as a fundamental one. Teacher Education Policy Frameworks call upon both teacher education institutes and teacher educators alike to adopt and respond to this goal in all earnestness. The present paper takes a critical view of the policy framework and emphasises on these two themes by seeking to investigate whether the conceptualisations driving the vision of a teacher in teacher education policy frameworks are by themselves humane and inclusive, to begin with. The NCFTE-2009 forms the investigative context to do so. Given that NCFTE-2009 does not define humane per se whereas the dictionary definitions of the term routinely throw up words such as sympathy, compassion, benevolence and 'that which tends towards humanistic culture' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), one needs to ask if the vision of the teacher promulgated in the policy framework itself exhibits any sympathy, compassion or benevolence towards the teacher as an individual.

With reference to inclusion, which the framework does attend to in considerable detail, the paper seeks to focus the constructions of gender in NCFTE for and gauge how inclusive these constructions themselves are.

### **THE DISCOMFITURE AND THE CONCEPTUAL BACKDROP**

The courage for the present undertaking emanates from Saldivar-Hull's (2000) exhortation to researchers to make conscious attempts to swim against the tide, question the emphatic and look beyond; way beyond, the seemingly sacrosanct. Saldivar-Hull asserts:

Hegemony has so constructed the ideas of method and theory that often we cannot recognise anything that is different from what the dominant discourse constructs. As a consequence, we have to look in non-traditional places for our theories. (Saldivar-Hull, 2000. Cited in Saavedra, 2006, p. 3)

Attempting a juxtaposition of Hull's discomfort with patterns of paradigmatic, methodological and discursive dominance in academic research onto one's own predicament as a Teacher Educator, I reckon that the dominant discourse in this case is evident due to the phenomenal currency enjoyed by the terms 'humane' and 'inclusive' in recent policy frameworks on education in general and on teacher education, specifically (NCF, 2005, NCFTE, 2009).

Turning to Hull's advice on looking at non-traditional places for research and theorisations, the present investigation deems it apt to move beyond the default discussions on learners, curriculum, educational spaces and so on and rather seeks to focus on the teachers as persons—specifically the discursive

construction of their gender identities and embodiments.

The rationale behind this choice emanates from, firstly, a theoretical location which emphasises 'teaching' as fundamentally embodied labour (Connell, 2009, p.10). Bondi (2009) too, in her work on history of feminisation of teaching, draws upon feminist literature to provide theoretical support to enmeshing of gender performance through bodies, and teaching as she remarks:

...gender is something that is done or performed reiteratively and repetitively, with a degree of variability in the form of multiple versions of femininity and masculinity, and at least some degree of instability and contingency...On this account, gender is necessarily being done all the time by all participants in teaching contexts, albeit in a variety of ways. (p. 334)

A second stream of thought arises from the work of Saavedra, who in her extensive perusal of literature on the intersections of teaching and gender, laments that in most of the literature pursued, '*Maestras* are represented as body-less entities.'(2006, p.2). She continues her observation—

The absence of the body is problematic... Knowledge and power over teachers is unleashed without regard to the discursive impact on their bodies and those of their students...the body is ignored, passed over, and perhaps denied to the point of invisibility. (Saavedra, 2006, p. 2)

The author was stuck by the omission of 'the body' in the discussions on gender and wondered whether the reality was any different in the frameworks hailed as progressive and a breath of fresh air in a global era characterised by a decidedly neoliberal-technical managerial framing of teachers and teaching. (Connell, 2009, 2013).

Now, the knowledge and power that Saavedra talks of is a theme with legions of work devoted to it in postmodern, post-structural literature. With specific reference to the 'body', works of *inter alia* Foucault (1978) and Butler (1990, 1993) stands out. John Fiske (1989) inadvertently sums up the essence of this body of work well when he cautions that 'The body is where the social is most convincingly represented as the individual and where politics can best disguise itself as human nature' (p. 70).

My own motivations and apprehensions as a researcher are inspired by and framed against these intersecting backdrops. Put concretely, the terms humane and inclusion themselves are fundamentally discursive constructions, which by default mandate a deconstruction as to their ontological and ethical leanings. In addition, their adoption and recurrent use in policy frameworks endow them with institutionally legitimised and systemically reinforced power as knowledge (Foucault, 1978). It then is warranted as one's *dharma* as an academic to engage in a minute investigation of what these ontological-

ethical leanings are, as also what are the precise messages being sent out, advertently or inadvertently, around what constitutes gender, and by extension how is the discursive import of inclusion vis-à-vis gender? In other words, given that there is no escaping the discourses and discursive practices around gender, and also the irrefutability of the fact of bodies too being constructed discursively through discourses and practices, any discussion on gender inclusivity in policy frameworks must firstly, examine how the policy discourse itself posits gender, and secondly, whether and how it recognises and addresses teacher embodiments.

My position on why such an investigation is critical, is summed up well by Saavedra (2006); who notably is a practicing educator herself, when she says—

Once a concept, idea, or body is identified, categorised, and classified, it is easier to regulate and control it through the management of discourse. The same could be said about managing educational constructs such as special education, accountability, gifted and talented, ability, and aptitude, and ultimately the subjects and objects of education: the teacher and student. (p. 17)

As an academic researcher, I am wary that should we miss an overt dialogue on the issues outlined thus far, the constructions, whatever they may be, will remain unaddressed,

unearthed and thus will always have the potential to be hegemonic. An unravelling is thus crucial for teachers and teacher educators alike to critically question and decide whether the vision of humanness and inclusivity is one that reverberates with them— at all, partially or even in entirety?

### **METHODOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES: EPISTEMIC RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGICAL CONTINUITIES**

The study occupies a post-modernist inclination for it seeks to raise questions about discursive narratives constructed as ‘truths’ in relation to the vision of teachers which in turn will influence the lives and work of teachers. In other words, this work seeks to engage in an ‘active deconstruction of the meta-narratives that define the teacher’ (Saavedra, 2006, p.9).

In addition, in seeking to explore the constructions of gender, whether binary and essentialist or non-binary and constructionist, or even somewhere in between, the work seeks to address the fallibility and challengeability of boundaries between categories— whether they are ontological, epistemological, ethical or material (Shildrick, 1997). Finally, the work also weaves in intellectual flavours from both feminist and queer locations as it seeks to investigate the existence or absence of any normalising discourses around gender in education.

In traversing from epistemic location to the commensurate

methodological choices, one may argue that for a work premised so entirely on discourses and practices, discourse analysis becomes the obvious method of choice. I, however, submit and argue that given the entire inquiry is based on textual articulations in a finite form, the methodology needs to be qualified as a discursive textual analysis (instead of discourse analysis).

To term the methodology discursive textual analysis, is not to legitimate or subscribe to an analytical separation between *texts* and *discourse*; *on the often suggested grounds* that textual analysis has a linguistic undergirding while discourse analysis pertains to sociological analysis (Van Dijk, 1997, Fairclough, 2003). Instead it is to acknowledge that texts; once etched into a written form are a relatively limited manifestation of a societal discourse and can at best allow only a certain type of discourse analysis.

The decision to qualify the methodology as discursive textual analysis is also bolstered by Fairclough's (2003) claim that the social constructivist arguments can only be moderately applied with reference to textual data. The idealist argument of texts constructing social reality overlook factors like what social reality already exists, who is constructing the texts, who is the text targeted at, how are texts appropriated, etc.

In choosing to qualify the methodology as such, the intent is not

to establish a hierarchy of authentic discourse analysis or reject the possibility of studying individual texts. Rather, it is to re-emphasise that discourses differentially emerge in and get reflected in texts. Individual texts give clues to a discourse which is never entirely available otherwise. It is the researcher's position that an awareness of these distinctions between discourses in all their complexity and their specific relationship with texts is a useful reflective device for researching texts.

#### **TEXT USED: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education-2009 is the focal text for the current investigation. As an official document, the NCFTE-2009 was readily available in public domain for download. As a result, the issues of authenticity and reliability of documents (Scott, 1990) as well as ethical considerations regarding author permissions, procurement and storing of documents did not arise.

#### **HUMANE AND INCLUSIVE: THE PROFESSED VISION OF NCFTE-2009**

National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education-2009 sub-captioned 'Towards Preparing Professional and Humane Teacher' envisions the teacher as fundamentally humane. It accordingly asserts, "Though verily a professional, the teacher's personality,

in being humane to the learners, is the core foundational issue on which this Framework is based...' (NCFTE, 2009, p. iii). Hereafter, however, the document lacks a clear explication of the term 'humane' despite being strewn with numerous references to derivatives and seemingly related usages like humane attitudes, humanity, human sensibilities, etc. Even when so used, much is left for interpretation and inference. For instance, in the assertion that 'The concern is to make teacher education liberal, *humanistic* and responsive to the demands of inclusive education.' (NCFTE, 2009, p.19)

The usage of the term 'inclusion' on the other hand is far more precise, unambiguous and chiselled. At the outset, NCFTE's vision displays a recurrent commitment to the values enshrined in the Constitution of India, and it is against this backdrop that the concept of inclusion is seemingly framed too. The NCFTE admits its commitment to constitutional values at the very outset when in the Preface it submits that *inter alia* 'the fundamental tenets enshrined in the Constitution of India have guided the development of this Framework' (NCFTE, 2009, p. iii). As NCFTE-2009 also explicitly acknowledges the vision of NCF-2005 as its intellectual-ethical beacon light, it is crucial to point out that the NCF-2005 too categorically and unequivocally underscores its adherence to the Constitutional vision of 'India as a secular, egalitarian and pluralistic society, founded on the

values of social justice and equality' (NCERT, 2005, p. vii)

The commitment to the constitutional values of equality, justice, liberty, fraternity and secularism is variously and recurrently reiterated throughout NCFTE-2009 in discussions on its vision of and for citizenship education (p. 21), of in-service teacher education (p. 65), etc. It is a fair observation that the NCFTE-2009 displays an inclination to synonymise inclusion with the constitutional ideal of social justice, and exclusion with social deprivation. To illustrate, in a section dedicated to 'Inclusive Education', a prototypical usage of the above kind is encountered in a specific reference to teachers' role in ensuring inclusion as NCFTE-2009 stresses that 'Teachers will have to be equipped if social deprivation has to be overcome through education and Constitutional goals of social justice are to be achieved' (p. 13). As an extension of this constitutional parlance intermingling with inclusion, the NCFTE-2009 also envisages teachers as influencing social attitudes and as actively engaging in overcoming discrimination inside classrooms. (p. 65)

The twin emphasis on altering attitudes and taking definitive and concrete measures to promote non-discriminatory educational contexts pointed above is a recurrent trope in NCFTE-2009, which thus, define inclusive education as—

Inclusive education refers to a philosophical position as well as an arrangement of institutional facilities and processes. This is to ensure access to and conditions of success in education for everybody, including those in the margins, either with learning difficulties because of physical or mental disabilities or because of their social position. The aim is to create an integrated school setting, providing equal opportunities to children with special abilities, varied social backgrounds and diverse learning needs. (NCFTE, 2009, p. 13)

It is almost worthy that the NCFTE is sensitive enough to highlight 'social exclusion' (alongside exclusion of the children with disabilities of different kinds and learning difficulties) as 'a more insidious pattern of exclusion' (p. 13).

It is in its charting of the topography of social exclusion in education, that NCFTE makes evident, its recognition of and concern for *inter alia* gender-based exclusion. It is to this specific end that the paper now focuses on.

### **GENDER AND INCLUSION: THE PROFESSED VISION OF NCFTE-2009**

At the outset there is recognition of gender based exclusion as echoed in statements like 'Regional, social, and gender disparities continue to pose new challenges.' (NCFTE, 2009, p. 2, p.30). In addition, there is recognition of gender as both a defining feature of the contemporary Indian society and

the perennial challenge it posits to it (NCFTE, 2009, pp. 30–31, 80, and 82). Also, evident is the recognition of the need to continually engage with it at various levels of education including teacher education. (NCFTE, 2009, pp. 10, 13–14). A logical continuity to these recognitions is maintained through exhortations of teachers to be aware of 'rights for gender equality and their implications for social change.' (NCFTE, 2009, p. 30)

Continuing with these observations, the NCFTE builds a case for commensurate professional development of teacher educators such that they can 'help teachers to reflect upon their own positions in society' with reference to *inter alia* gender (p. 76). The constant undergirding of gender throughout the document is again visible as the NCFTE forwards at least two suggestive curricular areas namely—a. Gender, School and Society and b. Developing the Self and Aspirations as a Teacher, both with the professed aim of understanding one's ideational and identity locations through a gender lens. The professed vision seems encouraging, thus far. Clearly, the NCFTE wishes for teacher educators and teacher trainees to be engaging with gender as both an area of study as well as of self-scrutiny.

Bolstered by the focus on gender, one turns to pursue how the NCFTE sees these understandings getting translated to teachers actually addressing gender-based exclusion and ensuring inclusion instead. This is pursued next.

### **GENDER IN NCFTE : A RELOOK**

The NCFTE identifies gender as a definite ground of social exclusion. However, what is the exact import of this term i.e., whether for NCFTE gender is mounted on an essentialist or constructionist undergirding is for the large part as elusive as the definition of 'humane' discussed earlier. It does not help with, that besides references to gender as an area of study as in 'Gender theory' or 'Gender studies', other uses of the term too fail to lend an insight into NCFTE's construction of gender. This is so, as most terms vis-a-vis gender perspectives, gender disparities, gender equity, gender equality, gender roles are predicated for their exact meaning on the prefixed term gender; the definition of which is conspicuous by absence.

Discourse analysis has a useful epistemic tool to offer here. Discourse analysis focuses not only on language but the interlinkage between languages (Fairclough, 2003). So an essentialist framing would manifest in sex-based binary construction of subjects as boys and/or girls (Mishra, 2016). On the other hand, non-binary identifications have no currency in essentialist framing. Carrying on with this epistemic scaffold and upon a closer scrutiny of references to gender in other formulations of language reveals a truncated notion of gender. To illustrate, the NCFTE while elaborating upon nature and remedies to social exclusion notes:

'The second and more insidious pattern of exclusion is the social exclusion of children who come from socially and economically deprived backgrounds— Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), minority and other communities, girls and children with diverse learning needs.' (NCFTE, 2009, p. 13)

Notably, as in the above instance, there is a tendency to abridge the entire gender conundrum to mean girls only while discussing inclusion. This is evident again in a discussion on measures to address gender-based exclusion. It remarks that, 'Teachers need to be equipped to sensitively bring and include girls in the classroom transaction.' (NCFTE, 2009, p. 13)

That this synonymising is decidedly essentialist can be proven on the following grounds— Firstly in a clear illustration of biological essentialism it conflates sex with gender. Secondly, and more subtly, it essentialises all girls as a class, as it fails to recognise the intersectionalist reality of gender, especially, in a society as socio-economically stratified as India. Thirdly and by corollary, it fails to recognise the differential matrix of exclusion as it intersects the life of boys, who by no means form an essentialised homogenous class. It is little surprising then that a quick word search for 'boy/boys' through the NCFTE returns zero results.

In a consolation of sorts, one does come across two mentions of gender

in conjunction with ‘identity’ (pp. 34, 57), but the above discussed essential framing forces one to ask whether it is epistemically viable for a researcher to presume a constructionist framing of gender based on these especially since in keeping with the tradition of discourse analysis, one does not find through the text any attempt to broaden the discourse on gender beyond the usual by allusions to either embodiments, sexualities, heteronormativity and so on.

### **EPILOGUE**

While still on the discursive constructions, one also senses a discursive attempt at— firstly creating teachers as particular kind of subjects, and secondly, by extension controlling what can and cannot be said, thought or be acted upon with reference to them. Saavedra’s comment on women teachers, which I will analogously draw upon to carry forward my analysis, is helpful in unearthing the ‘insidiousness’ of any discursive construction as she notes:

Discourse ultimately serves to control not just what but how subjects are constructed. Language, thought, and desire are regulated, policed, and managed through discourse... the discourse of femininity inadvertently informs, influences, and shapes women’s identity to the point that women act out and behave according to what has been labelled as acceptable and

true about females. (Saavedra, 2006, p. 6)

I argue that what is true of the impacts of discursive constructions on women/females as an essentialised category is also true of any other category essentialised and in NCFTE’s case—the teachers. To illustrate the genesis of both this recognition and the discomfiture it creates in the author, the NCFTE proclaims that ‘there is a dire need to equip teachers to overcome their biases in this regard (social exclusion) and to develop professional capacities to address these challenges’ (pg.13, parenthesis added). Several discursive constructions demand attention here—firstly, the role expectations from the teachers are essentially instrumental and interventionalistic. The framing fails to recognise that any charity must begin at home. In other words, the NCFTE despite being a document on teacher education continues to have the empowerment of the school-going learner at its pivot. Laudable as it is as an aim, it smacks of an adultist bias whereby it fails to identify teachers (both pre and in-service) as learners. In addition, it also points to a lack of recognition of teachers as persons first and foremost who need to be understood as humans with specific life histories shaping their beliefs, attitudes and ideological locations. Any allusion to teacher biases without adopting the same fervour that teachers are expected to display when dealing

with or handling student biases is an error on part of NCFTE.

The truncated vision of gender is especially hurtful as it is not as though recognition of the need of gender inclusive teachers and educational contexts is lost on NCFTE in entirety.

It is simply that the NCFTE sorely misses the opportunity to recalibrate the discourse to make it more empowering and inclusive for teacher educators and teachers across the gender spectrum.

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