

Co-Curricular Activities as Best Practices of CIE/ Department of Education, University of Delhi, India

Pankaj Arora

The Department of Education, University of Delhi, also known as the Central Institute of Education (CIE), was perhaps the first major institute of professional learning and research in Education established just after independence. The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru with the country's first Education Minister, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad took considerable interest in the establishment, activities, and progress of CIE in the early years of independence. Maulana Azad visualized the function of CIE as not merely to *turn out teachers who will be 'model teachers'*, but to evolve into *a research centre for solving new educational problems of the country*. Maulana prophesized that it would grow into "a beacon light for training institutions of the country". He said, *The Central Institute will, therefore, both train teachers for higher and secondary schools and also carry on research on the problems of basic and secondary education. The stage at which a child should be introduced to a craft as distinct from activity, the relative emphasis on craft and academic subjects and their correlation, the production of a new type of school literature to bring out the social function of all human activity, the degree of abstraction possible in the earlier stages of education, the stage at which there may be some bifurcation between academic subjects and crafts, the grouping of students according to aptitude, taste and ability, the place of art in the school curriculum - these are only a few of the many problems which arise out of a new conception of basic education and require constant and careful study in a research institution. It is my hope that the Central Institute of Education will be our laboratory for examining all these important questions under controlled conditions and offering suggestions as to the best methods for their solution.*

(Source: CIE Website)

Over these past seven decades, CIE has attempted to work towards the above mentioned vision. The Institution has shaped its unique philosophy which gets reflected in all its programs through inculcating the core values of democracy, freedom, dedication, creativity, social responsibility, diversity, inclusion, collaborative and experiential learning, innovation, sincerity and excellence. The Founder Principal of CIE, Dr. A.N. Basu, who was also an alumnus of Shanti Niketan, can be credited of defining the rich culture and practices of CIE which gradually became an integral part of CIE's institutional life. The institutional ethos envisioned by Dr. Basu were an amalgamation of rich academic activities, institutional publications, open discussions, debates, cultural activities and sports; and all of these became the center of life in CIE. Not only did CIE establish a rich academic flavor in the teacher education, it also recognized many cultural activities that eventually became part of all students' professional life as school teachers. His vision of defining the ethos of an educational institution for teachers has helped CIE become a leader in the education and professional growth of teachers for not only in our country, but in entire Asia. It has always been looked-up

Professor Pankaj Arora, Central Institute of Education [CIE], Department of Education, University of Delhi, India

by different institutions for its ethos. CIE is known for maintaining a fine balance between academic rigor and curricular participation.

In this paper, I am going to share some of the practices that have been an integral part of life in CIE. Writing this article also has a very special place in my heart as I have lived the life of CIE for around 30 years, first as a student and now as a faculty member. In these 30 years, I have witnessed many changes in my institute. As I write this article, I feel nostalgic as well as proud of the values that got inculcated in my personality through CIE.

Student-Teacher Rapport

To begin with, I am going to tap the unique and strong bond that existed between the students and teachers of CIE. CIE is always recognized for its rich culture of nurturing young students in very compassionate, caring and empathetic manner. This belief got etched through the initial Principals, faculty members and students of CIE who lived a unique rich culture of student-teacher rapport. The high standards of institutional life which they defined in participatory mode were something which till date is known as the prodigious heritage of this institution. Teachers took pain in allocating students to various tutorial groups, class sections, schools and curricular activities. The core idea was to let all students gain from every teacher during their stay in the institute. This practice gave access and familiarity to each student with almost every faculty member as well as with all other students of the institute across different programs. The principle, which was followed covertly, was to allot every student to a different group of students/ teachers in different class-sections, tutorial groups, school groups, houses, elective papers and so on. Within a month's time, students started associating themselves to a new set of friends and teachers and thus started owning the institution. This made the student-teacher bond so strong that it felt like an extended family.

Another marvelous way of creating a bond between the students and teachers was through sharing of tea. Often, teachers used to offer tea while teaching a class/ tutorial. This practice soon became an integral part of the institute's culture and I remember having rich discussions over cups of tea with most of my teachers. The Teachers also frequently planned educational excursions- local and outstation. They could be seen playing and singing with students to celebrate different occasions. In order to strengthen that bond, many teachers used to organize pooled lunch and even invite students to their home. This was a unique culture that was appreciated and enjoyed by one and all in the institution. Most of the students had a belief that the ownership of the institution which they experienced being a student at CIE even for a few months could not be developed even during their graduation or post-graduation period wherein they had spent 2-3 years' time. No doubt students keep coming back to CIE, to seek guidance on various stages of their professional life. One can say, that J.Krishnamurti's perception of a teacher truly runs in the blood and nerves of CIE which is, *"Teacher is the guru, father, brother, friend and philosopher for a student."* Krishnamurti believed *in teaching, what is important is not the subject, but the relationship between student and the teacher. If there is right relationship between student and the teacher, then what teacher teaches has a much deeper, non-mechanical meaning.....right relationship means I care for you.*

Daily Morning Assembly

I now wish to make a special mention of a ritual that existed for many decades in CIE. A day in CIE used to start with conducting a Morning Assembly. The Morning Assembly used to start at 9am and end by 9:25am.

This was a forum for students to share the thought for the day, have a two minutes silence period to reflect on it followed by its description by a student and National Anthem at the end of the assembly. I remember many students used to admire participating in the morning assembly as it was their first experience of addressing morning assembly at a public forum. Assembly also allowed different class representatives, house leaders or panchayat members to make relevant announcements. We, as students received this morning assembly time as a platform of settling down in terms of physically, mentally and emotionally after a boisterous morning travel through the busy streets of Delhi.

Student Panchayat

Student Panchayat was a nomenclature given to the students' forum. It composed of one President, one Secretary, one Joint Secretary, one Sports Secretary and one Treasure as core team. All the Students of B.Ed and M.Ed were allocated into four houses: Aurobindo, Gandhi, Sarojini and Tagore. Each house used to elect one Captain and two Vice-captains as it's representatives to the Student Panchayat. Accordingly, Student Panchayat had a total of 5+12 student representatives who used to work under the guidance of a small group of 2-3 teachers known as Panchayat Advisors. Along with this team two more teachers performed the duties as the in-charge/ advisor for each house.

The Student Panchayat used to be a truly democratic forum where student representatives used to get elected. Entire election (core + houses) used to be conducted by a designated election office. Candidates prepared posters with old newspapers or used charts/ brown papers. In a week-long election campaign, candidates were given time-slots to make their election speeches and share their manifesto before the student body. Everything was so transparent, healthy and inclusive that different candidates could be seen preparing posters for each other, even for the opponent candidates. This whole exercise was a spot-on training for democratic processes and to nurture leadership among young enthusiastic students. I can narrate all this with such conviction, as I had myself been elected as Joint Secretary of the Students' Panchayat during the academic year 1989-90. As an elected representative, I enjoyed a variety of experiences, ranging from organizing panchayat activities in a double period slot on Fridays, participating in different stage events-one act play, group song, extempore speech, sports- chess, badminton, table tennis and many co-curricular activities such as the community cooking, called Langar and in the celebration of Eid.

Subject-Clubs/ Societies

UNESCO Club and Science Club were two prominent clubs in the institute which provided a forum to students for sharing their views and arguments on various social themes related to children, women, education and literature. These clubs were known for organizing debates, quiz, wall magazine, essay writing, slogan writing and poster making. All the students were supposed to be part of at least one club. Gradually, various subject clubs and societies also evolved and added to the rich culture of academic activities. One such subject society was Civics Society, where I was associated as teacher in-charge for about two decades. Civics Society followed a democratic culture of electing it's office bearers and remained as one of the most vibrant subject society with some regular annual activities such as organising UN quiz, street play, panel discussions on relevant social/educational themes, visit to Indian Parliament (in session), educational excursions etc. Physics Society, Socrates Society, History society are few other subject-specific societies which can be named

in this series. All these Subject Societies/Clubs added an auxiliary aroma to the rich culture of co-curricular activities of CIE.

Foundation Week Celebration

Every educational institution takes pride in celebrating its foundation/ annual day. As mentioned earlier, CIE was founded on 19th December, 1947, where the first education minister of independent India, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad took considerable interest. Since its inception, CIE has been celebrating week-long activities to mark its foundation day every year. Foundation week celebration is no less than a festival in the life of the institution. Preparations for the foundation week start in the first week of December which is also the end of the School Internship program for the students. Students' community is briefed about the significance of foundation week celebrations and suggestions are invited from them to make it more vibrant. For about 10 days, all students and teachers can be seen enthusiastically preparing for this annual event. Different houses are given socio-cultural themes to make meaningful presentations. In this week, everybody can be seen singing, dancing and rehearsing for different inter-house events; such as- cleanliness and decoration of the institution, rangoli-making, corridors being washed, walls being cleaned, lawns being decorated by teachers-students together. This is a celebration of the dignity of working with hands, team spirit and rich institutional life. Week-long events were inclusive of annual day address by some social, cultural or educational dignitary; sports day celebration where students and Staff play a cricket match which has been an attraction for teaching as well as the non-teaching community of CIE, Bal-Mela for fun activities and self-prepared eatable food stalls which are specially prepared for the children of CIE Basic School. Similarly, many cultural activities were being performed on the stage of Anath Nath Basu Memorial Auditorium. These 5 days long foundation week celebrations can be named the heart and soul of the institution. Those days of togetherness have proven the substance of the popular saying *ONCE OF CIE...ALWAYS OF CIE*.

Educational Gathering

Central Institute of Education is well known for the academic nurturance of its students and scholars. For this purpose, CIE organizes a series of academic activities; educational gatherings which have always been an outstanding event of the institute. Two to three days long Educational Gathering used to be organized in the month of February every year. This was a real training for B.Ed. and M.Ed. students where they learnt to participate in any national or even international educational deliberations. A core team of 3-4 teachers and 2-3 student representatives from Student Panchayat, was formed to take lead in its organization. This small team, in consultation with other teachers, students and scholars, used to decide a theme for the educational gathering. This core team was supposed to provide a 15-20 page wide-ranging reading on the theme to all the students and teachers of the Institution, about a week before the event. A tutorial period was dedicated to initiate the reading, thinking and deliberating on the theme decided for the educational gathering. In a general assembly, organizing committee used to address the house about the theme with a spirit to ensure maximum participation while deliberating in small groups; which would be a mixture of 2-3 teachers, 3-4 M.Phil/ PhD Scholars and 12-15 B.Ed+M.Ed Students. These small groups were then sent to different designated places. Each Small group was supposed to appoint its rapporteurs and conveners from amongst its student/scholar members. These team leaders were responsible to conduct 2-3 days long educational gatherings which used to be planned in various sessions. Tea/ Biscuits and working lunch were served in between the academic

rendezvous, which I enjoyed being a student as well as a faculty member. This 2-3 days long activity got culminated with a well-organized valedictory session, generally a well-known academician from some other institution was invited as a guest. Rapporteurs of various groups presented a report on the deliberations in their respective group. In this way, the Educational Gathering was helpful for each one of the institute to reflect, write and present their views on critical educational concerns/issues.

Interface or Nostalgic Closure?

With the changing time, all institutions reflect and revisit their own ethos and practices. Sometimes these reflections and revisits bring positive change while at other times these may act as tides. In the year 1979, CIE passed-through a major structural change; *from an autonomous institution under MHRD, Government of India to a Department of Education under the University of Delhi*. It is important to mention about this change in nomenclature here as this was not just a change in the name, with it many things changed. By this time many pioneering stalwarts had already retired and this brought about a major shift in the organizational structure of the institute in many ways. To give a glimpse, a place with a fulltime dedicated Principal got redefined to designating a Head of the 'Department' which, by its nature is on a rotation-basis for a maximum period of three years or till his/her superannuation, whichever is earlier. This structural change initiated a new debate in the institution about the mandates and vision which is attached to a typical department under a university system. Some faculty members got the respite that after being declared as a department, we should be working like a typical PG department of the University of Delhi, which is to only teach and do research. These people had lesser interest in the conducting of any CCA, as according to them such activities are a 'waste of time and resources'. It was being said that pre-service teacher education should prepare teachers to only organize these co-curricular activities in school and thus they should be trained in organizational skills. Their own participation is not necessary. Gradually, with the passage of time, among many other practices, CCA was also started to see a decline in spirits and its nature has got affected.

The second blow on the cultural heritage of CIE can be attributed to change in teachers' perception towards their job. When the UGC declared the guidelines for University teachers' promotion under the API policy, debates on role and responsibilities of a university department started to merge. With more emphasis on publications, the teachers got directed towards writing exclusively, this mindset collectively made an adverse impact on CCA culture of CIE. The rich culture of activities, teacher-student rapport, morning assembly and institutional publications went through a major shift and now these can hardly be seen happening in CIE

The last blow happened in the year 2014 when NCTE released a gazette and professed that one year B.Ed./M. Ed. programs must be replaced by Two-year B.Ed./ M.Ed.- programs. This was another turning point in the life and culture of the institution. Once again, CIE passed through turmoil of divergent ideas and debates. Majority of the faculty members were keen to take this opportunity in redefining academic essence and vision for the department, whereas some other faculty members desired to switch over to the new gazette regulation as proposed by NCTE. Now, in this new extended two- year programs of B.Ed. and M.Ed., CCA and Student Panchayat finds 'NO space'. It also means that an institution which advocated democracy and students' space, has now virtually no forum for students' voices. In the name of NCTE curriculum guidelines, department chose not to enrich them with the existing good practices and make best use of one additional year in B.Ed. and M.Ed. programs. Till date, I am confused to realize the merit behind this shift from rich culture of CCA to not undertaking any CCA.

I, along with many other colleagues feel that CIE, as an institution, is losing its identity from being a premier institute of education pan-Asia. It has now got reduced to any other department of education under a university system. Recently, one of my senior colleagues expressed her concern over this no-institutional life situation and asked me “why do students/ scholars do not own this institution the way we used to own it during our student days?”

Though, CIE has always been privileged to embrace the best infrastructure along with best students/scholars and best faculty members in the country, it’s high time for all in the institution to save its dwindling glory. To the best of my understanding, it needs to work on three important aspects: Co-curricular activities, School Internship for B.Ed./ M.Ed. and Teacher-Student rapport across various programs. I propose to conclude this write-up with following encouraging words by one of my teachers who assured me that *institutions do not perish easily*.