



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: PLACING THE CHILD FIRST

THE STORY OF TWO INNOVATIONS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

AKDN

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

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Early Childhood Education: Placing the Child First

**THE STORY OF TWO INNOVATIONS IN
PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION**

AMITA GOVINDA

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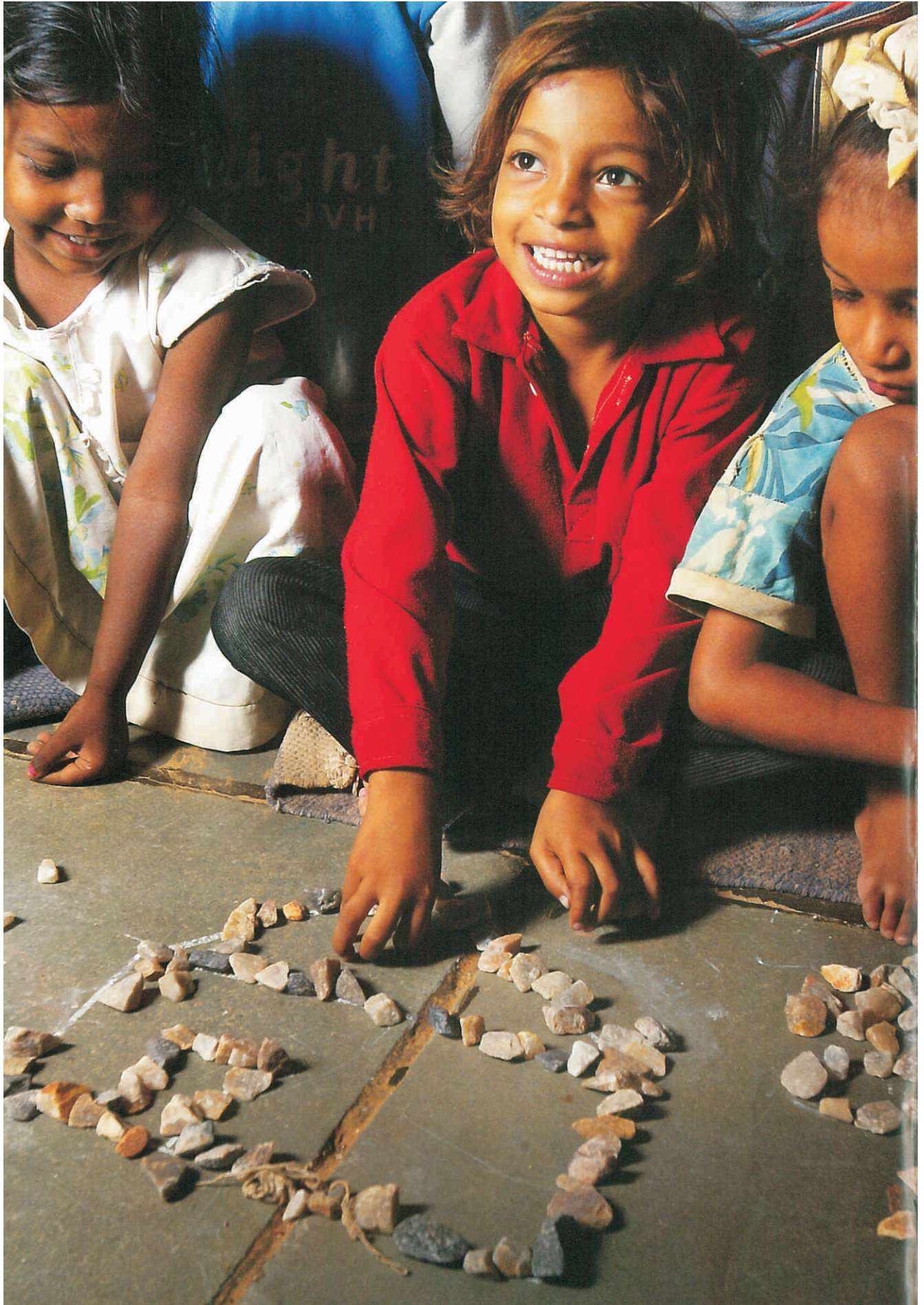
Early Childhood Education: Placing the Child First The Story of Two Innovations in Pre-School Education

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P R E F A C E

The critical value of experiences provided to a child in the early years, for her further education and development, is globally known. Studies in India have amply demonstrated the significance of organizing a comprehensive programme of early childhood care and education. The National Policy on Education, 1986, and other policy documents have consistently emphasized the need and importance for laying a strong foundation for education in the early years. Yet, there is a very long way to go in this regard even in official programmes. While the government considers the programme of Integrated Child Development Services as the main, if not the sole, means of imparting pre-school education, private sector efforts invariably treat pre-school education as a downward extension of the primary school programme.

In this context, I found the innovative efforts made by two non-governmental organizations, Bodh Shiksha Samiti and the Aga Khan Education Service, India worth noting. They are refreshing and present workable models for reforming pre-school education. Both innovations cross urban-rural boundaries; they consist of models for providing pre-school education to children from hard-to-reach marginalized groups. The two innovations, though evolved in different contexts, are guided by the twin principles of "placing the child first" and "partnering with parents". This monograph is based on a review of the early childhood education programme under the Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education that I undertook in 2006 and it involved multiple visits to field sites and extensive interaction with teachers and other functionaries involved in the innovative programmes. I also had the opportunity to revisit some of the field sites recently, which convinced me that the innovations are sustainable and hold immense value for anyone attempting to implement or reform pre-school education programmes.

I am grateful to the Aga Khan Foundation for giving me this opportunity, and I am in particular, grateful to Mr. Dayaram for persuading me to write the monograph. I am indebted to the teachers and other programme implementers for their cooperation and support during the field work. I hope the monograph will help further strengthen the early childhood education programme and extend the benefits of quality pre-school education to more children in the country.

New Delhi
January 2009

Amita Govinda



The provision of pre-school education should be viewed as part of the child rights compact to be made available to all children by the State.



Early Childhood Education: The Context



The significance of providing organized educational inputs, with those of health and nutrition, early in the life of the child has a unique value in enhancing his participation in later educational endeavours. Empirical literature is unequivocal on this crucial role of pre-school education in early intellectual stimulation and creating a readiness for continued learning through life¹. The position paper on Early Childhood Education (ECE) brought out by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) as part of the National Curriculum Framework reiterates this point: “Research in the South Asian region, particularly in India, has documented the effects of Early Childhood Development programmes, in the shorter-term perspective, on the academic and social preparedness of children for formal schooling; this is manifested in a difference of 15-20 percent in retention and achievement levels...”²

Based on overwhelming evidence, global perception of the place of pre-school education within the overall framework of organized schooling has begun to change. It is increasingly argued that such provision be made available to all by the State. In other words, pre-school education should not depend on the vagaries of official policy making or on the choice and financial capability of parents. The goals of 'Education for All' adopted in the Dakar Declaration, particularly the first one on early childhood care and education, reiterate this commitment: “Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.” Elaborating on this and emphasizing the value that ECE programmes add to the life of the growing child, the Global Monitoring Report published by UNESCO³ highlights seven significant points on promoting Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):

- ECCE is a right, recognized in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which has won near universal ratification;
- ECCE can improve the well-being of young children, especially in the developing world, where many live in extreme poverty and also die from preventable diseases before age five;
- Early childhood is a time of remarkable brain development that lays down the foundation for later learning;

- ECCE contributes to improving performance in the early years of primary school and to achievement of overall education and health goals;
- It is more cost-effective to institute preventive measures and support for children in early years than to compensate for disadvantage as they grow older;
- Affordable and reliable child care provides essential support for parents, particularly mothers, and
- Investment in ECCE yields very high economic returns, offsetting disadvantage and inequality, especially for children from poor families.

Within this global context, the Indian scene is quite complex. The Indian Constitution says the State shall endeavour to provide free education to all children in the 0-6 years age group, though not as a fundamental right, something now extended to the elementary education years of 6-14. But in actual programmes, the most critical and precious years of early childhood have got only perfunctory attention. Should education be seen to begin only from the age of six? The assumption, perhaps, is that the family would bear the major responsibility of childcare and education in the early years. How tenable is this, considering the fast-changing pattern of family life in urban areas and the continued dependence of rural families on daily wage labour and a subsistence-level economy?

Official recognition of the need for early childhood programmes came only in the mid-seventies, with the launch of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). It took another decade before ECE was incorporated into policy through the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986. The issue was effectively articulated and strategies formulated in the Programme of Action accompanying the NPE. It was proposed: "Programmes of ECCE will be child-oriented, focused around play and the individuality of the child. Formal methods and introduction of the 'Three Rs' will be discouraged at this stage... A full integration of childcare and pre-primary education will be brought out both as a feeder and a strengthening factor for primary education and for human resource development in general."⁴

Undoubtedly, these were bold statements of intention, with far-reaching implications for the development of ECE programmes in the country. How far we have progressed in implementing this vision is still a matter to be reckoned with.

Emergence of formal programmes in ECCE in India can be traced back to the late 1930s. These early efforts, before Independence, were mainly confined to individuals and the voluntary sector. At that time, educational reformers, social workers and others interested in child welfare assumed the role of teachers and worked at the field level. Early pioneers such as Nanabhai Bhat, Gijubhai Badheka, and Taraben Modak were influenced considerably by Froebel and Montessori, as well as by the ideas of Gandhiji and Tagore. The attempt was to design an indigenous



system of educating children of pre-school age. One of the first organized efforts was the establishment of a training centre by Gijubhai, popularly known as Dakshinamurthy, in Bhavnagar (Gujarat). A similar institution was created later by Taraben Modak at Dadar, Bombay (now Mumbai), Maharashtra.

Unlike the earlier efforts, the government-sponsored programmes that began in the mid-seventies were marked by an underlying social welfare concern, with relatively low emphasis on educational aspects of child development, even though ECE has been one of the six components of the ICDS. This seems to be changing in recent years. Following the commitments made at national and international levels, the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007)⁵ reaffirms government's commitment to the welfare and development of the young child. This commitment to the 'Development of Children' with a special focus on early childhood development, is seen not only as the most desirable societal investment for the country's future, but as the right of every child to achieve his/her potential. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Government of India's flagship programme for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), also acknowledges the need and importance of ECCE for quality education and proposes strengthening the pre-school education component in ICDS.

In the absence of government recognition and explicit support, except as a component of ICDS, early childhood education as a stage by itself has not grown in a systematic manner in terms of format or content. There is very little systematic information available about the overall extent and variety of ECE in the country.

According to the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), only around 20 per cent of children in the 3-6 years age group are covered under ECCE programmes, including ICDS and related schemes. Besides these official efforts, one can also witness during recent years, a mushrooming of pre-primary schools essentially responding to the market demand for pre-school education. Parents, particularly in urban areas, view these institutions as the gateway for entering the primary school of their choice, to which these pre-primary sections are attached. While the number of such institutions is increasing in the private sector, the government-sponsored ICDS, which reaches the poor and the marginalized, has been slow to reform and strengthen the education component. There is a great need for good and replicable models of organizing pre-school education, viewing child development in a holistic manner. It is this vacuum that the pre-school programmes of agencies in the voluntary sector, such as Bodh Shiksha Samiti, the Aga Khan Education Service, India (AKES,I) and others are trying to fill.

CONTEXT FOR THE CASE STUDIES

Early childhood care and education has been an important area of activity for the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) for a long time, in India and globally. In India, systematic effort to innovate pre-school education began in 1989 with the launch of a School Improvement Programme (SIP) by AKES,I. The aim was to improve the quality of education in its two Diamond Jubilee schools in Mumbai, both at pre-school and primary levels. The emphasis was on making the education provided in the two schools child-centred and activity-based. Many innovative practices were introduced to enhance the quality of learning experiences. The programme was subsequently evaluated; the reviews were very favourable and recommended consolidating and expanding the innovations to reach children of marginalized groups beyond the two schools.

It is within the above context that the Programme for the Enrichment of School Level Education (PESLE) was conceived and initiated by AKF in collaboration with the European Commission in 1999. PESLE (1999-2007) supported innovative projects of NGOs working in selected states of India for school-based improvements in the quality of education.

Specifically, PESLE focussed on providing appropriate quality school experiences for children from poor and vulnerable groups. The emphasis is on holistic development from the early childhood

years until the terminal stage of school education. The two case studies chosen for the present monograph were part of this larger programme.

The pre-school education programme of Bodh Shiksha Samiti is spread over different urban and rural areas of Rajasthan. AKES, I programme covers urban and rural pockets in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, including the Diamond Jubilee schools in Mumbai. The context in which the two programmes evolved are very different. What binds these, apart from being part of a larger programme of school improvement, is their common commitment to child-centred learning and promoting teachers from within as the essential change agents to reform the pre-school programme. Therefore, no attempt is made to generalize the observations across the programmes. Instead, the approach has been to characterize the efforts made by each and compare these to the core principles and practices that constitute a good pre-school education programme.







Programme Objectives, Organization and Coverage

The physical and social environment in which children live and grow is the most significant factor influencing how they learn and develop. Therefore, the design and development of all educational programmes have to be in tune with this basic principle. This overarching principle has, in fact, guided the formulation of pre-school education programmes by both organizations. However, it may be noted that when PESLE began its operations, both AKES,I and Bodh Shiksha Samiti had already been implementing programmes of school improvement for several years. Also, the contexts and conditions under which the two programmes were conceived and evolved differed significantly. Consequently, the nature and contents of the two pre-school education programmes have to be viewed in a context-specific fashion. This section presents the broad features of the pre-school education programme being implemented by the two organizations, focusing on their core objectives, organizational profile and their target groups.

AKES,I PROGRAMME OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

AKES,I began its effort to reform the pre-school education programme as part of the innovative project to improve quality of teaching and learning in the Diamond Jubilee schools (DJ schools hereafter) nearly 15 years ago, under the comprehensive framework of the School Improvement Programme (SIP). The context for reforming pre-school education, therefore, was essentially urban and conceived to operate within a well-structured school setting. Some of the broad assumptions underlying the programme were: (i) Pre-school years are the formative years of human growth and development. During these years, the child should be respected as a responsible self-learner. If this happens, the confidence generated will stand him/her in good stead for meeting the challenges of his/her entire life. (ii) Pre-school should be a place that will permit a child to get in touch with his/ her own being. Children are whole people who have their own feelings, ideas and relationships with others, different from those of adults, and they need to be accepted wholly. (iii) In the classroom, there should be a balance between child-initiated activities (those that enable children to investigate and engage in tasks with meaning and

purpose for them), teacher-initiated activities (arising from the teacher's planning but sufficiently open-ended for children to respond independently in a variety of ways), and teacher-intensive activities (those that arise from the teacher's planning, are more directed and the focus of teacher time). (iv) Self-discipline is emphasized by keeping children's intrinsic motivation intact, valuing their efforts and using social relationships to harness their will to learn. On these broad principles, their pre-school programme *shishu pahel padhati* (child first approach) has been designed to help children in the early years to broaden their base of information, form concepts, acquire foundation skills and positive attitudes to learning, and begin to develop their abilities and talents in a wide range of areas.

Children are whole people who have their own feelings, ideas and relationships with others, different from those of adults, and they need to be accepted wholly.



The pre-school programme was originally conceived as an in-house programme of the DJ schools. However, the idea was soon extended to cover the rural centres in Gujarat, which had been functioning since 1978, under the Rural Education Advancement Programme (REAP). REAP is implemented in 31 villages of Gujarat and 2 villages of Maharashtra. All these 33 villages have Day Care Centres (DCCs), with five DCCs having Rural Primary Education Programme Centres and another four villages having Upgraded Rural Primary Education centres attached to these.

The coverage was further enhanced by establishing linkages with the Navjeevan Trust and by taking up additional rural schools/centres in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Accordingly, the scope expanded to focus on consolidating the whole school approach in the DJ schools, developing network schools as Education Resource Centres (ERCs), and taking up programmes of outreach and mainstreaming. In all AKES, I was, then, reaching out to 27 schools and 175 pre-schools, and through these impacting 12,000 children and 340 teachers. The outreach programme included privately-run as well as government-run schools, in urban and rural areas. Elements of the *shishu*

pahel padhati to pre-school education were introduced in Mumbai and Gujarat through Pratham (a non-governmental organization) and the Navjeevan Trust, respectively. There were links with ICDS in Gujarat, Mumbai and Andhra Pradesh.

While outreach interventions involving school improvement planning are largely undertaken at the school level, working in the government school system for AKES,I meant developing relationships with functionaries in the State education departments in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. These include Director of School Education and Director of State Council of Educational Research and Training in Hyderabad; education officers and administrative officers of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation in Mumbai; District Primary Education Programme/Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan functionaries and District Institute of Education and Training faculty in these states. Through consistent interaction with government functionaries, AKES,I has been successful in creating a demand for its outreach interventions and materials.

In addition to government functionaries, AKES,I has been able to establish professional linkage with academic and networking organizations that influence pre-school education. The Indian Association of Pre-school Education is working with Hyderabad schools to develop quality indicators for pre-school education. Another network of NGOs working on early childhood and education, FORCES, has been in dialogue with AKES,I to develop research on quality indicators in Maharashtra. The South India Education Society teacher training college in Mumbai has incorporated the *shishu pahel* approach in its curriculum for training of pre-school teachers.

BODH SHIKSHA SAMITI'S PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMME

The pre-school education programme of Bodh Shiksha Samiti began in March 1993 with the support of the Aga Khan Foundation and the Bernard van Leer Foundation in three slums of Jaipur (Rajasthan). This was, in fact, a part of the ongoing programme of school improvement at the primary stage. Bodh's work in education is rooted in the need to bring the school and home closer and create what may be described as an integrated community school owned by the people themselves. Bodh's vision of education is embedded in three cardinal principles of quality, human dignity and a democratic way of life. The vision is a collective learning endeavour shaped by the child, the teacher and the community, generating a spirit of cooperation, respect for human dignity and democratic values and constructing knowledge. The initial programmes of Bodh were, therefore, contextualized to the underprivileged conditions in which schools in the slums of Jaipur were functioning. The programme gradually expanded to cover more schools and also spread to reach rural areas.



The main features of Bodh's pre-school programme are:

- School to be viewed in a holistic and integrative fashion, facilitating human development;
- Activity-based curriculum which serves as a forum to psychologically prepare small children for transition from the home environment to the school environment;
- Stress on improving the child's social environment by bringing attitudinal changes among parents towards their children;
- Flexibility in curriculum, keeping in view the developmental needs of children hailing from a variety of home backgrounds;
- Continuous evaluation through assessing and rectifying methods of teaching;
- Focus on developing cognitive abilities, rational outlook, democratic attitude and human sensibilities;
- Flexible timings, according to the availability and convenience of children;
- Ungraded system of schooling, in which children could be grouped according to their learning levels, and
- Children learning in the natural environment and with eco-friendly material.

Bodh is reaching out to the larger community through its community schools called *Bodhshalas*, located both in urban and rural areas of Rajasthan. Beginning with the programme of urban *Bodhshalas* in Jaipur, the programme expanded to include community schools run by other

selected NGOs in three cities (Jaipur, Ajmer and Bharatpur) and rural *Bodhshalas* in two blocks of Alwar district (Thanagazi and Umrein). The *Bodhshalas* in the slums of Jaipur are, in fact, the home of innovations in pedagogy and have been acclaimed as models of innovative, appropriate quality education for deprived children.

Urban Bodhshalas: Seven *Bodhshalas* in Jaipur have been used as models of a community-based, child-centred, equity and quality-oriented education. Three of these *Bodhshalas* have been transformed into Resource Schools used for field experience by teacher trainees. These schools continue to experiment with innovative ideas of education at primary and pre-school stages. Three pre-schools have also been added to government primary schools in Umrein and Thanagazi. The pre-school curriculum developed by Bodh is being tried out in these schools to elicit feedback from teachers and mothers teachers.

Resource School Net: Three urban *Bodhshalas* and four government primary schools in Umrein block have been developed as resource schools. These are expected to extend resource support to other *Bodhshalas* and NGO initiatives in primary education. Bodh proposes to create 'Resource school nets', each net covering 10 schools. Three more *Bodhshalas* in Thanagazi have been selected to be transformed into resource schools. Bodh has already set up a Resource School Net in Thanagazi, which includes nine schools.

Work with government schools: Bodh has been mainstreaming its innovative pedagogy for the past seven years. During PESLE, Bodh provided technical and academic support to state-run government schools, called *Rajkiya Janshalas*. In addition, Bodh is mainstreaming its approaches in two blocks of Alwar district by covering all government primary schools of Thanagazi block and two clusters of Umrein block under its quality improvement programme. Bodh has also set up 48 community-based schools (six in urban and 42 in rural areas) and 33 pre-schools and 9 centres for adolescent girls, building the capacity of 134 educators and reaching 3,360 children.

Though the two programmes have been conceived and developed under different contexts, one could find a common underlying philosophy of child and education in the way the contours and contents of the pre-school programme have been drawn. Both the programmes emphasize such core values as respecting the individuality of the child, developmental needs of children, recognizing individual differences and potential, and allowing space and freedom for independent work. Both programmes also emphasize the need for developing the home-school partnership, developing common understanding about children and the curriculum, and viewing home and school experiences of the child in a continuum. The philosophy and vision of these pre-school programmes are fully in consonance with contemporary theories and practices of ECE.

The common thread in both programmes is child-centered and activity-based education. Both the programmes focus on holistic development of the child and have the goal of providing children with a variety of experiences like dramatization, music, drawing, clay modeling and other activities; children are expected to learn in a natural environment without any pressure.

While one has to recognize the significant progress in consolidating the efforts that began more than 10 years ago in both places, how effectively are the basic principles being translated into action in the field? Do the curriculum and learning materials reflect and facilitate adequately the implementation process? Implementing effective programmes depends mainly on the quality of teachers, their training and the teaching-learning process they adopt in classrooms. Therefore, questions of who become teachers in pre-schools and how they are equipped become critical for the success of the programme. Similarly, are the principles of pre-school education being fully integrated into the new programmes while extending support to other agencies as part of 'outreach' or are they followed only in a superficial manner without adequate integration? These are some of the questions explored in the following sections.



Curriculum and Classroom Processes



Child-centred learning was the central principle underlying all programmes under PESLE. This is particularly critical in ECE and demands that all inputs and processes constituting the ECE curriculum are conceived keeping holistic development of the growing child in view. This section analyses the practices adopted by AKES,I and Bodh with specific focus on the curriculum and classroom processes, classroom organization, use of teaching-learning material (TLM) and assessment of children. The attempt is not only to examine the prescribed or espoused curriculum but also the curriculum in practice. How are classroom processes organized? What role is accorded in these to children? Does a typical day for the child in the school embody the principles of child-centred learning effectively? Are TLMs used in the schools/centres compatible with the age and stage of development of the children in pre-school years? What expectations are placed on children and are these in line with the philosophy of child centred learning and holistic development of the child in early years of schooling? These are some questions examined in the section. The analysis is based on information provided in various documents prepared by the implementing agencies over the years. This has been supplemented by direct observation, as well as empirical information from the field through group discussion with teachers and organizers involved in the programme.

PRE-SCHOOL CURRICULUM AT AKES,I SCHOOLS

The pre-school curriculum is not viewed as consisting of a predetermined set of activities and expected outcomes. It is an evolving framework, keeping child-initiated activities at the heart of all experiences provided. It is considered as a loosely configured programme, which provides ample opportunities for the child to explore, experiment and construct his/her own knowledge. The focus is as much on social and emotional dimensions of learning as on cognitive development. It is in line with these principles that AKES,I designed the *shishu pahel paddhati* programme.

Shishu pahel paddhati is designed to help the teacher take the child through the process of active learning. Pre-school children are recognized as capable individuals who initiate their own learning in a social context, in which the alert and sensitive teacher is essentially a participant-observer. Learning goes beyond the constricted area of the classroom into the real world in the form of 'field trips', relating education to real life situations. The key elements of the approach are: (a) The daily routine; (b) Organization of classroom space into learning areas; (c) Active learning, involving the children according to their choice and at their own pace; and (d) Planning curricular activities in a team, based on observation.

CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION

Pre-school classrooms consist of well-demarcated work areas. Materials in each area are logically organized and clearly labeled. The 'Home area' contains utensils like plates, pressure cooker, glasses, bowls and all other items one finds in the household. The 'Block area' has all kinds of blocks and puzzles. The 'Quiet area' has picture books and storybooks. In a corner, there is also space for sand and water play. This enables the child to act independently and learn in a self-initiated manner. The seating and work area arrangements in a *shishu pahel paddhati* classroom are supposed to reflect the principle that children learn best in a stimulative but ordered environment, in which they can make choices and act on them.



CLASSROOM PROCESSES

The daily routine under the *shishu pahel paddhati* is expected to:

- (1) Provide activities in a framework of plan-do-review, which enables children to explore, design and carry out projects and make decisions in their learning.
- (2) Provide a variety of interactive settings for learning - small and large groups, adult to child, child-to-child and teamwork, both as child-initiated and adult-initiated activities.
- (3) Provide time to work in a variety of environments inside as well as outside the school, in various work areas and during field trips.

The daily routine generally includes *mukta khel* (free play), *gappa goshti* (free conversation), songs, stories, mathematics, science, *shishu vachan* (child reading), book bag and drawing. Planning for daily work is done through a coordination meeting which gives teachers a forum to share ideas, plan lessons and discuss problems faced in day-to-day experiences of classroom teaching. Coordination meetings are integrated in the work schedule of teachers and are seen as a forum for professional development of teachers.

The 'daily routine' is the heart of the programme. It is through daily routine that the child-initiated curriculum gets transacted. Classroom observations indicate that children enjoy working in different areas and were learning many concepts through exploration with a variety of materials. The child-initiated activities are followed by many other activities conceived by teachers. In all the curriculum documents and training modules, the emphasis is on flexibility and creativity. However, in reality, there is the danger of ritualizing daily routine activities, which may create monotony and defeat the objectives of the programme. Within the programme, there is scope for innovation and for bringing in new elements to make the classroom more vibrant and meaningful to children.

It was observed that teachers follow *shishu pahel paddhati* as prescribed in the modules. However, there is a need to go beyond what has been prescribed, if classroom processes are to become truly child-centred. For example, the weekly routine prescribes a story-telling session just once a week. Should this be followed as a rigid rule? Story telling could probably find a place almost every day. Even the storybooks available essentially include concept-related stories. Should there not be access for teachers and students to stories from the *Panchatantra*, *Amar Chitra Katha* and other folk stories with an Indian flavour and content?

A TYPICAL DAY FOR THE CHILD IN AKES,I SCHOOLS

Children start their daily routine by planning to work in the areas of their choice. The classroom is divided into different areas like home area, block area and quiet area. Children are given the opportunity to select the area of their choice to work. They go and play in different areas. After they finish, it is recall time where children talk about what they have done, narrate their experiences of playing with different materials and how they liked working in that area. The process helps children to learn to make choices, make mental pictures of what they are planning to do, recall what they have planned and what they worked on. Children are encouraged to recall the completion of their work through showing, telling, representing through drawing, miming or by action songs. By doing this, children develop independence and confidence and it boosts their morale and self-esteem.

The teacher helps children who find it difficult to verbalize the plan. The teacher also tries to shift children gently to other areas which they have not explored. The teacher observes and moves around, helping children to extend their work plan. If there is any conflict, the teacher helps in resolving it.

In clean-up time, the teacher helps children to put away the play material properly. By doing this, children develop a habit of putting things in order. They also learn to sort out material according to the area of work. In small group time, children work with the materials chosen by teachers on the basis of observations made during work time. In snack time, children talk about the shape, colour and taste of the food they eat. They also talk about their likes and dislikes for particular food items. Children also play outside, where they take part in vigorous activity. This is mainly unstructured or free play, on swings, jungle gym and slides. In circle time, children and the teacher meet in a large group for action songs, story telling and show and tell activities. Show and tell is a very interesting activity where children bring any object of their liking from home. It is something very personal to them and since they are able to relate to it, they enjoy talking about the shape, colour and other details of the object. Sometimes, though, in the process of eliciting children's responses, the teacher's talk becomes predominant.

TEACHING LEARNING MATERIAL

Pre-school sections in both the Diamond Jubilee Schools in Mumbai have a wide variety of teaching learning material (TLM) for children in adequate quantity. Teachers have also generated TLM such as flash cards, number cards, story cards, puppets and masks which are easily accessible to children in all the classrooms. One finds a similar situation in the REAP centers in Gujarat.



In each class, generally, there are 20-25 children. The space for children is organized imaginatively. There is also a display of children's work. One does find low-level blackboards as well. However, the seating arrangement and organization in primary classes is completely different, though the pre-school one should stretch over the entire period of early schooling. All contemporary literature, as well as national policy documents on the subject, emphasize the need for treating pre-school and early primary years in an integrated fashion.

Rural Education Advancement Programme (REAP)

REAP operates in a rural context. It includes Day Care Centres (DCCs), Rural Primary Education centres and Upgraded Rural Primary Education centres. DCCs are considered a first step in the ladder of educational experience. The aim of REAP is to foster the natural development of children between the ages of two-and-a-half to five-and-a-half years through a child centered/child initiated programmes of learning. The focus is on holistic development through stimulating activities.

The salient features of the pre-school programme are:

- Individual attention
- Stimulating and encouraging environment
- Use of a variety of teaching aids and techniques

- Opportunity for self-expression
- Educational field trips
- Celebration of festivals to develop cultural values
- Medical checks, regular dosage of vitamin-A, de-worming tablets and regular growth monitoring
- Picnic, sports and fun games conducted throughout the year to encourage participation of children and their parents
- Bi-monthly meetings in which parents and teachers discuss strategies for working in harmony to understand the growth and development of children.

In principle, all pre-schools including DCCs, follow *shishu pahel paddhati* for framing the curriculum and implementing daily educational programmes. DCCs are particularly well laid-out, spacious and equipped with indoor and outdoor play materials. The classroom organization and processes in all rural programmes are on similar lines as discussed earlier.

A Teacher from Ranivav on the *shishu pahel* approach

“Before *Shishu Pahel Paddhati*, we were following environment-based learning. We had learning areas in that method also. It was more teacher-centred and children got little exposure to speak. We had to strictly follow the lesson plans. More writing work was given to children.

Now, the emphasis is more on oral. In this method, we allow children to plan and select the areas of work. There is more scope for child-initiated learning and children enjoy working in different areas. I am happy about it.”

HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL ASPECTS

The DCCs organize an annual medical checkup for all children enrolled, through the Aga Khan Health Service, India. In addition, teachers also maintain growth charts of all children. They keep a record of the weight of each child and plot these at the interval of every two months. In cases of marked deviation from the normal weight, mothers are informed and advised to provide nutritious food. All children get nutritious snacks daily, prepared by the helper (*masima*) at the centres. This is done in accordance with a nutrition menu drawn up for six months on a daily and weekly basis.

PRE-SCHOOL CURRICULUM OF BODH SHIKSHA SAMITI

As mentioned earlier, Bodh's work in education is rooted in the value of bringing the school and the home closer and creating what may be described as an integrated community school, owned by the people themselves. Bodh's vision of education is embedded in the three principles of quality, human dignity and a democratic way of life. The main features of the pre-school programme are: (a) Curriculum and teaching learning process are activity based; (b) Flexibility in curriculum designing and transacting the curriculum according to the local context; and (c) Activities to be designed keeping in mind the age and stage of development of the child. There are no separate grades or classes; children are grouped according to their learning levels. Very high emphasis is placed on children learning in the natural environment and using eco-friendly material.

The pre-school curriculum is characterized by the following elements:

- Concrete learning experiences for stimulation
- Adequate opportunities for free expression
- Total development of the child
- Variety of experiences provided through art, craft, clay models, dramatization
- Emphasis on learning from nature
- Increasing levels of complexity

A team of teachers, along with groups of mother-teachers, design pre-school activities. There is continuous reflection and introspection in the planning of activities, ensuring the feasibility of implementing these in classrooms and revising them on the basis of feedback from children. Teachers are required to constantly work with children and develop new materials and activities. Each teacher has freedom to take decisions about children's developmental issues and solve problems at her own level. This flexibility and responsiveness to local needs makes the programme more effective. Every aspect of children's needs, preoccupations, knowledge and thinking are met in a coordinated and yet, non-compartmentalized way.

One of the characteristic features of Bodh's educational programme is intensive planning of activities. Teachers maintain a content planning notebook in which the next day's teaching plan is prepared. An hour is set aside every day for this work, after teaching hours. Teachers also prepare elaborate worksheets to cater to the specific learning needs of children. Teaching aids like flash cards for associative learning, identification and matching games for developing discrimination and analysis skills of children are also prepared.



On the whole, the curriculum reflects the use of pedagogical principles of moving from known to unknown and from simple to complex for conceptual development. One finds the inclusion of geometrical shapes, matching of numbers and objects, order relations, flash cards and picture dominoes in order of complexity. There are puzzles and games to develop problem-solving skills as well as clay items for making small pottery, different objects, animals, birds, the sun, moon and whatever else stimulates a child's imagination.

Bodhshala views the pre-school curriculum as a part of the continuum of learning experiences extending from early childhood to Grade I of primary school. It is with this in view that the ECE centres are invariably located in the vicinity of primary schools. The centre's accommodation is provided by the community, as a bond between the community and Bodh.

CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION

Pre-school classrooms in Bodh are reasonably spacious. The rural pre-school centres have a lot of space outside the centre. Urban centres do not have that much space compared to rural ones, but even in these, the available space has been used imaginatively. For instance, in one of the centres a sand pit has been created in the middle of the room, where children are encouraged to play and make things out of clay. The pit is

covered when they change to other activities. Children's creative work such as drawing, paper cutting and objects made of clay has been displayed in the centre. TLM like flash cards, picture cards, puzzles and play kits are stored where these can be easily retrieved. In the classroom, children can move freely and interact with each other. There is considerable flexibility in seating arrangements. Children generally sit on small mats and are encouraged to work as they wish, individually or in groups.

The pre-primary group is divided into three levels according to the age group of children. The *shala poorv* group is for children of three to five years. The *shala arambh* is for the early primary equivalent to grades I and II, to be followed by the group covering later grades. The effort is to have smooth and comfortable transition for children in terms of the curriculum. Bodh's grouping of children, according to the learning levels, seems to promote peer interaction and learning. Children feel a sense of security and develop confidence in working in small groups. Children move to higher levels of learning on the basis of their participation in different activities, conceptual clarity and their interest in play activities.

CLASSROOM PROCESSES

Bodh schools follow a structured schedule. The day starts with circle time, featuring a variety of activities. Children recite poems with actions, individually and also in chorus. They are encouraged to talk about the objects in the room like balls, paper or objects made of clay. The teacher initiates discussion whenever children are found to be hesitant to speak in the beginning.

A storytelling session is a regular feature of the daily routine. Generally, children listen to stories told by the teacher. Sometimes children themselves narrate stories. These could be stories of animals and birds, folk stories or narration of personal incidents. Children also play with flash cards of pictures and words, puzzles, drawing and colouring, tearing and pasting, and stringing beads.

The classroom process in *Bodhshalas* aim to develop cognitive abilities, a rational outlook, democratic attitudes and human sensibilities. Teaching is rooted in the child's familiar world that helps children find meaning in what they learn without a sense of alienation from the real world. Teachers view learners in a holistic manner, embedded in the context of the community to which they belong. They recognize that children have meagre facilities at home, often do not have access to adult care givers and are expected to participate in household work. This empathy, affection and concern for children results in warm teacher-pupil relationships.

TEACHING LEARNING MATERIAL

Bohd has developed a wide range of TLM, which are age-specific, with increasing levels of complexity. The materials are also local and eco-friendly. Children are given considerable freedom, within the structured programme, to play with the material as and when they wish. There are learning corners for children in classrooms in which they are encouraged to play. Teachers act as facilitators. Children are encouraged to bring materials for learning corners in the form of picture books, storybooks, leaves, clay models, nests and other waste material. Most schools have a sand pit for play. The *shala arambh* group follows the *khel pathmala* series of activities for language and mathematics competencies. These are mainly group activities, but can also be given individually. The series includes a lot of manipulative activities, poems and songs.

CO-OPERATION FROM PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

As mentioned earlier, all schooling and particularly pre-school education has to be a joint effort of home and school. This question was explored with parents and teachers as well as other organizers through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). In general, schools report good co-operation from parents and the community, both of whom recognize the effort and work of the organization. They appreciate the ECE programme and the way it is being conducted.



Some parents wanted continuation of the same programme in higher classes. Some suggested that other schools should also follow the same methodology of teaching. It was found that some parents were not fully aware of the basic objective of pre-school education, as they tend to see it as a means of accelerating reading and writing skills of children. This misperception could be observed among parents across the institutions.

Communities in rural areas also contribute financially to the programme. FGDs with parents and community members at the AKES,I supported school in Ranivav suggested that parents and the community seem to be happy with the functioning of the DCC. One of the parents pointed out that the kinds of activities that are being carried out at the centre do not happen in other schools. Also, they get preference over others for getting admission to primary classes. And, they are happy with the introduction of teaching English to their children.

To bring parents closer to the school, AKES,I has developed a module titled 'Towards Parental Education'. It aims to create awareness on child development in parents; to acquaint parents about needs of children for their all-round development; to develop understanding on the role of parents in child development; to suggest ways to develop a meaningful relationship between parents and teachers and, to give guidance about organizing parent meetings. The module is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the need for parental education and what it should comprise on the growth and development of the child, health and nutrition, and providing a stimulating environment. Further, it discusses different aspects of development, the rights of children, the role of parents, activities to be carried out at home, selection of toys, importance of pre-school education and developing good habits in children. The second part covers, in detail, the need for meetings between parents and their organization. It also discusses the different methods for discussion in the meeting and suggests a variety of activities in these meetings, such as small group discussions, role-plays, sharing of experiences and games. It also suggests ways of evaluation and follow-up of the meeting.

FGDs with mothers at Umrein, in Alwar district of Rajasthan (Bodh), suggested that they are happy with work in the school. Mothers could clearly recognize the significance of the way of teaching adopted in the pre-school. Discussion also revealed that their association with the work of Bodh has developed awareness about various social issues confronting their community and the way these could be addressed. It also indicated that they attach great value to the education of their children as a means to address several social and economic problems they face. These are important observations, as Bodh attempts to specifically address the pre-school education needs of marginalized groups and tries to draw mother teachers into working in the ECE centres. Bodh has also been conducting orientation programmes for mothers in order that they follow the progress of their children and complement the activities being pursued in the school.

The general framework of the curriculum under ECE programme pursued by AKES,I and Bodh Shiksha Samiti are similar as both of these emphasize child-centred, activity-based learning and make efforts to locate learning experiences in the community life of the children. They also look at the programme not as a downward extension of primary schooling. Instead, ECE is viewed as an important component, with a unique identity defined by the age and stage of development of children. The principle of continuity and integration in viewing education in the early years, going beyond the three to five years age group, into at least the first three years of primary schooling, is also an important feature of the ECE programme. The approach and basic principles of curriculum formation are well in accordance with contemporary thinking on the subject as well as in line with the ideas underscored in several national policy documents.

Pre-school education has to be a joint effort between home and school.



CURRICULUM IN PRACTICE

In terms of content, ECE programmes of both the organizations share several common features. For instance, the programme generally begins with understanding of self and family at home, moves on to objects and people in the immediate environment, the world of animals, birds, plants, the sun, moon, stars, means of transport and people who help in day-to-day life. It also includes readiness programmes covering pre-reading, pre-writing and pre-number concepts. Further, it includes development of various skills like identification, comparison, matching, naming, seriating, drawing and problem solving. There is a serious attempt to make the content developmentally appropriate to the age and stage of development. The attempt in both the institutions is also to provide meaningful activities to children at the individual level and abundant opportunities to learn through interacting with material and people.

Though there are many similarities in terms of details, the overall framework of curriculum transaction seem to differ in schools/centres supported by the two organizations. As has been discussed earlier, ECE centres supported by AKES, follow *shishu pahel paddhati* for organizing the teaching-learning process. It helps a teacher take the child through the process of active learning.

Bodh does not refer to any such model of curriculum transaction to be followed by all schools and centres. The emphasis is much more on adaptation to local needs and conditions. The focus is specifically on reaching relevant pre-school education inputs to marginalized groups in urban and rural areas. This variation is possibly due to differing contexts in which initial explorations were carried out by the two organizations. As noted earlier, *shishu pahel paddhati* is the product of several years of practical exploration done by AKES, in the fairly structured contexts of DJ schools. In contrast, Bodh began and has continued to work in field-based informal settings, with minimal facilities and involving marginalized groups. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that both organizations have been able to expand their operations and explore new ideas in varying urban and rural settings.

How do these common goals and principles, though under different approaches, get translated into effective practice? A small-scale effort was made to capture the field reality prevailing in the pre-schools. One of the most important facet in this exploration was teachers' perception of various aspects of the ECE programme being implemented. How do teachers perceive the method being pursued? What have they to say on the curriculum? Table 1, on the next page, gives a summary of the observations made by teachers through a brief questionnaire and during FGDs.

TABLE 1: TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE METHOD

About the Method	Would like to change
AKES,I (Urban)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It helps children to develop confidence. • It helps the teacher to understand the level of the child and her development. • It is child-friendly. • It provides opportunities for holistic development of the child. • Learning is faster when the child is involved in the learning process. • Children grasp things better. • Children become independent. • It provides first hand experience. • Children learn better through concrete experiences. • The freedom to choose and explore leads to healthy development. • It does not pressurize the children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like to have water and music corners and the dollhouse fixed. • Would like to give more exposure to English language and reading readiness. • Do not want any changes, as teaching method adopted is appropriate. • Want to have a beautiful playground. • Would like to emphasize writing. • Would like to make small group activities more intensive (content wise). • Would like the same method to be followed in primary classes.
About the Method	Would like to change
AKES,I (Rural)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children develop thinking skills and become independent. • They do not find the work burdensome. • It helps in total development of the child. • They learn new vocabulary. • Importance is given to the choices children make. • Children have freedom to select the area of work according to their interest. • Activities are child-initiated. • Children develop confidence to play and talk freely. • It gives us opportunities to understand the child through our observations. • It is a child-centered approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like to make some changes in large group and small group activities. • Would like to know new games and activities and introduce them in my classroom. • Teachers have a lot of writing work which needs to be reduced. • Would like to introduce more creative work. • Will have more story-telling and songs to make it a more joyful experience for children. • Reduce clean-up time and planning time and increase recall time. • Would like to give writing work and homework to children. • In a week, we need one day for writing work and three times in a week for outdoor play. • Pediatrician for the medical check-up for children and not a general practitioner. • Give importance to writing work.

About the Method	Would like to change
Bodh (Mainly Rural)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system keeps in mind the age of the child when designing activities • It is applicable to all levels of children. • Can use the methodology till 8th standard. • It is the best method of teaching; one can see the development of the child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like more play material for children. • Would like to organize a balanced diet for children. • Would like day boarding schools for children. • Would like to know other ways of teaching children. • Children should get training in later stages of life, so they can become financially independent. • Do not want to see any change. • More time be given for teacher preparation. • The community should take up the responsibility of handling finances. • Organize teachers' visits to other institutions. • Need to strengthen the pedagogy. • Need for a trained teacher, along with a mother teacher.

The responses of the teachers clearly point out their strong conviction in the methods being pursued. All the responses convey that teachers find the pedagogy adopted in their schools as appropriate and helping children learn better. They seem to be convinced about the effectiveness of the pedagogy. However, some apprehensions are expressed about the contents of programmes, though responses are varied. Many of them indicated the need for introducing writing work for children during pre-school. Another observation, which indirectly reflects on the approach, is the need to reduce the written work of teachers. In general, teachers found it difficult to record their observations on children on a daily basis. Some teachers felt the need to closely link the programme of early primary and primary classes. It was felt there should be close coordination and continuity in the methods and programmes followed at the two stages. Several suggestions made by the teachers indicate their openness and readiness to try out new things and to critically reflect on the work in the school, which is a very positive feature.

A child-centered curriculum demands availability of a variety of teaching learning material. Table 2, on the next page, gives an overview of the teaching-learning material available in pre-schools under AKES,I and Bodh and also how teachers are contributing to preparing such material.

TABLE 2: ON TEACHING LEARNING MATERIAL (TLM)

TLM available in the school	Materials teachers would like to have	TLM prepared by teachers
AKES,I (Urban)		
Charts Visual cards Books Musical instruments LCD/TV Material for painting Puppets Dominoes Blocks Lacing board Utensils Clay board	Computer Soft toys Doll house Cycle Air blown swimming pool Puppets	Flash cards Charts Letter cards Story cards Number cards Scenery on the walls Pattern cards
TLM available in the school	Materials teachers would like to have	TLM prepared by teachers
AKES,I (Rural)		
Charts Visual cards Books Musical instruments LCD/TV Material for painting Puppets Dominoes Blocks Lacing board Utensils Clay board Pyramid	Laminated books Games for children	Cut-outs of pictures Story cards Charts on flowers, fruits, animals Fruits and vegetables made out of clay Equipments of farmers Books of birds and animals Charts on different shapes Chart on postman Different types of houses Chart for English teaching

TLM available in the school	Materials teachers would like to have	TLM prepared by teachers
Bodh		
Wooden blocks Buttons Beads Puzzles Masks Puppets Rings Balls CLR material Clay Vessels Musical instruments Flash cards Picture cards Story books Geometrical shapes	Picture charts Readymade masks Storybooks Picture books TV Computer Tape recorder	Picture cards of animals and birds Pictures for odd man out Puppets Puzzles Animal and fruit charts Cards on who is missing Story cards Snakes & ladders Storybooks Picture books

Across the institutions, the responses on TLM suggest that all of them have the material required for children. They have listed a variety of materials for different areas of work. For example, for the block area they have blocks, wooden toys, puzzles, beads and many other play materials; for the home area, they have listed a variety of utensils required for cooking; the quiet area has storybooks and picture books. Apart from that, they have musical instruments, provision for clay and sand play. Bodh has designed its own games and play material for children. They also use the ECE kit developed by the Centre for Learning Resources. On adequacy of materials, teachers invariably felt the need for more. Notably, in all the schools, teachers also develop a variety of materials like charts, masks, puppets, flash cards, story cards and picture cards.

ASSESSING CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

In any review of curricular practices, success in effecting progress for every child in a holistic manner is critical. Keeping a record of progress for each child helps in presenting a descriptive account of change, with the aim of creating a fresh picture of each child on a periodical basis.



The observations on different aspects of the child's development should help teachers and parents become clearer about the child's strong and weak points and help them decide what type and range of activities may help the child to progress better, checking that their abilities are growing, their mastery of skills are normal for their age and stage of development; and to note if there is little or lower than expected change in any aspect of development. For pre-school children, such record keeping can be done only in a participatory manner by the teachers. How is this being done in the two organizations?

Pre-schools under both organizations make an attempt to keep track of the child's progress in a cumulative fashion. In *shishu pahel paddhati*, the teacher is trained to observe the child throughout the day on specific learning objectives. She records these non-judgmentally in a prescribed format. On the basis of these, she plans the next day's learning experiences for her children. Thus, emphasis is laid on the process of learning, rather than only on assessing the outcome. These observations over two to three months are translated into a cumulative record of the child in the assessment card.

Teachers in all institutions have developed detailed observation schemes for recording progress in various aspects. How effectively are these used in communicating to parents and others concerned? For this, all institutions have developed report cards. Some

observations on this would be pertinent. Though the report card covers all areas of development, there is a need to reflect on the indicators for different areas of development listed in the report cards.

RESPONSIVENESS TO CHILDREN'S EXPECTATIONS

It is important that in a child-centred learning framework, teachers continuously explore children's perceptions and incorporate these in classroom activities. What, according to teachers, are the elements most liked by the children? Teachers' responses on this issue are summarized in the Table below.

TABLE 3: WHAT DO CHILDREN ENJOY MOST?

AKES,I (Urban)	AKES,I (Rural)	Bodh
Stories Work time activities Physical activities Water play, sand play Free play Singing	Singing songs with actions Listening to stories Watching cartoons Going on field trips Playing with clay Free play Playing in the block area Playing with musical instruments	Colouring Songs Dance Picture stories Listening to stories Playing and working with materials Drawing

The responses clearly reflect the activity that teachers carry out as part of the ECE programme. Across the institutions, children enjoy listening to stories, singing and dancing, playing with clay/sand, colouring and drawing, and playing with the teaching-learning material. This shows that a variety of experiences are being given to children, though some core components such as story telling and drawing need greater importance and to be integrated better into the basic approach. It was found during discussions that story telling is pursued as an activity only once a week, and not as a medium for transacting different aspects of the curriculum. It should be noted that story telling is an important step in developing reading skills in children which need to be strengthened. Drawing is another powerful tool in understanding children. Through drawing, one can understand a child's motor development, functioning of mental ability, socio-emotional development and creativity. Field visits showed that though there are low-level blackboards in many schools, their effective use needs greater attention.

The curriculum that really gets transacted depends finally on the expectations of the teachers. What do the teachers expect from students as they move ahead from pre-school to primary stage?

A summary of the responses given by teachers is shown in the Table below.

TABLE 4: TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS OF CHILDREN AT THE END OF TWO YEARS OF ECE

AKES,I (Urban)	AKES,I (Rural)	Bodh
Having self esteem Able to express their needs Self confidence Pre-writing skills Being independent Speaking simple English Recognition of numbers/letters	Recognition of common objects Developing good habits Ease of self expression Social development Ability to mix with others Able to follow rules Being independent Development according to their age	Motor development Pre-number concepts Conceptual clarity Expression of one's own needs Able to recite poems

Though the list is not exhaustive, the responses to the expectations after two years of the ECE programme clearly reflected the objectives of the programme pursued under PESLE. Responses cover a wide range of components- total development of the child, development of confidence, expressing one's own needs, mixing with others, development of various concepts, development of skills, pre-reading, pre-writing and pre-number concepts. This indicates synchronization between the activities, expectations and goals of ECE.

On the whole, one could conclude that the pre-school curricula being pursued by the two organizations have been designed with great care, as child-centred and activity based programmes. The programmes were not only in line with the basic vision and objectives of PESLE, but also correspond to contemporary understanding on organizing programmes of early childhood education. The discussions in this section also highlight the centrality of teachers in effective implementation of such programmes. Success of the programme is largely determined by the capacity and commitment of teachers. This will be the subject of discussion and analysis in the following section.



Professional Development of Teachers



The effectiveness of any educational programme finally depends on teachers. It is teachers who have to internalize the principles behind the programme, master the curriculum and effectively deliver the inputs to children. It is teachers who have to observe the young child in the pre-school and facilitate her growth and different dimensions of development in a harmonious fashion. The responsibility gets further enhanced in innovative child-centred programmes being pursued by the two organizations. Therefore, it is critical to examine several questions such as how teachers are recruited, what qualifications and experience do they bring to the classrooms, what kinds of professional support do they get on the job, how they relate to the children in the school setting and how motivated are they in performing their role as teachers? This section attempts to answer some of these questions with respect to programmes of early childhood education of AKES,I and Bodh.

PROFILE OF TEACHERS: AN OVERVIEW OF THEIR BACKGROUND

The expectations placed on the teachers in the innovative programmes of AKES,I and Bodh are very similar. But not all schools supported by AKES,I and Bodh function in similar circumstances. While DJ schools in Mumbai could aspire to recruit well-qualified teachers for pre-school sections, day care centres in Gujarat and schools in remote rural Rajasthan may have to contend with teachers from modest backgrounds.

The qualification of teachers in AKES,I (urban) ranged from higher secondary pass to post graduation, with pre-service training in ECCE. In addition, most had got induction training in the school. In contrast, qualification of teachers in AKES,I (rural) ranged from 8th grade pass to higher secondary pass and with no pre-service training in ECCE. Trained teachers, probably, are difficult to find in remote rural areas. In general, most teachers were in the age group of 25-35 years, indicating that many who join do not continue for long, as both the urban and rural programmes of AKES,I have been ongoing for a fairly long time.

In Bodh schools, a graduate degree is the minimum qualification required for a pre-school teacher in the urban programme. This criterion is relaxed in the rural one due to non-availability of qualified staff. Teacher selection is made through open advertisement in the local newspapers. Applications are scrutinized and listed candidates evaluated through an elaborate process consisting of written exercises, group discussions and interviews.

Most of the instructors in the rural programme are male. It is difficult to find female instructors, as many of them find it uncomfortable to live alone in a village away from their family. Some of the female instructors who join leave because of the hard living conditions. Bodh schools do not have head teachers. All the teachers are expected to help make the school function effectively.

Mother teachers: Bodh has evolved an interesting concept of mother teachers. Mother teachers are women from the community who are trained to work as pre-school support teachers. The value of recruiting mother teachers from the local community is manifold. First, children relate to them well, as they speak the same dialect. This gives children a sense of security and helps develop confidence. A mother teacher also knows about the background of each child. She brings with her a lot of information about the child and the family, which helps in planning pre-school activities in a contextualized manner.

Mother teachers, in general, have a special rapport with parents as they are from the same locality. This places them in a unique position to act as change agents on matters pertaining to hygiene, nutrition, health care and child development. They act as effective link between school and community. One of the objectives of engaging mother teachers is to bring positive change in women – to create awareness among women on different issues of child development, health care, nutrition, social justice and to help them recognize their own potential and make them feel that they, too, are important members of the community.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

In this section, first AKES,I and then Bodh methods are described. For AKES,I professional development of teachers has been at the centre of the School Improvement Programme that began in DJ Schools more than a decade ago. Efforts have continued since then to streamline in-service orientation and training so that they effectively imbibe the child-centred learning philosophy and adopt appropriate pedagogic practices. This has led to designing and trying out comprehensive induction and in-service programmes for all teachers concerned with ECE, in urban as well as rural areas. The main instrument for orientation and capacity building for fresh teachers joining the system consists of three training modules on *shishu pahel paddhati* (See Box on the following pages for a brief description of the modules), which together deal with various

aspects of child-centred and activity-based approaches to education in the early years of schooling.

A review of the training material shows these are comprehensive and theoretically sound in addressing various aspects of child-centred and activity-based learning. They present to the teachers a clear picture of the key elements of strategy with respect to organization, processes and outcomes.

For instance, the modules highlight the issue of physical arrangement in the classroom and illustrate creative ways of using the space, labeling of different areas, locating material thereon and so on. The participant is made to understand how such organization of the space into different areas of learning is critical in pursuing the aims of child-initiated learning. The modules also allow the participants to understand the basic concepts of the *shishu pahel* approach through practical work and reflective analysis instead of just lectures.

The module on 'Entering the child's world' presents to teachers the theoretical understanding about pre-school child – characteristics and different stages of development. This should help teachers in designing their activities. The second module on 'Getting it right' focuses on the curriculum content, the key experiences related to the language, pre-number concepts, spatial relations and time, along with theoretical underpinnings based on Piaget's ideas on transformation, class inclusion and conservation. Further, difficulties that teachers may face during the transaction have been anticipated and guidelines given on how to handle such situations. This module also focuses on partnership with parents. The third module focuses on moving into Grades 1 and 2. It discusses key experiences; discovering that parenting is teaching, finding ways of involving parents in the school programme, making them aware about the curriculum and how it is appropriate to the stage of development of their child.

Shishu Pahel Paddhati

Training modules for Teachers and Master Trainers

MODULE 1: ENTERING THE CHILD'S WORLD

The main purpose of this module is to demonstrate to teachers the efficacy of the *shishu pahel* methodology for ECE in mainstream classrooms where resource constraint is a common feature and to introduce the approach's key elements, namely, (a) Daily routine, (b) Organization of classroom space, (c) Active learning, (d) Planning in a team, based on observation of children, and (e) Key experiences.

MODULE 2: GETTING IT RIGHT

The main objective of the module is to help the participants review the progress made by them in incorporating the approach's basic principles and processes into the contexts in which they normally work. The module helps participants expand their perspective on key experiences, namely, active learning, language, experiencing and representing, classification, seriation, numbers, spatial relations and time. The module clarifies to the teachers their administrative and curricular roles in the *shishu pahel* approach. In addition, teachers are equipped with skills related to budgeting, acquisition of material and also enables them to work with skeptical parents, school administrators and teacher colleagues.

MODULE 3: SHISHU PAHEL IN PRIMARY GRADES 1 AND 2

The contents of this module are designed to train master trainers who could, in turn, guide teachers working in schools and organizations already committed to the *shishu pahel* methodology at pre-school level. The focus is on approaches and strategies to link primary classes with preschool experiences, by carrying over the basic principles in a developmentally appropriate manner to grades 1 and 2. The module presents to teachers, in a structured fashion, the required perspectives, understanding and skills to confidently adopt the approach in the early grades of primary schooling. It demonstrates how available resources- human, material and time- can be effectively utilized for student learning, in terms of development of basic competencies as well as higher order skills such as problem solving and collaboration.



A critical dimension of the framework of professional development under the AKES, I Programme of ECE is the preparation of master trainers. For this, the *shishu pahel* training modules have been used as inputs for 'training of trainers'. In all, around 20 senior teachers have been trained to function as master trainers. Their main role is to conduct induction programmes for new teachers joining the network of pre-schools and child development centres.

In addition to the induction programme involving the *shishu pahel* modules, in-service training workshops are conducted on a regular basis on a variety of themes such as leadership and personality development, developing TLM, teaching of English, music and activities for physical development. The duration of such workshop ranges from one to four days. This has been conducted by internal as well as external resource persons, according to the particular theme and expertise needed.

While the *shishu pahel* modules present the framework for training, actual transaction of the module requires proper institutional arrangements. Also, such training programmes have to be recurrent.

Bohd does not claim to have evolved any special method like the *shishu pahel paddhati* for adoption in its ECE programme. Nevertheless, very high priority is given in the programme for training and capacity building of teachers and instructors who work with pre-school children.

The effectiveness of Bodh's programme rests on the commitment, motivation and competence of teachers. The teacher acts as a link between the child and the community, as well as between the community and the school and is responsible for evolving the participative; shared framework of pedagogical and other activities acceptable to all stakeholders. Keeping in mind the nature of the population to which the programme caters and the stress laid on continuous innovations, the induction programme aims to not only develop in the participants a repertoire of skills, but also an attitude that would enable them to imbibe the Bodh philosophy, culture and work ethic.

All new teachers and instructors joining Bodh schools have to undergo a programme to familiarize them with Bodh philosophy and pedagogic approach. The training cycle consists of a number of sequential sessions, beginning with an induction course for three months for freshly recruited teachers, followed by a month's teacher development course to be completed every year. In addition, everyone undergoes a training workshop of seven days for development of teaching-learning material. A special pre-service training course of 21 days duration has been designed for mother teachers, followed by a six-day refresher course to be attended periodically.

**TABLE 5: INDUCTION AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING IN BODH
(BASIC PROGRAMMES FOR ALL)**

Training Schemes	Minimum Qualification	Duration
Pre-service training for teachers (induction course)	10th grade	3 months
Pre-service training for mother teachers	Not specified	21 days
Annual workshop	In-service	1 month
Special workshop for material development, art, creativity and health education	In-service	7 days

The initial induction programme, of three months, is fully residential. Training is done in a facilitative atmosphere, encouraging trainees to address various educational and social issues. The emphasis is on developing attitudes, competencies and capacities that would enable them to function effectively within pre-schools and communities, under relatively harsh conditions with few facilities. The programme has very few lectures; it relies heavily on collective discourse, reflection, dialogue and hands-on experience. The attempt is to create and facilitate a learning environment through group discussion, group work, brain storming, songs, role plays, story telling and art and craft work, all in a cooperative and collaborative framework. The programme

also includes field placement, providing an opportunity to closely observe and understand the work done with children and participate in the various processes such as preparing a work plan, evaluation and community contact.

The induction course covers a wide range of topics – theories of teaching and instruction, play school activities, health and children, child psychology, modern teaching methods, handicrafts and material development. An important activity that focuses on developing reflective capacity in the teacher is 'diary writing'. Everyday, teachers spend an hour writing down their thoughts, impressions and observations; these are shared with the whole group the next day. This enables continual reflection on day-to-day happenings and issues ranging from teaching-learning situations to community activities and acts as the basis for personal reflection, problem solving and perspective development. In addition, two-day workshops are held every month at the local level, which provides a forum for experience sharing, identifying problem areas and jointly working out possible solutions as well as designing innovative activities through participatory processes.

Not everyone selected and trained in the induction programme is retained in the system. Many teachers leave on their own, attracted by better pay or because they are unable to adjust to the harsh conditions that prevail in localities where Bodh schools function. Those who survive the first six months generally understand the programme and stay with Bodh for a long period of time.

As mentioned earlier, Bodh recruits women from the community as mother teachers to work in the pre-school sections. Systematic effort has been made to design training programmes that suit their needs and also meet the requirement of the tasks they are to perform in the pre-school. They are not specifically focused on pedagogy, as they have a dual role to play as teachers as well as community representatives.

The induction programme focuses on developing understanding about oneself; understanding and reflecting on socio-economic conditions of the community, understanding the issues in child development by reflecting on child rearing practices prevailing in local community; sensitivity to gender issues, understanding the role of women in society; opportunity for creative and constructive activities and understanding the role of mother teacher, keeping in mind the vision and philosophy of Bodh. The methods and contents are adopted keeping in mind the academic and social background of the women involved.

Initially, mother teachers carry out their teaching activities with assistance from regular teachers. However, most of them quickly acquire sufficient skills and competence to be able to undertake teaching activities independently. This is the result of intensive training given to them in different



areas of child development, dealing with children, different teaching learning strategies, handling playmaterials, etc. They design activities for children and also assess them. A systematic observation of their work could not be carried out, but it appeared they could considerably overcome their handicap of little formal training and quickly acquire necessary knowledge and skills, mainly due to their commitment and dedication to working in the community.

TEACHER MOTIVATION

From this analysis, one could conclude that both organizations have invested substantial energy in building capacity among the teachers. But are teachers satisfied with the work they do? Are they adequately motivated to implement the innovative programmes designed in the pre-schools of the two organizations? How much do they value the training they get and the work they do? Do their observations and actual performance in the schools reflect internalization of the principles and practices imparted through various professional development activities? While these are important questions impinging on the quality of programmes being implemented, answering them categorically would need comprehensive empirical research. However, some information was collected on these issues through direct observation of classroom processes, and responses elicited from teachers during FGDs, as well as personal interviews with some of them. The following summary of observations are based on these sources. They indicate only the broad trend and not generalized conclusions.

The general impression one gets by interacting with teachers in the urban DJ schools of AKES,I is that they are highly motivated, positive and open to learning. It clearly emerges that they have developed a good understanding of children and their development, based on various training programmes and through their direct work with children. The responses vary widely on the question of personal growth and professional development after joining the school. One teacher confessed that said she became a better mother after joining the school. Some of them said the experience had been rewarding as they could learn about a variety of pedagogical techniques for dealing with children. One could observe that teachers are generally very friendly with children and are able to easily relate with them. They are confident and convinced about the appropriateness of pedagogy, the *shishu pahel paddhati*. What they expect from children is age-appropriate and also matched the objectives of the ECE programme. In general, teachers expressed satisfaction with their work.

Teachers in the rural programme of AKES,I were also highly motivated. One could particularly note their enthusiasm in dealing with children. It was found that many of the teachers have been working in the Day Care Centres for years. This contributed to their continued learning and stable involvement in the profession of teaching young children. When asked about their personal and professional growth after joining the Day Care Centre, most of them said that from being mere housewives, they had gone a long way in their profession. They had learnt a lot about child development, teaching-learning methods, nutrition and health by undergoing various training programmes. People in the village gave them considerable respect because of their role as teachers. They were confident about their work and thought that the approach should be adopted not only in other schools but also for children in higher classes.

In Bodh schools, too, one found teachers committed, motivated and involved in their work. They were convinced of the appropriateness of the pedagogic techniques being used and valued the training inputs received through various programmes periodically. In rural schools, teachers invariably compared the approach with their own experience as children and appreciated the difference it made for the children and their development. One of the teachers said: "We wish we could have been treated the way we treat children in Bodh. One thing I like here is that there is no corporal punishment for children." This, in a way, sums up the attitude of the teachers, including mother teachers, the way they think about the pedagogic techniques being used and how they deal with children. Teachers were open about the problems they face in being teachers in remote rural areas. Their job is not only dealing with small children but also acting as a link between the school and the community. They have to motivate parents to send their children to school and mobilize support from the community. Mother teachers, particularly, see their role as that of a catalyst for promoting community learning activities.

Across the institutions, the common characteristics among all the teachers and instructors, by and large, is that they are motivated, involved and enthusiastic about what they are doing. Another factor that strikes any observer is their readiness to learn new things. Their reflective mode of training seems to have impacted their thinking and working. When asked about the change they would like to bring to the programme, barring a few who do not want to change anything, most reflected on curriculum, methods of teaching, infrastructure and TLM. This indicates their deep involvement and close feeling of ownership for what is being pursued in their schools. As mentioned earlier, most of them do recognize that their work is different from the traditional way of teaching.

Both organizations have taken the task of professional development of teachers seriously. A large variety of programmes and training materials have been developed for this purpose. These packages have helped to streamline the process of induction of new teachers as well as in-service education. However, care is needed to ensure the use of packages and modules remains flexible, so that the creativity needed to keep the programme vibrant and forward looking is not lost. There is need for continuous review and renewal of the programme, packages and modules. It is worthwhile to create a forum of teachers across various institutions, rural as well as urban, to continuously reflect on various components of the programme. It should be recognized that the present level of success has been achieved mainly due to active involvement of teachers in designing and developing the innovative framework at all stages. Such participation in all the components would help strengthen the sense of ownership and identification with the work they have been doing.

Though the current practices are found to be effective, exposure to other models of transaction is critical. It would, therefore, help if teachers were given opportunities to visit other innovative institutions. Further, training workshops should not be considered the sole means of imparting knowledge and skills to teachers. Making available contemporary literature on the latest innovations (Indian and foreign) in the resource centres and exposing teachers to such literature during training sessions would be very helpful in expanding their mental horizons and helping them view the practices adopted in their schools in a new light.



Reaching Out Through Partnership



Bodh and AKES,I have been organizing innovative educational programmes in their own schools for more than a decade. One of the concerns often expressed is for the ways and means of making the lessons derived from such small scale innovative experiences benefit the larger system. Both AKES,I and Bodh have made significant efforts to expand their zone of influence by building partnerships with other agencies in urban as well as rural areas. What is the scale of such engagement with other partners? What strategies are being adopted to disseminate the lessons derived from in-house experiences? What has been the general response of schools and agencies involved in such partnership actions? Some of these questions are addressed in this section.

How exactly are other schools being influenced through outreach programmes is a difficult question to answer with any precision. To some extent, one could say that every school associated with the organization and its work could have been influenced by the philosophy of child-centred learning, in one way or the other. Viewed from such a broad angle, the programme has reached more than 3,000 schools involving 8,000 teachers and more than 900,000 children, through a variety of interventions as reported in national-level PESLE documents. More directly, more than 120 pre-school centres are impacted through programmes of the two bodies and the number is expected to rise further in years to come.

OUTREACH THROUGH AKES,I

AKES,I has been pursuing a two-fold strategy for reaching out and influencing ECE practices in the mainstream. The first strategy is to work with a selected number of government schools. The second is to work with other NGOs and institutions which are involved in ECE programmes. The Education Resource Centres (ERCs) of the AKES,I network have been playing a central role in this process of reaching out through extending technical support in the design and development of curriculum and TLM, as well as through training of teachers and other personnel involved in ECE programmes.

As part of the first strategy, AKES,I has been focusing on consolidating the work within the main schools, developing their network schools as ERCs, and extending technical support services to replicate educational interventions in government-run schools. Effort has been made to extend technical support for improving the pre-school education component in the ICDS in several places. ERCs have been playing a central role in extending support to such government initiatives, including in a number of government schools. Towards this end, training and orientation programmes have been conducted for workers of *balwadi* and *anganwadi* (pre-primary centres), as well as government school teachers based on the *shishu pahel* approach. The reports indicate that a total of 590 primary teachers and 14 other officers from government schools had received such training. Also, a total of 78 pre-school teachers and 21 supervisors, coordinators and ICDS personnel have been trained in the *shishu pahel* methodology as well as in other aspects of child development.

As part of the second strategy, collaborative work was initiated with a number of NGOs and private institutions involved in ECE. Collaborative work with three such organizations is briefly discussed here as illustrative of the strategy. The first illustration is that of Pratham, a field-based agency running more than 1,000 *balwadis* for children from marginalised groups in Mumbai. Pratham *balwadis* are run in a variety of settings. Some are in proper four-walled structures, others are in hutments, open spaces, community spaces or in rooms provided by the local community *mandals*. Intervention in Pratham *balwadis* started in 2001-02. During this early phase, one training programme on the *shishu pahel paddhati* was imparted to Pratham staff working in two selected wards. This included 16 *balwadis*, four trainer monitors and two Pratham central team members. Based on the positive feedback from the field, the collaboration has continued in the following years. The main objective is to explore the applicability of the *shishu pahel paddhati* in the Pratham *balwadis* and derive lessons for adapting the approach to changing social and institutional contexts.

The second illustration is the partnership established with the Navjeevan Trust in Rajkot, Gujarat, a registered public charitable trust, which manages a number of socio-economic and social welfare programmes. It is directly involved in the training of personnel in various rural development programmes in Saurashtra and Kutch regions. The organization is working through its 26 community centres in the region, each working with six or seven villages. The programme with Navjeevan started in 2000 and continued since then with active involvement of the AKES,I ERC in Rajkot.

Under the outreach programme, the focus areas are:

- Curriculum issues,
- Teaching methodologies,

- Action research and process documentation,
- Facilitatory leadership development, and
- Capacity building of key personnel.

The main objective of the programme is dissemination of the *shishu pahel paddhati* pre-school curriculum to early childhood education programmes reaching disadvantaged groups. The intervention follows a two-pronged strategy. The primary focus has been to create five model *balwadis* in the Rajkot cluster and to eventually promote *shishu pahel paddhati* through these models in the remaining 62 *balwadis* run by the Trust. The second set of activities consists of training supervisors and animators, for scaling up and sharing the innovative pre-school curriculum.

The third illustrative case is the emerging relationship with the South India Education Society (SIES), a training institution engaged in conducting pre-service and in-service programmes of teacher preparation. The relationship with SIES is more technical in nature. Under the collaborative arrangement, AKES,I and SIES would jointly explore ways and means of disseminating the *shishu pahel* approach to larger sections of teachers through teacher education programmes. With this in view, interns from SIES would be placed in DJ schools for participatory observation of the approach. This would have a multiplier effect, as many graduating from SIES would become teachers in different schools and through that implement principles of child-initiated learning. Faculty from SIES would also collaborate with AKES,I as resource persons in training programmes organized for government run pre-schools.

OUTREACH THROUGH BODH SHIKSHA SAMITI

Bodh has been consolidating and scaling up its models of community schools for quality education through its *Bodhshalas* in urban and rural areas of Rajasthan. In addition, it has been working in close partnership with central and state government departments of education and with other donors, beside the support under PESLE, to replicate and mainstream its models of innovative, appropriate quality education for deprived children.

The main objective of the outreach programme of Bodh is to replicate its innovative pedagogy to impact the mainstream education system. It has been doing this in state-run government schools in a variety of ways. Bodh's approach for working with government schools evolved through successive stages of engagement with the system. To begin with, collaboration was initiated through adoption of five government schools in the pre-PESLE phase, to test the applicability of Bodh's approach. This was then taken to scale through technical support under

the *Janshala* programme. The approach has further developed through mobilization of community action to strengthen the local government school in Govdi village, which is being replicated in 35 more villages.

Overall, Bodh has been successfully running its *Bodhshalas*, where it has shown maximum gains. The resource schools are ready to take on outreach activities and provide field experience to teachers. The schools are well established and have the potential to reach out to a wider range of communities. Its mainstreaming activities promote the twin aspects of (a) the community as a partner in education and (b) quality education through interactive and child-friendly classroom processes. These activities are taking place in collaboration with private sector partnerships, international donors, the Government of India and the Government of Rajasthan. Both qualitatively and quantitatively, Bodh has been able to show a visible impact in terms of students' learning achievement levels and classroom pedagogy practices in its areas of operation.

AKES,I and Bodh have made significant efforts to expand their zone of influence by building partnerships with other agencies in urban as well as rural areas.



As discussions revealed, it is currently facing difficulty in getting acceptance of its total package by government teachers. Thus, it is all the more important that Bodh's fast expansion in urban areas is carefully reviewed internally, for the emerging challenges it poses on its in-house capacity to address them. There will be a further need for new pedagogic material and mechanisms to ensure that the process of transferability of the model happens smoothly, through training in different domains. Its outreach strategies, though well defined, need further attention to draw lessons and meet the challenges emerging in different contextual situations, to understand the constraints of mainstreaming and to redefine its negotiation strategies with the mainstream system, in addition to adapting strategies to varying contexts where required.

It is a common observation that innovative practices designed and implemented by NGOs operate successfully mainly because of their relatively small-scale coverage. Do they have

relevance to the larger government system? Can they survive in conditions under which many of the mainstream government schools function? It is clear from the description presented above that both AKES, I and Bodh have made significant strides in their effort to go beyond the confines of their own organization and introduce innovative approaches of dealing with early childhood education to many other schools and organizations.



The programmes emphasize such core values as respecting the individuality of the child, developmental needs of children, recognizing individual differences and potential of each child, allowing space and freedom for independent work.



Looking Ahead: Opportunities and Challenges

Early childhood care and development (ECCD) is the critical foundation for overall growth and development, not only of children, but of society as a whole. That it is yet to get the due attention of the planners in India is amply demonstrated by exclusion of 0-6 years age group from the Right to Education Act 2009 and also by the poor developmental indices such as infant mortality rates, under-five mortality rates and the high prevalence of malnutrition. Early childhood education is an important component of the ECCD programme. ICDS, which covers more than one million habitations, functions very poorly and has very weak or almost negligible ECE component. By and large, ECE facilities have been restricted to the children of urban middle classes and most of these are quite cost intensive. The experiments carried out by AKES,I for rural populations and by Bodh for both urban and rural marginalized children occupy enormous significance in this context.

The successes achieved by both the interventions in reaching out to the marginalized children with good quality ECE programme have been commendable. These programmes have many innovative aspects and are replicable at a larger scale. The methods adopted by AKES,I and Bodh focus on the process of learning, rather than solely on the end result; the belief is also that attention to the former ensures a satisfactory outcome for the latter. The students, parents and teachers are recognized as key components of the learning process, irrespective of socio-economic levels or abilities. Experimentation with class structures is encouraged, as with the methods of evaluation; the administration is marked less by hierarchy and more by discussion and enforcement of a sense of collective responsibility; learning outcomes are recognized to be a blend of measurable and immeasurable or less tangible parameters.

Values such as recognizing the individual traits and potential of each child, allowing space and freedom for independent work, the stress on experimentation, the emphasis on home-school partnership, common understanding about children and the curriculum; and viewing home and school experiences of the child in a continuum are very valuable aspects of the programme.

A clear demonstration of the fact that different stakeholders can come together in a collaborative manner and feel immense satisfaction while working on ECE is, on the whole, quite commendable. It requires tremendous work and commitment to the process –daily recording of each child, preparation of new learning material, planning for the next day, efforts to ensure that each child participates, field trips, learning from nature, ensuring that parents understand and are supportive of what is going on, the patience with individual traits, the activity base for each set of items, the gradation on task complexity, the constant re-grouping, attention to design and layout as well as coordination and harmonization with colleagues. In addition, attention is given to monitoring of health, nutrition and growth for each child, beside other family-related issues, which bear on child's attention and participation in the classroom.

There is an allied set of complexities for the teachers and administrators who plan and enforce this kind of a programme. Teachers' training, re-training and feedback, ensuring high levels of morale, addressing their needs for growth and development, communication at different levels, the readiness to keep updating these and also be reflective about the entire process, are some of the challenges which will require better attention within the programmes.

It has also been evident that the teachers and parents in the programme recognize the value of these components which aims to make learning an interesting and participative exercise for all. Teachers, for instance, have a clear conviction of the usefulness of this system and can see that it helps children learn better and develop confidence in the process. They also see the need to closely link such thinking with the primary classes and have made several suggestions on their readiness to try out and learn new things available in the body of contemporary experience in ECE.

A very high level of cooperation from parents and community is the hallmark of this programme. However, there is some gap in the family's understanding of the objectives of this pre-school system, despite an elaborate attempt to keep them abreast of what is going on and why. The home-school partnership, talked of as a main aim, has some way to go even with the effort to hire teachers from within the community, as Bodh Shiksha Samiti tries to do.

A child-centered curriculum demands a variety of inputs on interesting activities, teacher-learning material and their creative use. There is a clear need to equip schools with more materials, both locally developed and those purchased from outside.

The active involvement of teachers in designing the programmes and modules has been a crucial feature in its comparative success and vibrancy. However, further efforts are needed to ensure that this is an ongoing process. It is also important that teachers are given an opportunity to visit other innovative programmes as well as to enhance their exposure to literature on the latest innovations in this field.

AKES,I and Bodh need to make further efforts to disseminate their learnings to the larger system, including the government and other organizations. This is one of the programme objectives and their strategies have been to influence the functioning of government-run schools, partnering with non-government organizations (as in AKES,I collaborating with Pratham or Navjeevan), participating in programmes supported by other funding agencies and allowing for transfer of new methods and approaches across programmes. Both interventions have also sought, with some success, to influence the government policy. The major challenge before the programmes is to institutionalize some of these important innovations and connect with larger number of government and non-government programme /institutions to see that these innovations are replicated at much larger scale.

Systematic documentation from all these experiences would be crucial in throwing light on learnings for wider dissemination of the programmes. Of course, through better documentation and dissemination of these innovative practices, these organizations will be making efforts towards contributing and influencing the discourse on ECCD in the country.



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A B B R E V I A T I O N S

AKES,I	Aga Khan Education Service, India
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
DCC	Day Care Centre
DJ Schools	Diamond Jubilee Schools
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ERC	Education Resource Centre
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPE	National Policy on Education
PESLE	Programme for the Enrichment of School Level Education
REAP	Rural Education Advancement Programme
SIES	South Indian Education Society
SIP	School Improvement Programme
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
TLM	Teaching Learning Material
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ABOUT THE SERIES

The publication is a compilation of the experiences in education from the Aga Khan Foundation. It illustrates various methods and techniques that have been used to reach out to marginalized and disadvantaged communities to improve the availability and quality of education.

The Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education (PESLE) was initiated by the Aga Khan Foundation in India in 1999 and was completed in 2007. The programme, through support to a number of partner NGOs, piloted and expanded innovative approaches in school improvement and integrated important elements into the formal system. These have included new approaches in teacher training, professional development, curriculum innovation, school management and governance. All approaches have the active participation and involvement of the community. The impact has been measured against improvements in three areas: enrolment, retention and learning achievement.

Over the years, working closely with the various communities and educators, a number of good practices emerged that have resulted in a transformation and a visible impact on the quality of education, have now become institutionalised. Some have been adopted, both in the government and non-government sectors.

It is hoped that the series will prove useful for practitioners, policy-makers, implementers and scholars, as illustrations of experience and practice that started small but with the potential to address the larger issues in education.

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