

NAVATIKA National Conference
on
Early Childhood Care And Education

"Is Early Education In India Child
Friendly?"

Organized by

Salwan Education Trust, New Delhi

at

India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

19-20 September, 2008



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INTRODUCTION

Salwan Education Trust (established in 1941) has been committed to educational excellence for nearly seven decades and runs eleven prestigious schools in and around Delhi.

NAVTIKA: Journal of 'Early Childhood Care and Education', an initiative first of its kind taken by the Trust, was launched on January 20, 2007 by Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Govt. of India.

Moving ahead, a NAVTIKA National Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education- **'Is Early Education in India Child Friendly?'** was organized on 19-20 September, 2008 at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

The aim of the conference was to create a forum for discussion among practitioners and ECCE experts on the latest trends in ECCE and how to overcome the challenges and obstacles faced in ECCE settings.

This conference was hosted by the Salwan Education Trust and took place in the very well equipped conference room of India Habitat Centre. About 200 participants from different organisations attended the programme. They represented a broad range of institutions and brought to the conference a valuable mix of experiences and perspectives.

The speakers also came from different backgrounds and presented the audience with different practical experiences, insights, and views, both at an organisational and national level. It gave a good understanding of the many perspectives that can and should be taken into account when offering early childhood education.

The feedback of the participants confirmed that the conference was much appreciated and there is a pressing need for more such opportunities to discuss the prescriptions and practices in the field of ECCE.

THE CONFERENCE

Inauguration

The august gathering was welcomed and given a brief background of Salwan Education Trust. The Trust, established in 1941, is committed to educational excellence for nearly seven decades and runs eleven prestigious schools in and around Delhi. The logo- 'the rising sun' is a symbolic presentation of spreading education to dispel the darkness of ignorance. The audience was informed about 'Navtika' the only Indian journal on Early Childhood Care and Education which is published by the Trust and was launched on 20 January'07 by Mr. Chaman Kumar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

The aim of the conference, which was held on 19-20 September 2008, was to create a forum for discussion amongst practitioners and ECCE experts on the latest trends and how to overcome the challenges and obstacles faced in such settings.

The Chief Guest, Dr. Lovleen Kacker, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development was invited to light the ceremonial lamp along with the other esteemed guests; Dr. Prasad V Medury, Chairman, Salwan Public School, Gurgaon; Dr. Nittaya Kotchabhakdi, Keynote Speaker and Associate Professor, Mahidol University, Thailand; Dr. Venita Kaul, Senior Education Specialist, World Bank; Dr. Romila Soni, Lecturer, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT); and Mr. Paramjeet Khanna, Secretary, Salwan Education Trust. Floral welcome was extended to the distinguished guests.



Young children from Salwan Public School, Gurgaon sought blessings of Goddess Saraswati by singing a "Vandana" before the beginning of the conference.

In the welcome address, Dr. Medury congratulated the members for the overwhelming response. He thanked the audience on behalf of Dr. Indu Khetarpal, Principal, SPS, Gurgaon. He concluded by saying that such workshops should aim at making the child's schooling a happy experience.

Inaugural Address by Dr. Lovleen Kacker Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

Dr. Lovleen Kacker mentioned that Early Childhood teaching is a very challenging task and she appreciated the enormous input involved in taking care of young children. She informed the gathering about the basic rights of a child as:

1. Survival
2. Developmental rights
3. Security

These rights are the concerns of all teachers who are highly responsible towards children. She informed that the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) has been formulated to take care of children in the age group of 0-6 years. Currently 14 lakh Anganwadis are operational across the country. From these Anganwadis the children move on to to be covered under Sarvashiksha Abhiyaan, which is a tall order. She described the limitations faced by the Anganwadis and out of all the components of ICDS, listed Nutrition and ECCE, as the priorities areas.

She hoped that the conference could become the right forum to prepare a policy which the government could adopt to improve ECCE in the country as it had provided a platform for early childhood experts and practitioners to share their concerns and experiences.



Resource Persons: Chairpersons, Speakers & Panelists

Day-1

Theme	Resource Person
Brain research and the early years of life	Speaker: Dr. Nittaya Kotchabhakdi Associate Professor, Mahidol University, Thailand
What should children be learning in pre-primary/ ECCE	Chairperson: Dr. Nisha Peshin Director, DAV Education Society Speaker: Dr. Venita Kaul Senior Education Specialist, World Bank, New Delhi
Is ECCE today a source of joy or pressure for Kids?	Chairperson: Prof K. K. Vashishtha Head, Department Of Elementary Education, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi Panelists: Dr. Romila Soni Lecturer, Department of Elementary Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) Dr. Anil Gulati ,Pediatrician, New Delhi Ms. Anuradha Mathur , Headmistress, Salwan Montessori School, New Delhi
Role Of ECCE in universalization of elementary education	Prof. Krishna Kumar , Director, National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT)

Day-2

Theme	Resource Person
Including every child	Chairperson: Dr. Geeta Chopra , Reader, Institute of Home Economics, New Delhi Speaker: Dr. Amit Sen , Psychiatrist, Sitaram Bhartiya Institute, New Delhi
Reggio Emilia Approach	Chairperson: Ms. Amita Tandon Headmistress, Salwan Montessori School, Gurgaon Speaker: Ms. Deepika Mathawan , Coordinator, Montessori, G.D Salwan Public School, New Delhi
Should there be cursive writing in pre- school?	Chairperson: Ms. Usha Ram , Principal, Laxman Public School, New Delhi Panelists: Dr. Ampralli Lahiri , Occupational Therapist, New Delhi Ms. Viji Vasudev Headmistress, Indian School, New Delhi Dr. Jessy Abraham , Reader, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi
Introducing English at pre-school stage?	Chairperson: Ms. Neelima Sharma , Education Officer, Government of Delhi Speakers: Dr. Rekha Sharma Sen , Lecturer, School of Continuing Education, IGNOU, New Delhi Ms. Paramjeet Kaur Narang , Principal, Pathways World School, Gurgaon Ms. Renu Kaul , Headmistress, Pallavan Gurgaon
Theatre in education	Chairperson: Ms Amita Shaw , Director, National Bal Bhawan, New Delhi Speaker: Dr. Asha Singh , Reader, Lady Irwin College, New Delhi
Tracking children's progress in pre-school- Can we make it child friendly?	Chairperson: Dr. Shraddha Kapoor , Reader, Lady Irwin College, New Delhi Speakers: Dr. S Bhanot , Dean, College of Home Science, Nd University Of A&T, Faizabad Col. Ajay Bakshi , SO, Army Wives Welfare Association (AWWA) Dr. Amita Puri, Reader, Army Institute of Education
Nursery Admissions- Issues and concerns	Speaker: Mr. Ashok Ganguly Former Chairman, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)

Programme

Friday, 19 September 2008

9.00a.m. - 9.30a.m.	Registration
9.30a.m. - 9.40a.m.	Lighting of the Inaugural Lamp followed by Vandana
9.40a.m. - 9.50a.m.	Welcome: Dr. Prasad V Medury
9.50a.m. - 10.00a.m.	Release of the Navtika Journal Inaugural Address: <i>Dr. Lavleen Kacker</i>
10.00a.m. - 11.00a.m.	Key Note Address: Brain Research and the Early Years of life Speaker: <i>Dr. Nittaya Kotchabhakdi</i>
11.00a.m. - 11.30am	Open House Discussion
11.30a.m. - 12.00noon	Tea
12.00noon-1.00p.m.	Theme: What should children be learning in pre-primary/ECCE? Chairperson: <i>Dr. Nisha Peshin</i> Speaker: <i>Dr. Venita Kaul</i>
1.00p.m - 1.30p.m.	Open House Discussion
1.30 p.m. - 2.30 p.m.	Lunch
2.30 p.m. - 3.30p.m.	Panel Discussion: Is ECCE today a source of joy or pressure for kids? Chairperson: <i>Prof K.K.Vashishtha</i> Panelists: <i>Dr. Romila Soni, Dr. Anil Gulati, Ms. Anuradha Mathur</i>
3.30p.m. - 4.00p.m.	Tea
4.00p.m. - 5.00p.m.	Theme: Role of ECCE in Universalization of Elementary Education Speaker: <i>Prof. Krishna Kumar</i>
5.00p.m. - 5.30p.m.	Open House Discussion

Saturday, 20 September 2008

9.00a.m. - 9.30a. m.	Theme: Including Every Child Chairperson: <i>Dr. Geeta Chopra</i> Speaker: <i>Dr. Amit Sen</i>
9.30a.m. - 10.00a.m.	Open House Discussion
10.00a.m. - 10.30a.m.	Theme: Reggio Emilia Approach Chairperson: <i>Ms. Amita Tandon</i> Speaker: <i>Ms. Deepika Mathawan</i>
10.30a.m. - 11.00a.m.	Open House Discussion
11.00a.m. - 11.30a.m.	Tea
11.30a.m. - 12.30p.m.	Panel Discussion: Should there be cursive writing in pre-school? Chairperson: <i>Ms. Usha Ram</i> Panelists : <i>Dr. Amrapalli Lahiri, Ms. Viji Vasudev, Dr. Jessy Abraham</i>
12.30p.m. - 1.30p.m.	Panel Discussion :Introducing English at preschool stage Chairperson: <i>Ms. Neelima Sharma</i> Panelists : <i>Dr. Rekha S Sen, Ms.Paramjeet Kaur Narang, Ms. Renu Kaul</i>
1.30p.m. - 2.30 p.m.	Lunch
2.30p.m. - 3.00p.m.	Theme: Theatre in Education Chairperson: <i>Ms. Amita Shaw</i> Speaker : <i>Dr. Asha Singh</i>
3.00p.m. - 3.30p.m.	Open House Discussion
3.30p.m. - 4.00p.m.	Tea
4.00p.m. - 5.00p.m.	Panel Discussion: Tracking childrens' progress in preschool - Can we make it child friendly? Chairperson: <i>Dr. Shraddha Kapoor</i> Panelists: <i>Dr. S. Bhanot, Col. Ajoy Bakshi, Dr. Amita Puri</i>
5.00 p.m.- 6.00p.m	Valedictory Theme: Nursery Admissions- Issues and Concerns Speaker: <i>Mr. Ashok Ganguly</i>

NAVTIKA National Conference on Early Childhood Care And Education
“Is Early Education In India Child Friendly?”

Day-1

Friday, 19 September 2008

Themes:

- * Brain research and the early years of life
- * What should children be learning in pre-primary/ECCE?
- * Is ECCE today a source of joy or pressure for kids?
- * Role of ECCE in universalization of elementary education

Keynote Address

Theme: Brain Research and the Early Years of Life

Speaker: Dr. Nittaya Kotchabhakdi, *Associate Professor, Mahidol University, Thailand*

Dr. Nittaya Kotchabhakdi wished a heartening “Namaskar” and said that she was glad to visit India to share her experiences in the field of ECCE. She referred to the common problems like poverty, malnutrition and undernourished children in Thailand and other countries, and said that these present as a challenge as they hamper optimum development of children.

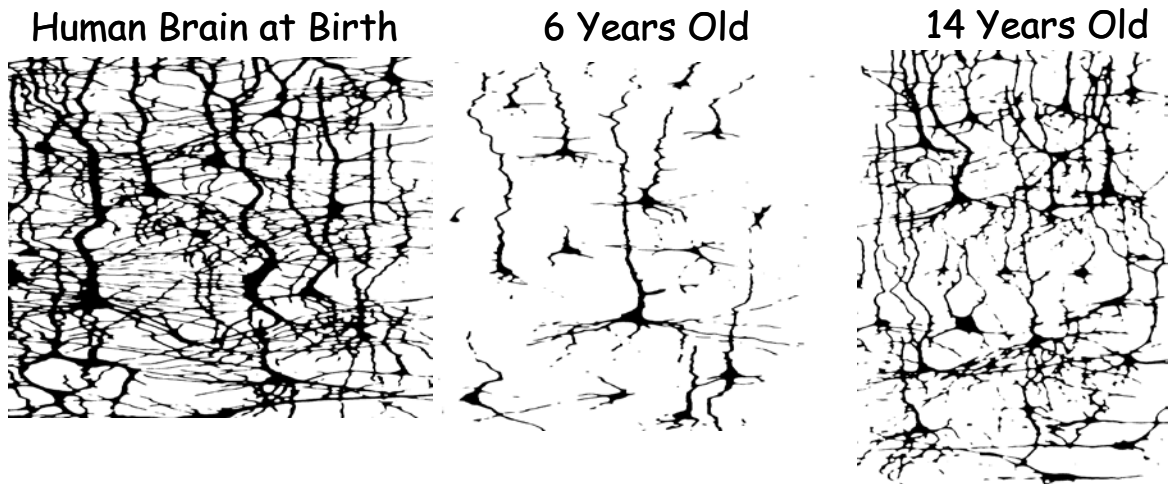
Her presentation revolved around three topics:

1. Importance of human brain and behavioural development in Early childhood,
2. Loss of human potential,
3. Bridging neuro-sciences with early childhood.

Brain Development in Early Years

She began with showing slides on Intra-uterine Human Development and mentioned that we have to study the brain from the day of conception. She referred to the research by Dr. David Parker in UK, who found that chronic stress plus malnourishment in pregnant women has effects on the brain of her foetus. So, pregnant mothers should take good care of themselves or a lot of time would be spent in future in correcting the problems.

At birth, the human brain is in a remarkably unfinished state. Most of its 100 billion neurons are not yet connected in networks. Forming and reinforcing these connections are the key tasks of early brain development. Connections among neurons are formed as the growing child experiences the surrounding world and forms attachments to parents, family members and other caregivers.



Through a graphical representation she showed that the “prime time” for visual and auditory development, or a child’s capacity for learning to see and hear is from birth to between 2-6 months after the child’s birth. The development of these sensory capacities is very important for allowing children, especially babies, to perceive and interact with the world around them.

Very informative slides were shown related to new born babies' perception about mother's milk vis- a -vis salt/sugar water to emphasize that right from the first hour the baby is aware of his surroundings and his preference.

Critical period for recognition of speech begins at birth and continues through 1½ years. The development of children's skills in language is central to their abilities to communicate in relationships and learning; to understand ideas and to explore; to order and refine their thoughts. If a baby does not hear during this period, he might lose the opportunity for doing so forever.

The curve of cognitive development in children shows that the peak time for cognitive growth is 1½ years to 5 years, this continues till adolescence. A good thing about it is that a person continues to be wiser and keeps learning till adolescence.

A video clipping comparing two children was shown:

CASE 1: A child is intensely occupied with a jigsaw puzzle trying to fix the pieces.

CASE 2: A child being guided by an adult while he attempts to fix a jigsaw puzzle.

The child who was solving the puzzle had a better experience as he tried and tested various options, whereas the adult guidance actually hindered cognitive development because the child became a passive learner.

A word of caution: The adults can hinder the natural process of thinking by helping the child.

Nutrition

As the rate of growth of the foetus in the womb is tremendous, from 2 mm to 3 kilograms, the nutritional requirement of the growing foetus is massive. The child in the womb receives nutrition from the mother, e.g., the bones are formed by the calcium intake of the mother. The proper nutritional intake by the pregnant woman is essential for optimum prenatal development.

She also drew attention of the gathering to the fact that frequent pregnancy is detrimental as the mother does not have enough reserves for the baby.

Loss of Human Potential

Loss of human potential in early childhood is a global challenge. Research shows that 37% of 4-5 years old children, which mean more than 200 million children, in the world have delayed responses.

Few well documented risks are:

1. Stunting
2. Iodine deficiency
3. Iron deficiency with or without anemia
4. Inadequate cognitive & social stimulation.

What works?

Integrated approach where health, nutrition and academics are coordinated.

Bridging Mind and Brain: Key Concepts

1. Functional organization of human brain benefits from good experience.
2. Development is not merely a biologically driven unfolding process, but also an active process that derives essential information from experiences.
3. Research shows that some experiences have the most powerful effects during specific sensitive periods while others can affect the brain over a much longer time span.
4. An important issue that needs to be determined is that developments are tied to critical periods. Caregivers need to know that development will take its due course for e.g.; a child cannot and does not need to understand many languages as soon as he enters preschool.
5. Focus on disadvantaged children.
6. Teachers and families need to be partners.
7. Provide opportunities to children to initiate and investigate their own learning and exploration of surrounding with age-appropriate activities.
8. Blend traditional child rearing practices and cultural practices and beliefs with evidence based approaches.

She concluded by telling teachers to work with more intensity like an artist and carve the brain of the children into beautiful paintings. It was followed by an Interactive Session.

Theme: What should children be learning in pre-primary/ ECCE?

Chairperson: Dr. Nisha Peshin, *Director, DAV Education Board, New Delhi*

Speaker: Dr. Venita Kaul, *Senior Education Specialist, World Bank, New Delhi*

The resource person began by highlighting that ECCE has now been internationally accepted up to 8 years and the aim of ECCE is to make elementary education joyful. She asked the group to introspect if we are really doing what we need to do at the pre-primary stage. The current hue and cry about age five or age four is not important for class I or Nursery. What is important is what we are doing with the children in our set up and what environment is being provided to them.

In many situations one observes that the subject matter that a child is supposed to be taught in class I is being done in Nursery. Why is it so, why should a child be expected to sit quietly and observe the teacher explaining on a blackboard? What is the reason behind it? One of the reasons might be that there is little awareness amongst the people, i.e. the parents, the teachers, the school and the child who actually determine what the curriculum would be, because all the teachers who come to pre-primary are not trained in early childhood education.

It is important to understand what are the needs of the children and what are the right practices.

There is no standard curriculum for Early childhood education, and it is believed very strongly by everybody associated with education, particularly ECCE that one cannot have a standard education because every child is unique. In early years it has to be a developmentally oriented programme and not a strictly regimented academic programme, imposing certain things on the child. It is a programme to foster the development of each child as every child's needs are different.

Also, there is a need to realize that the transition of the young child from pre-primary to primary has to be made smoother. She listed the objectives of ECCE for the house.

Objectives of ECCE

To develop in the child:

- * Adequate muscular coordination and basic motor skills.
- * Basic skills necessary for personal social adjustment.
- * Ability to express her thoughts and feelings in fluent, correct, clear speech.
- * Independence and creativity by providing child with sufficient opportunities for self-expression.
- * Intellectual curiosity and understanding of world around and foster new interests by providing opportunities to explore, investigate and experiment.
- * Social attitudes and manners, that encourage healthy group participation and to make the child sensitive to the rights and privileges of others.
- * Emotional maturities by guiding the child to express, understand, accept and control feelings and emotions.
- * Aesthetic appreciation.

Some Perceptions

What is ECCE	What is not ECCE
A balanced play based programme of language, cognitive, creative and psychomotor activities.	Not syllabus bound programme for teaching 3R's nor 'a song and rhyme and go home' / or package of activities.
A child centered programme Catering to individual children's learning and emotional needs through individual, small and large group activities and one to one communication.	Not a teacher centered programme that follows formal classroom approach as in school.
A school readiness programme which 'readies' children for learning to read, write and do arithmetic later.	Not a programme for formally 'teaching', reading, writing and arithmetic which is to be done in primary.
A programme which indirectly promotes self control and thereby inner discipline in children through interactions.	Not a programme which demands unquestioning obedience or strict classroom discipline.

What is Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum/Practice (DAP)?

- * A DAP is a programme that keeps pace with the developmental status of the child and is based on child's readiness to learn.
- * A DAP follows the needs, interests and characteristics of children as per the developmental continuum.
- * Play comes naturally to a child and is therefore the medium for learning and development in ECE.
- * A DAP takes into account the socio/cultural background of children and focuses on individual child's needs and progress

Age/DAP focused Curriculum Outcomes for 2-3 years old

A **play group** with shorter duration, often with parents/mothers which is a secure environment and provides opportunity for children to: handle separation anxiety; develop five senses; listen to a lot of language and have opportunity to speak/communicate; be curious; explore; learn emotional control and simple socialization practices and development of large and fine motor skills.

Age/Dev. Appropriate Curriculum Outcomes for 3-4 years old

Longer duration and planned play based programme for all round development which enables children to speak fluently and confidently; handle and bond with picture books; listen to stories; learn rhymes; be immersed in a language environment; indulge in imaginative play; develop the five senses; ask and think out answers; do simple problem solving; experiment; learn to play with others, make friends; learn to channelise emotions and generally have a 'feel good' experience for a positive self-image.

Age/Dev. Appropriate Curriculum Outcomes for 4-5 years old

Curriculum moves towards an increasing ratio of adult guided vs. free play activities, more of large group activities focused on all round development with increasing complexity in all of above.

Specific school readiness activities of language development comprise of listening, understanding, speaking and communicating. Literacy readiness comes with phonological awareness, book knowledge and appreciation, print awareness, early writing and alphabet knowledge.

School Readiness Play Activities

- * **Reading Readiness:** eg. Picture- sound matching, shapes, phonetics, enriching vocabulary, verbal expression, developing bond with and interest in reading through picture books, story telling, charts etc.
- * **Writing Readiness:** eg. Eye hand coordination, interest in flair for writing, left to right directionality.
- * **Math:** Developing skills in classification, seriation, pattern making, reasoning, problem solving.
Forming Concepts: pre number and number concepts, space concepts, patterns and measurements

- * **Environment Concepts:** Thematic activities
- * **Motor development:** Fine and large muscle activities; music and movement
- * **Creativity and aesthetic appreciation:** Creative arts readiness is a result of music and movement, art and dramatic play

She concluded by giving tips for introducing English at early childhood education (ECE) level.

Introducing English

- * Respect mother tongue and have a bilingual approach.
- * Should be focused on developing listening and speaking skills so that children can learn to read fluently and with comprehension in Grade 1.
- * Should not start with reading and writing if children still do not have vocabulary or expression in English.
- * Introduce through games, story telling, rhymes and conversation.

Dr. Nisha Peshin appreciated the zeal and perseverance of the Navtika team which is able to print an edition of Navtika every four months. She underlined that ECCE policies are a framework and not a prescription. The ECCE programme aims to foster development of each child so there is no fixed curriculum required.

She called the private schools the pace makers and all teachers the custodians of pre-primary education. She reminded teachers that NCERT makes syllabus, books, etc. from Grade1 onwards. So pre-primary is not for so called teaching, and purpose of early childhood programme is to provide an educational environment to help in developmental needs. She wrapped up by saying that all children learn at their own pace. Government's concern is to send all children to school and ECCE initiatives must plan to make it a joyful learning experience. She recommended that the teacher has to be a change agent and a facilitator who creates a conducive environment where learning takes place.

Interactive session following the presentation was well answered.

Theme: Is early childhood education a source of joy or pressure in India

Chairperson: Professor K.K.Vashishtha, *Head,*
Department of Elementary Education, NCERT, New Delhi

Speakers: Dr. Romila Soni, *Lecturer,*
Department of Elementary Education, NCERT, New Delhi
Dr. Anil Gulati, *Pediatrician, New Delhi*
Ms. Anuradha Mathur, *Headmistress, Salwan Montessori School, Rajinder Nagar,*
New Delhi

Dr. Romila Soni explained that looking at the current scenario, it is mandatory to talk about pressure. We have seen mothers talking about pressure on kids and when admission time is on, everyone seems to be discussing pressure.

In context to the question –how pressure can be reduced and ECCE can be transformed to joyful learning, she suggested that there are various aspects which need to be taken care of

- * We need more schools with play based activities.
- * Teacher –student ratio matters a lot.
- * Government has laid policies for admission in nearby schools, still we see the children travelling 10-12 kilometers to get admission in good schools. This factor is a major cause of pressure. The children get tired and feel pressure of home assignments.
- * There is a lack of quality in ECCE programmes. The objectives behind it are not clear to educationists. There is a need for different kind of programmes as compared to the existing ones which can provide experiences according to the needs of different age groups
- * There are wrong notions about ECCE. Many pre-schools are doing addition, subtraction etc. Students are loaded with worksheets.
- * We often compare the child’s achievement in school as well as at home which leads to pressure.

In context to all these problematic issues, Dr. Romila Soni said that the children should be given concrete practices with manipulative material. Visual perception activities need to be given and then only an educator can move on to an abstract education. She emphasized that home assignments should be in the form of exploration and experimentation. Handling manipulative material makes the child more confident. She said that lack of nursery teacher training institutes, absence of competent teachers again brings out failure in the successful ECCE programs. In order to cover this drawback, Dr. Soni suggested that the schools should give quick capsule training to its teachers. In the end she quoted that TOO MUCH TOO SOON IS TOO BAD

Ms. Anuradha Mathur suggested that we should let the childhood be a journey. Both schools and parents have too many expectations. She emphasized that children should not be rushed into situations beyond their capacities.

Teachers in today’s school are attempting to research and give children a great learning experience. Many schools are improvising their strategies and are making pre-primary set-up more child- friendly. No school wants a syllabus that is stressful for the children. The kindergarten is an integral part of an elementary school’s curriculum. It is important for the children to be able to communicate their needs and wants, and the school system should be child-friendly to help the children do so.

Parents also have an important role to play. They need to focus on pre-education skills and physical development of the children. According to her, the parents should not have unrealistic expectations from the children. They should not be compared with their siblings/peer. Parents should also realize that the children suffer from separation anxiety when it is time to enroll the child into school and should prepare the children accordingly. The children should not be pressurized into joining different activities after school.

According to her, parents needs to be provided with the knowledge of how to help the child become a good human being. The parents should be patient and let the child grow at his/her pace. They have to be a good listener and should teach the children good problem solving and time management skills.

Dr Anil Gulati informed the audience about the illnesses such as abdomen pain, breathing problems, constipation, clingy behaviour, temper tantrums etc that are caused due to stress in young children because of early schooling. It is important for the practitioners at school to keep the health and psychological aspect of the child in mind.

The parents expect too much from preschools, and pressurize the children and school authorities. He also emphasized that parenting is a skilled job, but most of the parents are not trained to handle young children, except by the grandparents. Also, the social pressure forces them to send their children to school early, and as a result a two year old child who should actually be indulging in play, faces school work and is concerned for his belongings, at times some injury on way back and many other such aspects are to be faced by the child even when he/she is not ready for them according to the age.

He recommended that we have to be firm about the quality of the preschool programme being offered to children and the age at which the children enroll in a preschool programme.

Theme: Role of ECCE in universalization of elementary education

Speaker: Prof. Krishna Kumar, *Director*
National Council of Educational Research and Training

In the post lunch session **Prof. Krishna Kumar** spoke about the role of ECCE in the universalization of elementary education. He commenced the session and asked, why are we not convinced that ECCE is essential?" The only reason is that we do not have the system in place. It has always been felt that ECCE should be universalized and it is even mentioned in the constitution of India, but the matter has been delayed since 1960. The promise has not been kept and when we break a promise with an adult, he can wait but, when we break a promise with a child it breaks him!!! Instead of blaming one another, we must look introspectively, it is the poor people who are affected and it's time that ECCE component was made mandatory. He cited certain examples comparing the public schools and the MCD schools.

- * Children going to class I in a public school are expected to read and write in English where as in a MCD school there are no expectations.
- * Children of Class III of a public school have subjects like Mathematics, English, and Environmental Science etc. Whereas in a MCD school children of Class III cannot read, and if one can read, it will be without understanding. Many of them even cannot write. Only 5 or 6 children in a class of 40 can do really well.
- * The admission of children in public schools is based on their strong background, parents' qualification and organization of thoughts. The MCD schools have no such criteria and this is the reason why India has failed at universalization of elementary education.

According to **Prof Krishna Kumar**, apart from the socio-economic process, the systematic expression of public school children is better as they come from a pre school, whereas in a MCD school children

do not attend preschool. Thus public school children know what to expect in a school where as children of MCD schools are not aware of their expectations. Access to early childhood education has made a difference to the public school child in grade I, that point cannot be denied in any manner, that the public school child is familiar to the idea of a school before coming to the school, and has some exposure to the basic skills, like reading and writing skills and that is a role the pre-school has played. It is evident early childhood education makes a difference.

According to him the effect of ECCE is evident in all the ages. The behaviours, temperament, values and mindset of an individual depends on the kind of preschool he has received in his early years. Thus, it is very important to have our objectives at the ECCE level very clear. According to UNESCO report an Early Childhood Programme has to lay a “strong foundation” meaning that it provides strong foundation for later development. If it is done well the foundation will serve for a long time.

He warned that early childhood is a very crucial stage of life and a very sensitive area, so one should not play around with a child! We need to understand children at that age and what can be done at this point in order to let the child grow in a manner in which the child has been designed to grow by nature rather than in a manner a child can be made to fit into a system.

He also asked the group to introspect that if we all feel that ECCE is a strong foundation and in present scenario what foundation are the public schools giving? Public schools have inculcated the art of stress in the child. They are emerging as a tight system in which no mistakes are allowed to be made. If we want to build early childhood education as a strong sector then it is not enough to improve nursery and kindergarten it is also necessary to transform the nature of teaching in grade I, II and III as well and make the system adaptable to the needs of the child and not the other way round.

He mentioned that the National Curriculum Framework has made an effort to remove stress and make education child friendly. He also praised Maria Montessori’s research and requested all the participants to read these resources.

NAVTIKA National Conference on Early Childhood Care And Education
“Is Early Education In India Child Friendly?”

Day-2
Saturday, 20 September 2008

Themes:

- Including every child
- Reggio Emilia approach
- Should there be cursive writing in pre-school?
- Introducing English at preschool stage
- Theatre in education
- Tracking children’s progress in pre-school- can we make it child friendly?
- Nursery admissions- issues and concerns

Theme: Including every child

Chairperson: Dr. Geeta Chopra, *Reader, Institute of Home Economics, New Delhi*

Speaker: Dr. Amit Sen, *Psychiatrist, Sitaram Bharatiya Institute of Science and Research, New Delhi*

Dr Amit Sen introduced the topic, referring to the newspaper articles regarding stress in children causing suicides, and killings amongst youngsters. He emphasized that it is vital to sow seeds now to reap benefits decades later. Hence the importance of getting to the roots of the problem at the early stage is of prime importance.

In the present scenario, we need to believe in celebrating differences (in terms of potential, pace or calibre) in people to bring out diversity in profiles, (in terms of attention, memory, language skills, spatial ability, motor skills, higher thinking and social thinking). He compared the case histories of two children: Ragini and Raghav. Ragini is a quiet, intelligent and attentive girl with a very high IQ and low EQ; she does not have any friends. She is depressed and remains solemn. On the other hand, Raghav is a high thinker, has a good vocabulary, has good motor as well as social skills but poor sequential attention, memory and poor grades. Despite being sometimes disruptive, he is a bit of a clown in class. He is very popular amongst all. He understands other people's motivation. The audience was questioned that who they think would do better in life? Unanimously, everybody agreed that Raghav would do better. Dr. Sen. added that definitely he would do better provided his self-esteem does not get shattered as a result of bad upbringing or our conventional school system.

Emotional & Social Quotient: Higher prediction to success, so let IQ take a back seat.

He said IQ is a crude measure developed in France in 19th century. It gives a broad yard stick. In America by 1930- 40, every thing depended on IQ. But in today's world, it is more important to evaluate EQ and SQ of a child. According to Howard Gardner we possess multiple intelligences. In this light, education becomes multi dimensional from a uni-dimensional concept of an IQ which can only predict how a child will do in the traditional class room.

Being Inclusive

Being inclusive means celebrating differences. We are all wired differently and the wiring is not permanent.

Speaking traditionally, children have to be good at everything. They have to behave, obey, respect, read, listen, speak, comprehend, memorize, write, spell, calculate, conceptualize, make friends, participate in sports and be popular. And if they can't do all this, they are labeled as 'Slow learner', 'Incompetent', 'Naughty', 'Nuisance', 'Low IQ'. He asked the group, if it wasn't too much!!!

According to *Rabindra Nath Tagore* the young mind should be saturated with an idea that the human world is in harmony with the world around it. But all the regular schools ignore this with the air of superior wisdom. We got the idea of school from the English; they designed schools during the Industrial Revolution and produced educated children as mass products from factories, following rigid rules and regulations. The mere method of discipline does not take into account individuality of each child. With Independence, came the industrial age and with no defined education system, children were treated as

final product, i.e., good or bad. The good children were the ones who coped well with academics.

But we need to move on, there are no good children and bad children, all children are capable and need designed education to help them perform, and build on their strengths. They need inclusive education. Schools should be treated like living systems rather than machines. Schools that learn are the ones that actually are the need of the day.

Inclusive education is not only to help the children who have learning disability, attention disability or having bad family life. Inclusive education is disconnected from special education. It is beneficial to typical and atypical education. It is based on social justice, understanding of neuro-developmental differences, children's emotional, social and other needs, understanding of social and cultural realities. It holds the progressive attitude and is based on the holistic education that is dynamic and organic.

He advised not to use the box approach where the children were compartmentalized into regular normal children and learning disabled children. Instead, use the "spectrum approach", where all fit into the pattern somewhere.

Two very sensitive questions that touched the chords of each teacher were:

"If I can't learn the way you teach, can you teach me the way I learn?"

"Is it a learning disability or a teaching disability?"

We need a 'Paradigm Shift of Attitudes' through acceptance, accommodation, awareness and finally celebration of differences. The teacher should introduce a child centred learning rather than teacher centred learning. Teacher must be a prophet and treat school like living system rather than a machine. This is possible when teachers, parents, children, schools, administrators/ planners and policy makers all come together.

Towards Inclusive Education

Steps required are

- * Awareness building
- * Advocacy
- * Different levels of expertise
- * Referral system
- * Specialised services
- * Training & capacity building
- * Optimising & prioritising resources
- * Networking & collaboration with other agencies

Dr. Sen concluded his presentation with a quote by Mahatma Gandhi:

"We do not inherit the world from our parents; we borrow it from our children"

During the interaction session all the doubts of dyslexic, LD children and inclusive school were discussed by Dr. Sen.

The chairperson thanked the speaker for such an enriching presentation and stressed that such type of inclusive education should no more be a prerogative of a rich and the affording class but for all the strata of our society. She mentioned that when we address the issue of inclusion even in legislation and act formation the ECCE component is neglected. But this is the age from which we have to begin inclusion as ECCE setup has the maximum flexibility and the children are also in a stage where they can be moulded and transformation can occur.

Theme: Reggio Emilia Approach

Chairperson : Ms. Amita Tandon, *Headmistress,*
Salwan Montessori School, Sector-5, Gurgaon

Speaker : Ms. Deepika Mathawan, *Co-ordinator*
GD Salwan Public School, Rajinder Nagar.

Mrs. Deepika Mathawan shared her findings and teachings of the Reggio approach in Early Childhood Learning. She began with a quote “We were children, we have children, we have grandchildren and we all teach children.”

She gave a reflection of the Reggio Emilia Approach as an educational philosophy focused on pre-primary and primary education.

This approach fosters mental development of children, encourages them to explore the environment and express themselves through available media; communicative and cognitive languages (painting, drawing, collage, clay etc.).

This concept was first introduced in a small town in Italy, called Reggio Emilia by Loris Malaguzzi after World War II. It emphasizes that a child’s imagination is of utmost importance. The child has a hundred languages, thoughts and ways of thinking, understanding, to discuss and to dream. Learning experiences and ideas flow from the children and they become researchers. The underlying principles are that the child is competent, has rights, is biologically exposed to discovering and exploring and understands everything from body language.

Parents are a vital component of this philosophy; they are viewed as partners, collaborators and advocates for their children.

Special feature of the approach is documentation. Everything is documented, not only what is happening outside but within each child, as their views are put up along with all their work. Classrooms are different as they have glass partitions. A child has the freedom to move on to the attached room if wishes to. Every morning each teacher asks the children “What would they like to do today” and the day’s activities are planned accordingly.

The art room- ATELIER is a huge gallery where children work with clay and other material and their work is put on display.

Reggio Approach in gd Salwan Public School: Some initiatives taken

- * Hearing the sound of our inner voice
- * Assembly takes place only once a week, other days the mornings are used for conversation
- * Learning by doing.
- * A lot of use of clay.
- * Children have freedom.

Ms. Amita Tandon concluded by saying that this philosophy connects education to the children's real life, and helps children construct their knowledge through variety of experiences. She also informed the house about the exhibition gd. Salwan Pubic School had organized on Reggio Emilia approach and appreciated the effort enormously.

Theme : Should there be cursive writing in the preschool?

Chairperson : Dr. Usha Ram, *Principal, Laxman Public School, New Delhi*

Speakers : Ms. Viji Vasudev, *Headmistress, Indian School, New Delhi*
Dr. Jessy Abraham, *Reader, IASE, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi*
Dr. Amrapali Lahiri, *Occupational Therapist, New Delhi*

Dr. Amrapalli Lahiri asked the house not to endorse writing at all till the child is 6 years at least. The bones and muscles are not ready to have a flow in writing. According to her instead of writing the children can use clay for the formation of letters. Before writing, concept of shapes and size should be developed. Children will have difficulty in writing if the concept of big and small is not clear. They should be taught to colour within boundaries, making different objects of clay before being introduced to writing. She cautioned everybody to be careful about left handed children as the left hemisphere of the brain is more prominent in these children. Insisting right handedness would confuse the child.

Also, if visual- motor integration is not in place, then, copying, ability to draw straight lines, circle is not possible. To teach with the help of three dimensional objects (beading, sorting, and sequencing before drawing) before teaching from two dimensional media such as board or notebook/book is recommended.

The young children should not be forced to insist on colouring within pencil drawn boundaries. A useful suggestion was, to make use of stencils, bangles etc. so that children colour within the boundary. She recommended tracing was better than copying. Gross motor movement of shoulder is advised for colouring but fine motor movements comprising of finger and wrist is not advised. Lots of games and activities to improve these skills should be played.

Dr Lahiri advocated that before developing the writing skills of a child the pre-writing skills like visual skills and spatial skills need to be honed. The writing with a pencil should be avoided at the age group 3-4 years. She also mentioned that a print script is better suited form for writing initially. The cursive handwriting should only be introduced at the age of 6+ and not before, as the idea of spacing becomes clear to the child at a later stage. The students should be made to work with stencils in order to fine tune their finger as well as wrist movements. Spacing is a visual skill that a child should be taught.

She insisted that a handwriting which is legible should be accepted and a lot of stress should not be paid on a beautiful handwriting.

Dr. Jessy Abraham in her address said that the writing is considered a stressful activity by a child as the insistence on perfection is of a paramount importance to the teachers as well as the parents. She suggested that the writing task could be assigned according to the child's chronological age. For e.g. a child between the age group of 2-3 years could be asked to draw lines, a child between the age group of 3-4 years could be asked to draw straight, zigzag and curved lines and so on and so forth.

The basic guidelines she gave are as follows:

- * no strict rules should be introduced regarding letter formation
- * teach the child according to his/her ability
- * space should be given to the child
- * no pressure from the parents

Like other panelists, **Ms. Viji Vasudeva** also showed her disagreement on introduction of cursive handwriting in pre-primary stage. She reiterated that the development of fine motor skills is of utmost importance and stress should be laid on making a child self reliant and the child should be encouraged to do small chores so that the fine motor skills get honed. She insisted on use of crayons at an early stage and not to discourage the child's experience in writing.

Ms. Usha Ram summed all up by counting out the advantages and disadvantages of cursive handwriting.

* **Advantages**

It is faster

It develops fine motor skills

It gives a personal touch to the work

Children who are slow writers or have disgraphia often find cursive hand writing more easy

It brings out the artist in you

* **Disadvantages**

The learning is time consuming

It is more teacher dependent

The children are computer savvy so find it difficult to relate to this font

Pre-primary education is to be based on the 3 Hs not just 3 Rs. The three Hs are Head, Heart and Hand.

The session was concluded with the question answer round and the queries were answered adequately by the panel.

Theme: Introducing English at Preschool Stage

Chairperson: Ms. Neelima Sharma, *Education Officer, Delhi Government*

Speakers: Dr. Rekha S Sen, *Lecturer, School of Continuing Education, IGNOU*
Ms. Paramjeet K Narang, *Principal, Pathways World School, Gurgaon.*
Ms. Renu Kaul, *Head, Pallavan, Gurgaon*

Ms. Paramjeet Narang began the session by saying ‘Life is not compartmentalized and it is integrated and language should be learnt that way’. She defined language as a means of communication, sharing feelings, sharing curiosity and getting information. When the children come to school, they have already learnt the mother tongue. In schools, English can be taught easily as the teachers speak in English and question the children in English. As the child hears quality language he understands, he picks up words, phrases and finally the transition from bilingual to later speaking in English. The basic need of the child is to communicate to get information, share feelings and as he grows, he has another need, the need to be creative (record and share). In this scenario the language develops. If we create the need for the language it becomes easy for the child to learn another language, therefore we need to provide experiences where child can use language to express and be creative without being fearful of using correct English and the language will develop automatically.

Ms. Renu Kaul underlined the whole language approach as listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to her writing doesn’t necessarily mean writing a,b,c...(at a pre-school) but it could be a scribble for a teacher to draw out conclusion about the child knowledge of words, spacing etc. Reading (not necessarily correct) at that stage could be an indication of the child’s readiness to move ahead. Pre-reading, pre-writing and speaking should not be compartmentalized and should go hand in hand.

Dr. Rekha S Sen brought the attention of the house to the word ‘introduce’ and challenged whether the school introduces the language in school or whether it is introduced by parents. As most children are familiar with names of objects like bottle, bag, copy, pencil, etc. we should not underestimate childrens’ language skills, for they surely recognize Kellogg, Cadbury, Bournvita etc. She explained with the help of Hindi varnimala, the use of each ‘varn’ to be meaningfully put in sequence.

Each word is made by using ‘swar’ and ‘vyanjan’ alternately. In her address **Dr Rekha S. Sen** said that our classrooms are multilingual with a marginal understanding of English and the usage is restricted to a repertoire of words alone. She said that there is a need to immerse the child in the language and not in terms of nouns and verbs alone. A meaningful and rich environment should be developed for the learning to take place. The learning should be anxiety free and supportive.

She then asked the members to memorize random letters in Hindi, when no one could remember the whole sequence, she organized all the letters into a meaningful sentence ‘Kamal Kichad mein hi khilta hain’ and asked the participants to repeat - the answer was prompt.

She inferred that facts get memorized better when made meaningful. Therefore teaching English in a more meaningful way by taking topics of interest for children should be emphasized.

Theme: Theatre in education

Chairperson: Ms. Amita Shaw, *Director, National Bal Bhawan, New Delhi*

Speaker: Dr. Asha Singh, Reader, *Lady Irwin College, New Delhi*

Theatre transforms the child's personality. The child is no more a passive learner. It fosters the individuality of the child. It allows group participation. The children learn different linguistic approaches. It helps the children to learn from each other things like sharing, caring, take turn, persistence, coping with failure. Theatre deals with them in a very natural, unfocused way and the children are very good to pick up, uncovering all the mysteries of the world. Theatre allows them to do that. She said that the education needs to be exciting, full of discovery and experimentation and most importantly it should be participatory. She opined to take the curricular portions and teach them through theatre. Theatre is an extremely powerful medium for anyone who has different ways of learning. The body language and the actions become the point of concern. Theatre allows for emergence of many identities.

In order to enrich the classroom transactions the teachers need to undergo training. They should learn to be resourceful, should have local knowledge and the knowledge of rhythm and harmony so that theatre could be used as a potent classroom activity

The Chairperson **Ms Amita Shaw** seconded her views and said that the children are creative, flexible and innovative by nature. These natural instincts should be nurtured and put to use for their own learning. She laid stress on masks and recommended the use of masks in education.

Theme: Tracking children's progress in preschool- can we make it child friendly?

Chairperson: Dr Shraddha Kapoor, *Reader, Lady Irwin College, New Delhi*

Speakers: Dr. S. Bhanot, *Dean, College of Home Science, ND University of Agriculture and Teachnology, Faizabad*
Dr. Amita Puri, *Lecturer, Army College of Education, New Delhi*
Col Ajoy Bakshi, *SO, AWWA, New Delhi*

Dr. S. Bhanot emphasized the importance of three A's 'Affiliation, Affection Achievement'. ECCE programmes are to foster the development of children by providing them the stimulating environment and the experience so as to help the children realize their own potential. Keeping this in mind, set the goals of curriculum which should be result oriented. If the child does not develop basic feeling (affiliation and affection) he will be disturbed and that will affect the whole pace of development and the child's achievement.

She pointed out that the dictionary meaning of 'tracking' is to follow the trail or the movement. Assessment is a procedure we follow to track one's progress where as evaluation comes at the end. Assessment should be used to enhance future and should be used as a teaching support. While assessing one has to keep in mind the child's capability, and age-appropriate expectations.

The assessment could be done in the form of checklist, observation etc. where the child does not come to know that he/she is being assessed and becomes conscious. A formal record could also be kept in the form of graphs. The assessment has to be 'on-going'. If the ECCE programme is child friendly, the assessment can also be child friendly and assess the different domains. The assessment parameter should be linked to objectives of curriculum.

Along with the child, we also need to assess the totality of the programme i.e. the environment, material, motivation etc. Assessment should be a comfortable experience for a child and let it be participatory involving teacher, child and parent.

Col Ajoy Bakshi was the next speaker who shared his success story of introducing a tension free pre-primary education in all the 305 branches of Army Preschools all over the country. The assessment was made child and parent friendly. The pre-existing method of parent –teacher –interaction as a large group activity was changed and the educators discussed with each parent individually. This helped in better interaction among the parent and the teacher and they together worked out ways to help the children.

He said the assessment is in a way the evaluation of the teacher to see how successful he/she has been in imparting the curriculum.

Dr. Amita Puri said that the focus should be on four areas of development in the preprimary group.

- * Gross motor skills
- * Fine motor skills
- * Language
- * Social skills

There is a need to have correction in our perception of teaching. We should not just focus on cognitive aspects in assessment; rather we should create a profile where all domains are assessed in order to help the child progress further rather than use assessment for labeling.

Dr Shraddha Kapoor the Chairperson summed the opinions expressed by the panelists and said that according to her there was no need for a stereotype evaluation as each child is different and therefore needs to be treated differently. The criteria for assessing at pre-school should rather be based on knowing whether the child is inquisitive, happy and active.



The Valedictory Address

Theme: Nursery admissions- issues and concerns

Speaker: Mr. Ashok Ganguly, *Former Chairman CBSE*

Mr. Ashok Ganguly, the Former Chairman CBSE shared his views regarding nursery admission.

Nursery education is one of the parameters of ECCE. When we restrict our mind set, then all the complexities, all the problem arises. He talked about Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) which is meant for class I to VIII.

The ECCE which includes the pre-primary education has been globally recognized as critical for HRD. He said that the ECCE is critically recognized by the Human Resource Development Department.

The early years of child actually constitute the foundations for life outcomes. The 3-8 years of a child's life determine not only the cognitive and the physical growth but also shape the foundation for personal and social habits and the values.

He agreed with the other speakers that there should be no competition and compulsion or comparison. He said that all of us have to take an atomic vow that we will make one change and we need to learn how to accruing through out the human activity. The concept of schooling at every level is also undergoing huge transformation. It has to be changed. We have to be dynamic in order to catch with its situation. We have to remove the mindset of stereotypes and the repetitiveness. We cannot allow the younger generation to remain in this world with unsolved problems. They have to be impassioned with inertia.

He opined that the teachers are responsible for stifling the creativity of every child when they try to give same inputs to all of them irrespective of their individual differences.

He emphasized that if the horizontal base of a child is strong then the vertical growth later becomes a must. He said the quality framework of a preschool is influenced by content; people- the head of the institute/teacher/student/parents; process and technology.

The four significant dimensions of pre-school are-

- ✱ Issue of duration: He said ideally there should be one year of preschool, be it any type of school the child joins.
- ✱ Issue of content/curriculum: A play way method is essential
- ✱ Issue of quality: As few schools in urban areas are considered Quality Schools, there is huge

rush for these schools. But this system has to be changed. In today's world each school has to become a centre of excellence. We have to develop a transparent system, we are accountable to people from whom we are charging fees. We should have parameters defining the admission procedure to make this fair and just procedure. School is a part of society and it has to reflect the heterogeneous nature of society and become truly inclusive, where all children stand a fair chance of being considered for admission.

- * Admission - Admission policy was being solely decided by the school. But we need some regulation. It should be pressure free for the child as well as the parent. It should be fair, less time consuming and transparent where the preference to be given to the student living in the neighbourhood which would lead to diversity. Also, the student should be admitted to class 1 at the age of 5+ (in the month of April of the year the child proposes to join the school). This cut-off date has been decided in accordance with the beginning of the academic session, which in the Indian system, largely starts from April.

He emphasized that we need transformation in all the components of preschool. There is a difference between the reformation and transformation. In reformation, we just cut and paste it here and there and put it into a new situation. But in transformation we transform the system all together. According to him the entire examination and evaluation in the primary and nursery level should be removed.

Vote of Thanks

The vote of thanks was extended by *Mr. Sushil Dutt Salwan*.

He said that we have neglected the teaching profession. In the 90's and even now it is considered as the second source of income for the family. Teachers are supposed to be absolutely learned, most respected and are supposed to give their best to the children they take care of. He opined that unless there is transparency we would not be able to convince the parents that the school is meant for the child. He also mentioned that the government was opening a school in each block but the ECCE component was neglected. He summed up the talk by asking the next generation to work hard and requested them to take lead and work on the latest issues in the domain of early childhood care and education.



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