

Pre-School Education

Early Childhood Care for Survival Growth & Development (ECC-SGD) is an integrated holistic approach within a rights perspective, to ensure proper childcare leading to the survival, growth, full development and protection of the young child through child centered, family focused and community based interventions. The immediate determinants of Survival Growth and Development are adequate dietary intake, opportunities for playing and communicating and freedom from disease. Pre-school years lay the foundation for optimum growth and development in the areas of health, hygiene, nutrition, language development, personality building and social adjustments, besides the physical, emotional and intellectual development. Play related activities are of fundamental importance for children in the first 6 years of life as health, educational and social experiences of early years determine the quality of human resource and consequently the tempo of social and economic progress of the country. Most of these concepts are incorporated into the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) services, which have definitely shown its impact especially in the rural scenario.

Objectives of Pre-Primary Education

- Physical development resulting from a well balanced activity and rest, outdoor play, nutritious food and general hygiene inclusive of medical care
- Mental development, resulting from a rich environment, varied experiences and contact with understanding and sympathetic adults devoted to providing the

necessary guidance.

- Social development as a result of contact with more adults and with many more children than is possible in homes.
- Emotional development to take place from a richer emotional life, learning what emotional responses are acceptable to others and an advancement in the understanding of the when, why and how of emotional expression
- Educational development, meaning a better preparation for school life by the acquisition of the necessary background experience
- Parental education for the sake of enlightening the parents through parental conferences, observation and discussion of individual problems.

As early as 1992, the Ministry of Human Resource Development thought of setting up a National Advisory Committee, under the Chairmanship of Prof Yash Pal, to advise on the ways and means to reduce the academic burden on school students(2). The committee has made it clear that there is no justification for torturing young children by compelling them to carry heavy bags of books everyday to school. Textbooks should be treated as school property and thus, there should be no need for children to purchase the books individually and carry them daily to homes. The school has to prepare a separate timetable for the assignment of homework and for the use of textbooks and notebooks and the same should be made known to the children in advance.

Early childhood educations in India still receive low priority in terms of research facilities and actual funding. It is therefore

necessary to float more research studies particularly on the vulnerable and disadvantaged children, to gain further evidence regarding the effects of early childhood education on the development. A large number of experimental program in early childhood education have been in operation in the country for sometime. Similarly a variety of teacher training programs on early childhood education are in existence today. The ICDS, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and the present Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan (SSA) are all part of the national governmental efforts to bring in quality into childhood education.

Many who are concerned with the welfare of pre-school children have watched with dismay and horror at the turn of events that have happened in the field of pre-primary education. There is a feeling now among professionals and parents alike that modern pre-primary schools have totally forgotten the purpose of pre-primary education and the importance of non-formal education and they have instead used these institutions for imparting formal education at a tender age. It is in this context that the Indian Academy of Pediatrics, had formed a sub-committee on pre-school education, that have made the following recommendations and the same were summarized and published in 1999 as 'Guide to Pre-school Education'(3).

General Recommendations

- The pre-primary age is a crucial one in the development of the child and hence a developmental approach rather than an educational approach must be adopted.
- Pre-primary education is not a downward extension of primary education and hence only non-formal educational method must be adopted.
- Pre-primary child can express herself best

in her mother tongue and hence the medium of communication in the nurseries preferably be the mother tongue.

- Some of the apparently normal looking children who may have developmental disabilities need to be integrated into normal nursery system with special attention.
- Pre-primary period is the most valuable period of childhood and hence all efforts should be made in assuring quality in the training of teachers.
- There is no uniformity in the pattern and academic content of the pre-primary teachers training of various Government departments and private sector in India and hence the state units of NCERT (SCERT) may be entrusted with the academic content of teachers training program.
- Although universalization of pre-primary education is an accepted policy of the Government, financial constraints often come in the way and hence Panchayath and other local bodies may be encouraged to come in a big way into the field of pre-primary education
- The public and a large number of parents are not aware of the advantages of promoting non-formal pre-primary education and its vital role in overall development of the child and hence all efforts must be taken to enlighten the public on this concept.

Specific Recommendations

- Minimum age for entry onto LKG should be Four Years Complete on the day of admission.
- The selection criteria for admission should not be based on Interview and testing the child.
- Medical fitness and immunization

certificate should be a must for admission.

- Mother tongue should preferably be the medium of communication in pre-school education.
- The undue emphasis on reading and writing is detrimental to the development of a pre-school child and it should not be practiced.
- The pre-school activities should be based on the recommendation of the NCERT, New Delhi.
- Pre-school child should not be subjected to formal examination and homework. Grading should be preferred to ranking or marking.
- RTO safety regulations should be strictly followed while transporting children to and from a school.
- Pre-school education should not be a must for admission in the 1st standard.
- The Indian Academy of Pediatric should be involved in formulating guidelines for preprimary education at all levels as has been done in Kerala(4).

Although these recommendations were approved by the Executive Board of IAP in 1994 itself, we cannot say that we have made

serious headway in the last 10 years. It is my earnest appeal to each of the state, district, city branches to conduct at least one awareness program for pediatricians and parents and for pre-school teachers in association with Indian Association of Pre-school Educators (IAPE).

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