

Early Childhood Care and Education

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) is a major national initiative and a step forward towards achieving the goals of Universal Elementary Education (UEE). It has set forth the targets for itself to reduce the drop out rates and enhance the quality of learning of primary school children in a planned manner by making all-out efforts for and addressing issues related to the three major parameters of UEE, that is universal enrolment, universal retention and enhancement of learning achievement level.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has been recognised as a crucial input for achieving the goals of UEE by providing necessary impetus to universal enrolment, retention and quality of learning at primary stage of education. The quality and coverage of ECCE inputs in DPEP states therefore becomes an important ingredient in the overall context of the DPEP strategy. The integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) being the major ECCE programme in the country, DPEP initiatives in ECCE need to largely focus on strengthening the quality of the preschool education component in this programme through supplementing existing training efforts and through development and dissemination of supportive resource materials. DPEP also provides for reaching children in the 3 to 6 years age group in remote areas still unserved by the ICDS by opening new ECCE centres in a phased manner. The emphasis in DPEP will thus be primarily on quality improvement in ECE to ensure its impact on attainment of goals of UEE.

To facilitate the planning and implementation of ECE interventions in the DPEP states a two days orientation programme was organised by the Department of Preschool and Elementary Education, NCERT, New Delhi on September 18 and 19, 1996 under the aegis of DPEP with the objective of discussing the following:

- the crucial significance of ECCE in the context of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE);

- the status of ECCE programmes in the country including ICDS and issues that need to be addressed for effective qualitative improvement; and
- in the light of state level experience, areas requiring special attention with a view to establishing/strengthening linkages between ECCE and Primary Education in the context of UEE.

METHODOLOGY

The orientation programme was conducted essentially in the participatory mode. In view of the short duration of the programme visits to ECCE centres could not be possible. Alternatively, participants were requested to visit *anganwadis* in their respective states/districts prior to participation in the programme. This was expected to provide the necessary baseline to participants for relating the programme inputs to their respective state specific issues and conditions.

The participants were also requested to communicate any five major issues/questions of priority to them with regards to ECCE. The programme schedule was thus planned in a flexible way to accommodate all these queries and make modifications where necessary.

The sessions were well supported with video film presentations on various themes related to ECE to highlight issues and stimulate discussion and sharing of experience. The participants were also exposed to a variety of resource materials in the area of ECE which could facilitate their planning in this area. The material was also made available to them on request. The material included:

1. Early Childhood Care and Education Programme
 2. ECE Trainer's Handbook
 3. Minimum Specifications for Pre-schools
 4. School Readiness Programme
 5. Pressure on Pre-School Child
 6. ECE-CMLKit
 7. Handouts on session themes
 8. Minimum kit of play materials
- A Guide

The programme commenced with welcome address by Prof. Venita Kaul, Head, Department of Preschool and Elementary Education, NCERT. She gave a brief introduction to the programme in terms of the objectives and scheduling of sessions. Shri R.S. Pandey, Joint Secretary (DPEP) MHRD, Government of India in his opening remarks

ECCE IN DPEP

The concluding session of the programme was on Developing a Framework for District Level Planning for ECE. This session was conducted by Ms. Vrinda Swamp, Director (MS) MHRD. In this session she presented an action plan for ECCE in DPEP states long with guidelines and financial provisions. Under broad categories of what can be done under DPEP and how can it be done she informed that DPEP will finance (i) expansion of ECCE centres in villages not covered by ICDS (ii) construction of ECCE centres next to primary school (Hi) developing of improved pre-school materials through SCERT/DIETs/NGOs (iv) training of workers appointed in DPEP (v) joint training of AW/Primary teacher/health workers (vi) testing innovative models in ECCE (vii) documentation (viii) convergence with ICDS, with community etc. She also clarified that DPEP will not finance (i) nutrition (ii) duplication of ICDS (Hi) norms other than ICDS except innovations.

Ms. Swarup briefly also highlighted some salient points for ECCE planning. These included:

- *A Programme Officers should be appointed to coordinate gender and ECCE related issues.*
- . *Constant linkage with SCERTs/DIETs/NGOs will need to be maintained for resource support.*
- . *Liaison will be required with the state level ICDS nodal department*
- *The planning will have to be done in coordination with the DPEP planning processes and Annual Work Plan and Budget formulation.*
- *Prior planning, necessary data and information with respect to ICDS status and expansion plans and coverage will need to be procured and used as a basis for planning.*
- *DPEP financial parameters will have to be considered and conformed to.*
- *The executive committee approval will be required for the plans.*

Ms Swarup also stated that in Annual Work Plan & Budget (AWP & B) information about the activity, funds required, agency that will execute and time frame to conduct activity should be clearly incorporated. She gave broad areas where monitoring of the programme will be of crucial significance. These were: (i) development of ECE related performance indicators for effective monitoring (ii) monitoring opening of centres (Hi) monitoring training inputs (iv) monitoring resource support (v) monitoring convergence and (vi) conducting evaluation.

highlighted the crucial importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes in the context of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). He attempted to demystify the meaning generally attached to constitutional Directives for free and compulsory education of children upto the age of 14 years by stressing that children below 6 years of age are also implicitly covered under the Constitutional provision which unfortunately has been generally interpreted as referring to children from 6-14 years only. He further emphasized that the programme for pre-school children has to be joyful, play-based and activity oriented. He opined that while there is a need to open more and more IEC centres to facilitate universalisation of ECE services, the quantitative expansion must be linked with quality as well. In this context he endorsed the modern economic theory which postulates that quality of supply creates demand, as against the traditional belief that demand decides supply and quality. Elaborating this concept further, Shri Pandey stressed the need to provide good quality pre-school education to children so that the community perceives its importance and comes forward to demand and support the programmes. He felt that the materials and methods used at this stage are most crucial to the quality of the programmes and its impact.

Prof. A.K. Sharma, Director, NCERT, inaugurated the programme. In his inaugural address Prof. Sharma noted that ECCE which was not given much attention in phase I of DPEP implementation has now been accorded a prominent place in the overall strategy of DPEP implementation and has become an integral part of it. He cautioned that ECCE should not be made a replica of primary education. ECCE should have its own personality in terms of its content and methods which are directed towards a child's development in a holistic manner. In this connection he opined that a training of functionaries involved is of crucial significance for ensuring use of content and methodology appropriate to a child's development needs. ECCE therefore should make extensive use of audio-visual materials/play materials and toys and local specific low cost materials such as those generated in the Annual Toy Competition held earlier by the Department of Pre-school and Elementary Education. He also stressed that ECCE should be viewed in the overall context of universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE), as a very significant input.

At the end of the inaugural session a vote of thanks was proposed by the Programme Coordinator, Dr. G.C. Upadhyay.

The session following the inaugural was essentially devoted to getting to know each other through the play way method. Three introductory games were played with the participants by Ms. Romila Soni. The first game elicited the names of each participant in a rhythmic

mode. This was followed by 'Zip Zap' a game which helped each participant to get to know his/her two neighbours. The third game taxed the memory skills of each participant by making him/her recall the names sequentially of all the participants of the programme present at the time. Following these games which helped to establish rapport between the faculty and the participants, the latter were given an opportunity to share some games, they knew with the others. The session concluded with a discussion on the significance of such games not only for any training programme but also in the early childhood education programmes with children.

Significance and Issues of ECE

Prof. Kaul highlighted the two-fold significance of ECE i.e. its direct influence on the overall development of the child and its potential contribution to achieve the goals of universalisation of elementary education (UEE). In this context she gave the basic rationale for investing in ECE. The concepts of ECCE, ECE and Early Childhood Development were deliberated upon and the shift towards the concept of ECE as broader, all encompassing and holistic approach was highlighted. Some of the crucial issues concerning ECE were discussed. These included a) the low priority given to ECE in the Education sector despite its accepted and proven significance; b) the lack of even minimum essential material, human and financial resources; c) dearth of experience and capacity for ECE at present at state and substate levels in many states; d) inappropriate community perceptions and expectations; e) miseducation in the name of ECE by introducing formal teaching of the 3R's.

The role of NCERT/SCERTs/SRCs in promoting ECC programmes was highlighted. Prof. Kaul also gave an account of researches done in this area at National level and State level.

Methodology of ECE Programme

To make participants aware of the kind of curriculum (content) and methodology used in Early Childhood Education Programme a film *Meri Pyari Anganwadi* was screened for the participants. Some charts were also put to clarify to the participants both major objectives or goals of a good ECE programme as well as the specific principles of planning the daily, weekly and monthly programmes. A discussion was conducted by the resource person Ms. Sushma Singh, ECE Consultant, UP after viewing the film so that participating states get an opportunity to have clarity with regards to the content, their sequencing, material used, organisation of outdoor/indoor activity and methodological issues. The concept of programme planning and its principles were also highlighted in the discussion. For evaluation of

children's progress, indicators developed in each area of child development i.e. physical motor, personal-social, language, cognitive and creativity were shared with the participations. Similarly indicators developed for assessing school readiness of children were also discussed. A major point of discussion was the observation that despite all training and emphasis on play and development oriented programmes the field reality indicates that most *Anganwadis* are functioning as little primary schools and teaching children alphabets and number when they are developmentally not ready for this. The adverse effects of this practice were discussed and the need for advocacy and community education in this context was stressed.

Training

Training is one of the most vital components in the overall context of the quality of ECE programmes. The facilitator for the training session in the afternoon, Dr. Adarsh Sharma, Addl. Director, NIPCCD gave an overview of the shifting focus in training of functionaries of ICDS in the context of ECCE. She informed that the training package (sandwich courses) now being adopted is focussed more on (1) increasing access to services (2) improving utilisation, quality, impact and sustenance. The training would lay emphasis on reducing the burden of *Angan Wadi Workers* (AWW) on the one hand and lay emphasis on improving the skills, and reorienting the training content with the life cycle approach with an emphasis on a holistic perspective.

The holistic perspective will be translated into actual practice by reconceptualising the training content in terms of different blocks of training based not on different service components like health, nutrition, ECE etc. as done at a present but on different age groups targeted i.e. 0-2 years, 2-3 years, 3-6 years with all services considered as relevant to each in a holistic manner. One of the strategies highlighted to clear backlog in training was to expand institutional capacity. At the same time alternative non-institutional district training teams/ mobile training team approaches should be concerned. Dr. Sharma suggested possible DPEP intervention in this area. The possibilities and benefits of joint training of functionaries from Department of Education and Department of Women and Child Development as well as of AWWs and primary teachers were also discussed.

Linkage

Establishing linkage between Early Childhood Education and Primary Education is the top priority at present. Most of the participating states had raised queries about the ways and modalities to bring about convergence/coordination, of efforts between different departments.

Dr. K. Lakshmi, Director ERC, Andhra Mahila Sabha covered various components which would be necessary to establish both horizontal and vertical linkage. The efforts which have been initiated by Department of Education and Department of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India were mentioned in this context. These included establishing linkages through ensuring that AWs are located in the premises of the primary schools or in their proximity and their timings are synchronized with AWs starting 15 minutes earlier to facilitate girls participation since they can leave their younger siblings in the AWs. It was also opined that school linkage has to be seen and operationalised in local specific perspective, keeping the working patterns, lifestyles etc. in view. The training needs for effective linkage programmes were also highlighted. The need to extend play based/ activity based/child centered approach to class I & II for programmatic linkage was stressed and the advantage of organising joining training of AWWs/ECCE workers and class I teachers particularly from the point of view of continuity and mutual understanding of the programme objectives and roles were discussed.

A film on school linkage entitled "*Ek Sarthak Shuruaat*" was screened for the participants. The viewing of the film was followed by a discussion under different aspect of school linkage, and the issues involved in it. The need to explore alternative models was also emphasised. In this context the concept of feeder centres to primary school was introduced which can be taken up under innovations in DPEP. This model envisages extension of AWs/ECE centres into AW+ grades 1 and 2 in an ungraded way. This model has advantage of providing a more child-friendly environment in the crucial first two years of school through proximity, familiar worker/teacher, space for bridging the gap between home and school language etc. This could ascertain mastery of self learning skills in children prior to entry into primary school.

Status of Pre-School Education Component of ICDS

The second day of the programme was devoted to a presentation of the findings of a study on "Status of Pre-School Education Component of ICDS and its Perception and extent of Utilisation by the Community" by Dr. G.C. Upadhyay, undertaken in 10 UNICEF-assisted ECE project states. Based on preliminary data available from some states it was found that only about 50% children in the 3-6 age groups are registered in AWs and out of the registered children only 60% were found attending AWs on the day of observation. Thus from the total population the percentage of children benefited was only about 30%. Various other dimensions of the study e.g. i) timings of AW; ii) activities conducted in

AWs (PSE programme); iii) extent of programme planning for PSE component; iv) material availability v) availability of outdoor/indoor space and other facilities like drinking water/toilet; vi) parental perception of AW as a pre-school centre; vii) school linkage and viii) skills/knowledge and attitudes of AWWs/AWHs/Supervisors were discussed as per the trends available in the study. The presentation which highlighted gross inadequacies in terms of resources available and quality of the programme opened up issues related with promotion of quality of preschool education. It was again reiterated that it is good quality ECE and not ECE per se that will have an impact on the goals of UEE *or* on the individuals child development.

AWWs load of work, AWW's job responsibilities also figures in the discussions. The question of gap between children's language at home and in school, single parent families and first generation learners were some issues raised in the context of children's retention in schools, and the scope to counter these through ECE.

After this presentation participating states were requested to share their experiences in the area of ECE. States of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, UP and Maharashtra presented briefly the status of Pre-School Education in their respective states. One of the important references made during this session by the participants from Maharashtra was about the Ram Joshi Committees' recommendation on ECCE, which are being considered for implementation by Maharashtra Government.

School Readiness Programme

In the next session a film "*Nanhe beej ootho*" made on the theme of school readiness was screened for the participants. Activities appropriate for reading, writing and number readiness were demonstrated in the film. A discussion was organised after the film, which was initiated by Mrs Kanta Seth. The discussion emphasized the need for School Readiness Programmes in the initial stage of class I curriculum since almost 75% children enter class I without any pre-school education experience with the specific deficits in terms of competencies and attitudes required for readiness for 3 R's. This has been demonstrated in a recent research study conducted by NCERT. It was pointed out that the six weeks to two months programme helps children adjust better to the demands of primary curriculum.

Dr. Prerna Mohite who implemented the school readiness programme for class I children and brought out a book called "*Tarang*" in Gujarat highlighted the implementation of the programme in the state. She informed the participants that in order to increase enrolment, retention and learning achievement of children, children's needs and readiness levels should be considered before formal teaching in class

I begins. It was therefore decided to give children school readiness experience till September (the first three months in class I) through play-way, activity based joyful learning. She also informed that till September children continue to register themselves and as such there cannot be any formal teaching. The period from July to September is suitable for school readiness activities.

After September Class I curriculum is transacted in such a way so that children acquire competencies as prescribed under Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) through activity based joyful learning extended to class I and class II. Training of teachers to implement "*Tarang*" is done by district level resource teams already in position. "*Tarang*" therefore as the name suggests aims to create ripples in the community teachers, children and parents. The setting up of Balmitra Varg i.e. class I classrooms made colourful and attractive by teachers as a part of *Tarang* training was also referred to by her in the context of making education child friendly.

Community Participation

The next session organised was on community participation and reaching the community. Majority of participating states had raised issues of community participation and involving of parents. In the first half of the session Dr. A.C. Lai discussed the concept and process of community participation and presented before the participants experience gained under Area-Intensive Education Project (AIEP) implemented in six states. Dr. N. Lalitha gave an overview of experiences of community participating in AIEP project in Tamil Nadu state. It was revealed that the community participation experience under AIEP were found positive and parents and communities have been able to sustain the programme even after the impending closure of the project.

In the latter half of this session on community participation participants were oriented to Participatory Learning and Action Approach by Ms. Deepika Srivastava of UNICEF, Delhi Office. She highlighted the basic tenets of Participatory Learning and Action Approach by suggesting reversal of present approaches towards interaction with communities and the paradigm shift to bottom-up rather than top-down approach.

It was emphasised by her that the essential elements for participatory learning and action approach are learning together, learning from each other and learning by doing. To achieve this end it will be necessary to have local issues analysed, understand how community views different institutions i.e. AW, Primary School, Panchayat, Health Centre etc. in order to work with these institutions

effectively. It would also be important to have resource mapping done for planning an effective strategy for community participation.

Minimum Specification for ECE Centres

A document entitled Minimum Specifications for Pre-School was given to each participant which describes the minimum requirements for a pre-school centre. These requirements, however, have been presented at two levels: 'essential' and 'desirable'. Along with this document one more title *Users manual for minimum Play Material Kit* was demonstrated before the participants by Ms. Kanta Seth.

The material developed by the Department of Pre-School and Elementary Education in the area of pre-school education was also presented and discussed with the participants by Ms. Romila Soni. One set of this material was given to each participant. The material includes a copy of ECE programme, Trainers' Handbook, Cards, Charts, Picture and Story Books for children, Instructional Material Series for teacher educators and pamphlets for parents awareness. The participants were informed that similar material has been developed in regional languages as well by some states.

The concluding session was chaired by Prof. A.N. Maheshwari, Joint Director, NCERT. Prof. Maheshwari in his valedictory address laid emphasis on different aspects of school readiness in children entering class I. In this context he highlighted the studies conducted in five states by the NCERT. He was optimistic of the gains which will accrue to primary education out of expansion of ECCE coverage and enhancement of quality of ECCE programme in DPEP states. The programme ended with a formal vote of thanks.