

3.6

POSITION PAPER

NATIONAL FOCUS GROUP

ON

EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION



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PREAMBLE

The members of the National Focus Group on ECE unequivocally agreed to name the National Focus Group on ECCE instead of ECE. In the context of the work of the National Focus Group, the rationale for replacing ECE by ECCE is as follows:

Early childhood is the period from conception to age 8, a period that presents a developmental continuum, according to the theoretical framework of developmental psychology and learning theories. The other reason for extending the span of early childhood from 6 to 8 years is to ensure a gradual and smooth transition from preprimary to primary education, which is a structured and formal learning system requiring effective interface. The term 'Care' has been added in recognition of the fact that young children need care and nurturing. In addition to their health and nutritional needs, their psychosocial and emotional needs also have to be met adequately for their holistic development. The term Education covers learning, a process of acquiring knowledge, skills, habits, attitudes, etc. It also indicates an important focus, viz., to prepare the young child to enter the formal educational stream/system.

Thus, the term ECCE refers to a philosophy of providing opportunities/experiences to young children up to 8 years of age in order to promote their holistic development, as well as arranging and providing services and support systems to communities and families to meet the needs of their young children. For the sake of convenience, and for purposes of programming and institutional location, ECCE can be divided into three substages: birth to 2+, 3 to 5+, and 6 to 8+. Each substage can be located in a different institutional setting.

1. **Section I** emphasises the significance of the first few years of life for human development with evidence drawn from recent researches. It places India in a global context and perspective and defines the nature of Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes that have the maximum impact.
2. **Section II** presents a situational analysis of ECCE in India, tracing briefly the history of its evolution to the present position. It examines the policy framework, access and coverage, the various models, the quantitative picture and the gaps, and offers a critical appraisal of the current scenario.
3. **Section III** attempts an analytical review of the interlinked critical issues in relation to the existing social realities and systems based on a qualitative overview of the situation, and draws out the policy and programmatic implications for ensuring quality ECCE for all, and resolving language issues.
4. **Section IV** takes a hard look at the basic policy shifts required to move ahead and spells out the actions that need to be taken in each case. Without such an outline for a blueprint, the policy statement will remain another empty promise on paper.
5. Assuming that a curricular framework cannot be equitably implemented in the absence of a commitment to such major steps, the guidelines for a new curricular framework based on the principles of child development have been placed in **Section V**.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Section I A Global Perspective on Early Childhood
- Section II The Indian Context: Situational Analysis and Current Scenario
- Section III Critical Issues, Social Realities, and Policy Implications
- Section IV Moving Ahead: Changing Policy Paradigms
- Section V Guidelines for a Curricular Framework

I. A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

The first 6 to 8 years of a child's life are globally acknowledged to be the most critical years for lifelong development since the pace of development in these years is extremely rapid. Recent research in the field of neuroscience, particularly on the brain, has provided convincing evidence of the 'critical periods' located within these early years for the forming of synaptic connections in the brain and for the full development of the brain's potential. Research has also indicated that if these early years are not supported by, or embedded in, a stimulating and enriching physical and psychosocial environment, the chances of the child's brain developing to its full potential are considerably, and often irreversibly, reduced. This stage in life is also important as a foundation for the inculcation of social values and personal habits, which are known to last a lifetime. What follows logically is the crucial importance of investing in these early years to ensure an enabling environment for every child, and thereby a sound foundation for life, which is not only the right of every child but which will also impact, in the long term, the quality of human capital available to a country. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) derives its importance from this rationale.

Global events and the needs emerging from various social, economic, and demographic changes in the last few decades have also influenced ECCE in India. Five of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the UN Millennium Declaration relate to the health, nutrition, and education of the young child. India's poor progress towards the realisation of MDGs in relation to other developing countries indicates that we have already neglected our young children for too long.

Research around the world has shown that in order to maximise impact, the planning and provision of early childhood and primary education programmes need to take into account three important principles of child development:

- (a) Child development is a continuous and cumulative process, so that what precedes influences what follows. Therefore, in terms of programmatic interventions, it is important to address the entire childhood continuum, from the prenatal stage to the end of the primary stage, as opposed to intervening during any one substage exclusively;
- (b) Health, nutrition, and educational/psychosocial development are all synergistically interrelated, which makes a case for the importance of addressing all the needs of children through a holistic approach; and

- (c) The child's development will be optimised if the programmes address not only the child but also the child's overall context.

II. THE INDIAN CONTEXT: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS AND APPRAISAL

The situational analysis of the current scenario includes an overview of the relevant constitutional provisions, the policies and legal provisions relating to children developed over the years, the evolution of the planning process, the various programmatic interventions, the responsibilities of various ministries, and a broad quantitative assessment of the present situation.

The concluding critical appraisal notes that the public sector covers only 22 per cent of children in the age group 0–6 years. There are no figures available for the private sector, which is estimated to be possibly as large as the public sector. The small NGO sector, for which also there are no accurate figures available, offers a variety of models.

The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, which effectively releases the State from its obligation to provide care and education for children below 6 years, is noted as a negative development.

The report cites a fragmented approach and divided responsibilities as some of the main reasons for this grim situation. It concludes that ECCE must be brought firmly within the framework of EFA and UEE, with responsibility and accountability for all programmes for children above 3 years lying with DEE & L, while programmes for children below 3 years will be the responsibility of DWCD.

III. CRITICAL ISSUES, SOCIAL REALITIES, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The report offers an analysis of critical issues and social realities, and also points out the policy implications. It argues that most of the problems derive from the still 'unrecognised' status of ECCE as a part of the mainstream education system; it draws attention to the multiplicity of overlapping social divides that affect the quality of ECCE available to different segments of the population, discrimination against certain social groups, and the polarisation of services. The deep gender bias and pervasive patriarchal values in Indian society are held responsible for the failure to realise the need for crèches and day care, especially for children of poor rural and urban working women; this neglect also has an adverse impact on the education of girl siblings.

The report discusses strategies to address the three sectors (public, private, and NGO), including regulation. A qualitative review reveals the more or less low quality of facilities found in the public sector; highlights the great variation found in the private sector, where a large number of damaging and undesirable practices are producing a pernicious influence on the entire system; and shows that while there are some islands of excellence in the NGO sector, these have not gone to scale.

Addressing the issue of ensuring quality for all, and emphasising the need for norms and standards, the report outlines the five major dimensions of quality: appropriate curriculum; trained, motivated, and suitably rewarded teachers; appropriate teacher–child ratio and group size; a supervisory mechanism; and child-friendly infrastructure.

This is followed by a discussion on the issue of regulation and the need to empower parents, families, and communities through advocacy.

Attention is drawn to the low status and pay of teachers, the poor state of teacher-training programmes, the lack of recognition and certification of teachers, and the urgent need to address the vast backlog of ‘untrained’ teachers.

The report describes the steps needed to build a quality workforce. These include the provision of training in all sectors for all types and levels of programmes through diverse courses; the adoption of multiple models and flexible strategies; ensuring fair wages for all; capacity building of trainers; provision of learning and instructional materials; and accreditation.

The report also addresses the issue of multiple languages in the classroom, as well as the overwhelming pressure from all classes for ‘English-medium’ schools; some innovative suggestions for language teaching are also made.

IV. MOVING AHEAD: CHANGING POLICY PARADIGMS

Since many of the current problems in ECE are the outcome of earlier policies, to give young children a fair deal now will require major policy shifts before we can speak of curricular reform.

- i. Value of ECCE: The first step is the recognition and acceptance that ECCE is a vital developmental need of all children, and that every child has a right to ECCE of equitable quality. ECCE must be the first step in the educational ladder and should be a part of EFA. DEE & L must take responsibility for all programmes for children 3+, and DWCD for all programmes for children below 3 years.
- ii. Resource Allocation: The intention to provide ECCE of equitable quality to all means that there will have to be a vast enhancement in resource allocation. While global research indicates that 85 per cent of a child’s core brain structure is already complete in the early years, the actual spending per child on children below 6 years is only one-eighth of the spending on children in the 6–14 age group.
- iii. Ensuring Quality for All: The existence of multiple models, diverse sectors, and different programme approaches that developed over time must be accepted, but within a common framework. Adherence to some basic norms and standards as well as to the five basic dimensions of quality must be ensured through different strategies, including regulation as needed as well as adaptation to different contextual realities and a meaningful language policy.
- iv. Advocacy: To sensitise the public at every level, from parents to policy makers, an extensive and sustained campaign for advocacy involving the mass media is needed. This requires that adequate resources be provided and that the government take the lead in preparing the requisite materials in various forms. The advocacy campaign should convey the significance of this period in the life of children, warn against the dangers of neglect, and describe the proper scope, meaning, and purpose of ECCE.

- v. Capacity Building: The next important task is to straightaway launch a massive and long-term programme of capacity building at all levels, as already described. DEE & L has a key role to play in building on the existing capabilities and institutions.
- vi. Other Important Tasks are:
 - Convergence among all the ministries concerned with the young child.
 - Coordination among the various autonomous authorities.
 - Networking among various academic institutions.
 - Development of reporting systems leading to the compilation of a database.
 - Institutional mechanisms at every level for implementation and monitoring.
 - Empowering PRIs to participate effectively in the process.
 - Appropriate structures and institutions for research, monitoring, and evaluation.

V. CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK FOR ECCE

The three broad objectives of ECCE are:

- holistic development of the child to enable him/her to realise his/her maximum potential;
- preparation for schooling; and
- providing support services for women and girls.

The curriculum is defined as age appropriate, all round, play based, integrated, experiential, flexible, and contextual. The guiding principles of the ECCE curriculum are:

- Play as the basis of learning
- Art as the basis of education
- Recognition of the special features of children's thinking
- Primacy of experience rather than expertise
- Experience of familiarity and challenge in everyday routines
- Mix of formal and informal interaction
- Blend of the textual (basic literacy and numeracy) and the cultural
- Use of local materials, arts, and knowledge
- Developmentally appropriate practice, flexibility, and plurality
- Health, well-being, and healthy habits

Next, the report outlines the various domains of development, the developmental characteristics of each subgroup within the period 'birth to 8 years', and the needs of the child in terms of experiences that help the child attain the goals of development. The age-specific curricular frameworks for each of the subgroups, 0–2+, 3–5+, and 6–8, are then spelled out in the light of the basic principles. Inclusive education and language policy are also dealt with.

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MINA SWAMINATHAN

Chairperson

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1. A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

1.1 Significance of the Early Years

The first 6–8 years of a child's life, known as the early childhood stage, are globally acknowledged to be the most critical years for lifelong development, since the pace of development during these years is extremely rapid. Recent research in the field of neuroscience, particularly on the brain, has provided very convincing evidence of the 'critical periods' located within these early years, particularly the first three years, for the formation of synaptic connections in the brain and for the full development of the brain's potential.¹ Research has also indicated that if these early years are not supported by, or embedded in, a stimulating and enriching physical and psychosocial environment, the chances of the child's brain developing to its full potential are considerably, and often irreversibly, reduced.^{2,3,4,5,6,7}

This finding immediately places a very large percentage of children in the developing world in poverty contexts 'at risk', in terms of their life chances. This early childhood stage is also important as a foundation for the inculcation of social and personal habits and values that are known to last a lifetime. What follows logically is the crucial importance of investing in these early years to ensure an enabling environment for every child, and thereby a sound foundation for life, which is not only the right of every child but also

something that will impact, in the long term, on the quality of human capital available to a country.

1.2 Emerging Concepts

Given this wide scope, early childhood development has been defined and described in various ways under various programmes, the determining factor being the priority that a particular programme serves and the age group that it addresses from 0–6 years. The nomenclature and definitions include *Early Childhood Education* (ECE) programmes, which are 'preschool education-focused' programmes aimed at 3–6-year olds (as seen in nurseries, kindergartens, preparatory schools, etc.). These are often part of a primary school. *Early Childhood Care and Education* (ECCE) retains the same educational thrust but enlarges its scope to include the care component (including care and early stimulation for 0–3 year olds, through crèches and home-based parent education). *Early Childhood Development* (ECD) and *Early Childhood Care and Development* (ECCD) constitute a still more holistic and integrated concept of programming, which aligns itself with that of the synergistic and interdependent relationship between health, nutrition, and psychosocial development or education, and addresses the all-round development of the child. Programmes of ECCD or ECD normally take a life-cycle approach, as in the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) in India, and target, in addition to the child, pregnant and lactating mothers and even adolescent girls.

¹ Doherty, G. 1997

² Levinger, B. 1994

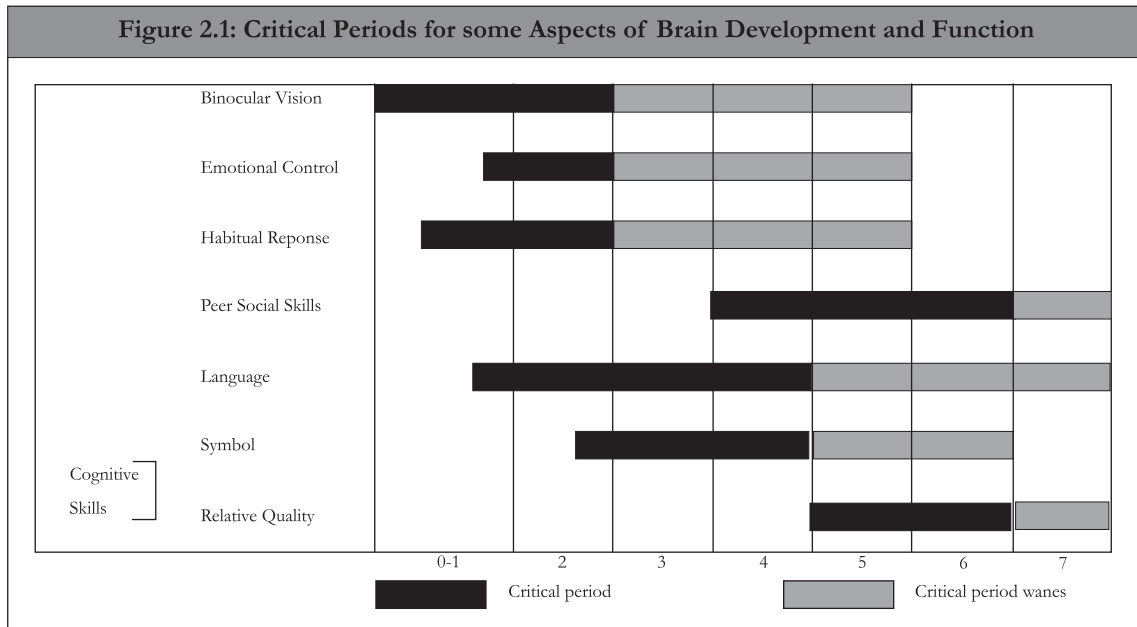
³ Ghai, O.P. 1975

⁴ Natesan H. and Devdas 1981

⁵ Anandalakshmi, S. 1982

⁶ Bhattacharya A.K. 1981

⁷ Upadhyay, G.C. 1996



Source: *Reaching Out to the Child*, HDS, World Bank, 2004.

1.3 The Global Context

Globally, many events have contributed to the realisation of the significance of the early childhood years for a country's economic progress. The beginnings of this change started with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. For the first time, there was a set of international standards and measures intended to protect and promote the well-being of children in society.

The second major event that drew attention to the issue of early childhood was the creation of the Human Development Index, a summary measure of human development, by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1990. The Human Development Index measures the achievements of countries on three basic dimensions of human development: (1) a long and healthy life; (2) knowledge; and (3) a decent standard of living; it includes indicators

that specifically relate to children, namely, mortality, education, and child labour.

The third important event in the international arena was the World Conference on Education For All (EFA), held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, where a global commitment to education was made in a document beginning with the famous words 'Learning begins at birth'. In addition, the World Education Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000, reiterated the importance of ECCE through the involvement of the state, the family, and the community. India is signatory to all these agreements.

The process of globalisation has made it possible to draw international attention to issues of children across countries. Issues of child labour, child malnutrition, and education are now being addressed transnationally and resources are being put together⁸.

⁸ Datta, V. 2005

South Asian countries, too, have achieved important milestones in their commitment to children and have identified common issues to be addressed in relation to child health, nutrition, education, and protection of children from exploitation, violence, abuse, trafficking, and labour.

1.4 The Indian Context

These global events have also influenced the field of ECCE in India. The need for early interventions on behalf of children, especially those from economically marginalised communities, has been well recognised. India reached a population of one billion in 2001. It has the largest child population in the world. According to the 2001 Census, India has a population of 158 million children between ages 0–6. The overall level of human development is considered to be quite low. India's position in the Human Development Report has stepped down from 124 to 127, and the 2003 Report highlighted India's inadequate performance in areas such as health, life expectancy, education, and hunger. India's progress in moving towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has been much slower than that of other developing countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, and China in relation to goals such as reduction of child mortality, achieving gender equality, and primary school completion. The prospect of attaining the MDGs by 2015 seems doubtful at this pace. Five of the eight MDGs in the UN Millennium Declaration relate to the health, nutrition, and education of the young child. Therefore, ECCD is the first and essential step towards achieving the MDGs.

India has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW), yet gender discrimination is seen throughout the life cycle of women in India, ranging from female foeticide, female infanticide, and child marriage to sexual exploitation and poorer access to household resources.

1.5 Locating the Status of the Young Child Globally

ECD programmes for children in the age group of 0–6 years derive their importance from this rationale and from the emerging need arising from various social, economic, and demographic changes in the last few decades. These are more specifically changes in the family structure, increase in maternal employment outside the home, and a growing demand for education. Good quality ECD programmes that cater to this age group of 0–6 years are known to produce significant short and long-term benefits, particularly for children in underprivileged contexts. They contribute by compensating for the deprivations at the home front for the children in poverty contexts, and thus serve to improve their life chances.

Research in the South Asian region, particularly in India, has documented the effects of ECD programmes, in the shorter-term perspective, on the academic and social preparedness of children for formal schooling; this is manifested in a difference of 15–20 per cent in retention and achievement levels as also in the improved quality of learning of mathematics in the primary grades⁹. In the Brazilian Programa de Alimentacao de Pre escolar (PROAPE) project, the total cost of schooling, including the early learning

⁹ Kaul et.al 1993

programme itself, for pupils up to Class II of primary education was 11 per cent lower for those who participated in ECCD as compared to those who did not. ECD has benefited not only the younger children themselves but also their older siblings, particularly girls, who are freed from sibling-care responsibility and thus enabled to join school. In the longer-term perspective, participation in ECD programmes has paid dividends in terms of higher incomes, lower dependency on welfare, reduced rates of delinquency among adults, better adjustment levels in careers and within the family, higher productivity, and lower health care costs. The British longitudinal study EPPE (Effective Provision of Preschool Education) clearly demonstrates the links between various models of ECCE and later achievement at the primary level.

ECD can play a very significant role in the context of the MDGs and EFA goals, to which India is a signatory and which include completion of primary education as an important goal. Research around the globe has shown that to maximise impact, the planning and provision of early childhood and primary education programmes need to take into account three important principles of child development:

(a) Child development is a continuous and cumulative process, so that what precedes influences what follows. In terms of programmatic interventions, it is, therefore, important to plan for and address the entire childhood continuum, from prenatal to the end of the primary stage, as opposed to intervening during any one substage exclusively. For example, primary-education outcomes cannot be improved significantly despite high investments unless the early-childhood outcomes that ensure preparedness are also ensured.

- (b) Health, nutrition, and education/psychosocial development are all synergistically interrelated, which makes a case for addressing all the needs of children through a holistic approach.
- (c) The child's development will be optimised if the programmes address not only the child, but also the child's overall context, both immediate and distal.

1.6 Global Developments

A review of policies and practices around the globe indicate the emerging priority of ECCE.

In China, nurseries with childcare as their main purpose have been placed under the jurisdiction of the education departments at all levels. Kindergartens enrol children at age 3 and the length of schooling is three years. However, preschool education is not compulsory, and non-state entities are encouraged to be the main providers to supplement some government initiatives.

In New Zealand, ECE refers to a non-compulsory provision but almost all children are in the formal school system, which includes kindergartens for children between 3–5 years and these receive government support. The government is now considering a comprehensive national policy on ECCE, which will allow for flexible and diverse approaches.

In Japan, ECCE has been traditionally divided into two systems—kindergarten for children above 3 years, which is with the education department, and day nursery for children below 3 years, which is with the welfare sector. In kindergartens, emphasis is placed on enabling children to receive experiences that are believed to be educationally desirable but which cannot be given within the framework of the family. Group living experiences, intellectual learning activities, and creative

constructional activities carried out under the guidance of trained specialist teachers make up the curriculum for the kindergarten.

Malaysia, too, has public preschools funded by the government. In Philippines, legislation was enacted in 2000 promulgating a comprehensive policy and a national system for ECCE.

The Status Report on Early Childhood Care and Education in the E-9 countries¹⁰ (the nine most populous countries, namely, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Pakistan) clearly demonstrates that all are taking steps to promote ECCE as a critical element of EFA, including attempts to introduce holistic curricula, train teachers, and several other indicators.

In this context, it is disheartening to observe the profile of the child in India.

1.7 Profile of the Child in India

- ☞ The child population (0–6 years) is 158 million.
- ☞ One-third of babies are born with low birth weight.
- ☞ Only 42 per cent children (12–23 months) are fully vaccinated.
- ☞ 14 per cent are not vaccinated at all.
- ☞ India has the largest number of malnourished children in the world.
- ☞ 47 per cent of all children below 2 years are malnourished.
- ☞ 5 per cent of all children 0–6 years suffer from severe or moderate anaemia.
- ☞ 25 million children are born every year.
- ☞ The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is 70 per 1,000 live births.
- ☞ 60 million children (< 5 years) live in poverty.
- ☞ Of them, only 19.4 million children (3–5 years) are getting preschool education under ICDS.

- ☞ Of the 16 crore children below 6 years, only 3.42 crore are getting supplementary nutrition.

Source: Government of India, 2002 (a) The Child in India: A Profile, 2002, New Delhi; UNDP 2003: Human Development Report.

Clearly, India has already neglected its children for too long. If bold and decisive action is not taken now, the future could be at grave risk.

2. THE INDIAN CONTEXT: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS AND APPRAISAL

The previous section described the significance of the earliest years in a child's life and emphasised the need for ECCE during this stage. Advances in scientific knowledge offer sufficient arguments for investing in ECCE programmes.

2.1 A Historical Perspective

India has a wealth of traditional practices in ECCE that date back almost 5,000 years. ECE initiatives in India have been documented formally in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The early pioneers of the movement were Gijubhai Badheka, Tarabai Modak, Maria Montessori, and several others. The writings of great Indian educational thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Zakir Hussain have also drawn attention to this important aspect of education in the formative years of a child's life. At the time of independence, the need for preschool education was primarily fulfilled by voluntary organisations and/or private institutions.

2.1.1 The Indian Constitution and the Young Child

There are several provisions in the Constitution of India, either as Fundamental Rights or as Directive Principles of State Policy, that have been used to promote ECCE services in the country. As a

¹⁰ UNESCO 2003

Fundamental Right, Article 15(3) of the Constitution of India empowers the State to practice positive discrimination favouring economically and educationally weaker groups, which allows for special provisions for girls and children of disadvantaged social groups, and in difficult situations not to discriminate

against any citizen. Article 15(3) asserts, “*Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provisions for women and children.*”

Specific Articles under the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of India that provide a supportive framework for ECCE in the country are:

Article 39 (f)	<i>Opportunities and facilities for children to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected from exploitation.</i>
Article 42	With direct relevance to working women: “ <i>enjoins the State to secure just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.</i> ”(Children are also benefited by this statutory provision.)
Article 45	Until the Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2001 was passed, Article 45 (Directive Principles of State Policy) of the Constitution of India directed <i>the State to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of fourteen.</i> The earlier inclusion of 0–6-year-old children within this constitutional directive implied the intent to provide conditions for holistic child development, with preschool education as an important component.
Article 47	The State shall endeavour to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people to improve health.

2.1.2 The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2001

The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2001 has divided 0–14 year old children into two clear categories to cover their interests under separate Articles of the Constitution. Article 21A has been introduced as a Fundamental Right after Article 21 to read: “*The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.*” Articulating the intent to cater to the needs of 0–6-year-old children, the Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act has altered Article 45 (Directive Principles of State Policy) to read: “*The State shall endeavour to provide early childhood*

care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years.” The advocates and practitioners of ECCE have expressed their deep concern and disappointment at the Amendment, and argue that it de-recognises the needs and rights of the young child. Further, the government has managed to release itself from an obligation to provide education and care to children below the age of 6 years merely by declaring an intent to make an attempt or effort to create services.

2.1.3 Protection of Children’s Rights

The well-being of children has been an integral part of India’s developmental planning since 1951.

Constitutionally, child development and education are concurrent subjects, which implies shared Federal and State responsibility in ECCE service delivery.

The provisioning of ECCE services in India that entails multiple components is governed by a plethora of policies such as the following:

<p>The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986</p>	<p>Views ECCE <i>as a crucial input in the strategy of human resource development, as a feeder and support programme for primary education and also as a support service for working women.</i> The Policy especially emphasises investment in the development of young children, particularly children from sections of the population in which first-generation learners predominate. Recognising the holistic nature of child development, ECCE programmes were to be expanded and were to be child oriented, with a focus around play and the individuality of the child. The aim was to bring about a full integration of childcare and pre-primary education, to both feed and strengthen primary education.</p>
<p>National Policy for the Child, 1974 and National Plan of Action: A Commitment to the Child, 1992</p>	<p><i>“It shall be the policy of the State to provide adequate services to children, both before and after birth and throughout the period of growth . . . The State progressively increases the scope of such services so that, within a reasonable time, all children in the country enjoy optimum conditions for their balanced development.”</i></p>
<p>National Plan of Action (NPA), 1992</p>	<p>The NPA was followed by the formulation of the State Plan of Action for Children (SPAC), aimed at the protection, survival, development, and growth of children. For each of the areas covered under NPA and SPAC, time-bound goals and strategies were laid down.</p>
<p>National Nutrition Policy, 1993</p>	<p>Recognises that children below 6 years are nutritionally vulnerable and constitute one of the ‘high-risk’ groups, and thus accords highest priority to them through policy articulations and programmatic interventions for especially vulnerable groups; the National Nutrition Mission (NNM) has been launched to address this problem.</p>
<p>National Population Policy, 2000</p>	<p>Sees the health of children as a step towards population stabilisation.</p>
<p>National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001</p>	<p><i>The provision of support services for women, like childcare facilities, including crèches at work places, educational institutions, homes . . . will be expanded and improved to create an enabling environment and to ensure full participation of women in social, political and economic life.</i></p>

National Health Policy (NHP), 2002	The 0–6-year-olds comprise a vital segment vis-à-vis the targets of the NHP for reducing IMR to 30/1,000 live births and MMR to 100/100,000 by the year 2010. Separate schemes, tailor-made to suit the health needs of children, in tribal and other socio-economically underserved sections have been proposed.
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1992	The ratification of CRC (1992) by India has further affirmed the country's commitment to children, and has resulted in the formulation of a policy framework to prepare a National Charter for Children that ensures that no child remains illiterate, hungry, or lacks medical care. The setting up of the National Commission for Children is being pursued actively.

2.1.4 Related Statutory Provisions vis-à-vis ECCE

In India, there are two types of legislative measures that have a bearing on child development. Though not related directly to service delivery, one kind of statutory provision is concerned with children's right to life and health, and access to equal opportunity. The other kind makes the availability of child-care services statutory in certain work situations, so that working women with infants and young children are provided with a supportive work environment, which promotes the growth and development of the children.

The first set of provisions consists of the following:

- **Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994** to prevent misuse of such techniques for the purpose of prenatal sex determination leading to female foeticide.
- **Infant Milk Substitutes, Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994** aims to protect and promote breastfeeding and to ensure the proper use of infant food.

- **Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995** relates to the adoption of preventive measures to protect persons with disabilities and offer services for their growth and development.

The second set of provisions consists of the following: Day-care facility in the form of crèches is mandated as a statutory provision under different labour Acts subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions that pertain to the number of women employed, the number of eligible children, and the size of the plantation/factory. These Central Acts provide the overall guidelines, and the State governments have formulated rules under each Act that go into greater details. These are:

- The Factories Act, 1948 (amended in 1954)
- The Mines Act, 1950
- The Plantations Labour Act, 1951
- The Beedi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966
- The Maternity Benefits Act, 1961
- The Contract Labour Act, 1970
- The Interstate Migrant Workers Act, 1980
- The Construction Labour Act, 1996

2.1.5 The Planning Process and the Young Child

Until the **Third Five-Year Plan**, ECCE continued to be within the purview of the voluntary and private sector. It was only in 1968 when the **Ganga Saran Sinha Committee** highlighted the need to provide preschool education that it was included within the purview of the government.

However, in the **Fourth Five-Year Plan**, the preschool period in the educational system continued to be regarded as a child welfare concept, seen in the form of a scheme of family and child welfare for rural areas; the objectives were to provide comprehensive child welfare services to preschool children for their all-round development and to strengthen the family so that it could contribute to the optimal development of its children.

The Fifth Five-Year Plan saw a major breakthrough in the concept of child development with a shift in approach from *welfare* to *development* and the declaration of the National Policy for Children in 1974. In pursuance of the policy, the **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** was launched in 1975; it began on an experimental basis with 33 projects. By the **Eighth Five-Year Plan**, an accelerated expansion had taken place in its coverage of preschool children within the governmental sector.

The Ninth Five-Year Plan reaffirmed the priority accorded to the development of early childhood services as an investment in *human resource development* and stressed the involvement of women's groups in the management of ECCE programmes, particularly under the decentralised Panchayati Raj System (PRS).

The Tenth Five-Year Plan adopts a rights-based approach to child development, with major strategies aimed at reaching all young children in the country to ensure their 'survival', 'protection', and 'development'. To ensure development through the effective

implementation of policies and programmes in the areas of health, immunisation, nutrition, and education, the three nationwide programmes of Reproductive and Child Health (RCH), ICDS, and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) were launched. The Plan also recognises that, while early childhood up to 6 years is critical for the development of children, the period from the prenatal stage to the first 3 years is the most crucial and vulnerable one in life; it lays the foundations for the achievement of full human development potential and cumulative lifelong learning, thus reinforcing the importance of setting up family-focused and community-based interventions. The Tenth Five-Year Plan also recognises the increasing need for support services in the form of crèches and day-care centres for the children of working and ailing mothers, especially in the context where more and more women are coming out of their homes to seek employment both in the organised and unorganised sectors. In this context, the **National Crèche Fund** will be further strengthened to aid in its mission to develop a wide network of crèches all over the country.

2.1.6 Inter-Ministerial Convergence for ECCE

Four ministries of the Government of India are involved in provisioning early-childhood services, each bearing its respective sectoral responsibility for particular age groups of children in the delivery of the different components of early-childhood services, as shown in Table 2.1.

The main ministry dealing with 0–6-year-old children is the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). The Department of Women & Child Development (DWCD) in the Ministry is the nodal agency for provisioning ECCE services; it deals with the 0–6-year-olds through the ICDS scheme, the National Crèche Fund, and the Crèche Scheme. As regards the centrally sponsored ICDS scheme, the

Table 2.1 Ministerial Charge in the Delivery of ECCE Services

Area of Responsibility	Age of Children	Ministry
Nutritional supplementation, nutrition and health education (NHED), referral	0–6 years	Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)
Immunisation	0–6 years	Department of Family Welfare, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW)
Pre-school education	3–6 years	DWCD and Department of Elementary Education and Literacy (EE & L), MHRD
Childcare	0–5/6 years	DWCD, Ministry of Labour
Prevention and early detection of disabilities	Prenatal onward	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

Central government is responsible for programme planning and operating costs, while the State governments are responsible for programme implementation and supplementary nutrition. In addition, the private sector and the voluntary sector also play a part.

2.2 Coverage and Access

Programmes and interventions aimed at children aged 0–6 years are provided by the government, the private sector, and NGOs.

2.2.1 Public Sector

According to *Early Childhood Care and Education: An Overview* (MHRD 2003), out of the total number of children in the 3–6 age group, barely 19.64 per cent children were covered under ECCE programmes such

as ICDS and ECE schemes such as crèches and balwadis in the voluntary sector supported by DWCD in 1996–97.

Since 1996–97, the coverage of children, especially under ICDS, has increased substantially. The coverage under the two major programmes of ICDS and Crèches (2003–04) is given below:

As regards the other programmes of the Government, the expansion of ECE was not as large as that of ICDS. As against the target of 2 million ECE centres in 2000, only 0.55 million centres are operative at present. In programmes like the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and SSA, efforts have been made to fill the gaps left by ICDS. DPEP opened 10,000 ECE centres in the non-ICDS areas¹¹. As per the estimates of the Department of EE & L, the total number of children enrolled at the

¹¹ DEE & L, MHRD 2001

pre-primary level is 46,23,168. Thus, from the above data it is clear that, despite the expansion of the ECCD programmes, the coverage of children (22 per cent) under the ECCE programmes is grossly inadequate.

Apart from the ICDS programme of DWCD, efforts have also been made by the Department of EE & L to impact early childhood education through a variety of strategies under DPEP and the Mahila Samakhya Project. More recently, SSA aims to: (i) strengthen the preschool component in ICDS; (ii) set up balwadis in areas hitherto not covered; (iii) build advocacy for the importance of early childhood development; (iv) organise training programmes for community leaders; (v) provide for intensive planning for ECCE; (vi) develop materials; and (vii) promote convergence between the school system and ECCE. The scheme has provision for Rs 15 lakh per district per year for opening ECCE centres. Janshala is a similar innovative support programme.

2.2.2 Private Sector

Since no survey has yet been undertaken, there are no accurate figures available for private-sector commercial ventures operating under various names. According to some estimates, the number of children enrolled in private-sector initiatives (including day-care centres, nurseries, kindergartens, and pre-primary classes) was about 1 crore (2001), or about as many children as the number under ICDS at that time.¹² Today the initiatives of the private sector may be as large as the programmes undertaken by the government sector, but the former caters to different classes. Though originally confined to the upper and middle classes in cities, today private-sector initiatives have spread to small towns, villages, semi-urban areas, urban slums, etc., reflecting the unprecedented demand for and popularity of such services. Besides these, statutory crèches run under the provisions of the various Acts are estimated to cover not more than 1 lakh children.

Table 2.2 Current Status of Coverage of Government ECCD Programmes, 2003–04

Sl. No.	Programmes	Age Group	No. of Projects/Crèches	Beneficiaries	Total
1.	ICDS	6 month 3 yrs 3–6 yrs	5,267	1,67,98,824 2,04,38,002	3,72,36,826
2.	Crèches for Working and Ailing Women*	0–5 yrs	12,470	3,11,750	
3.	National Crèche Fund*	0–5 yrs	4,885	1,22,125	4,33,875
					3,76,70,701

*Run by non-governmental agencies with financial support from the government.

Source: Annual Report of DWCD, 2003–04, MHRD, GOI, pp. 19, 107.

¹² DEE & L, MHRD 2004

2.2.3 NGO Services for ECCE

There is also the non-government sector, which offers different models and packages of ECCE services. There are no figures available for the number of children covered under ECCE services provided by the NGO sector, which is funded in various ways, by international and national donors, trusts, and denominational groups. Estimates vary from 3 million to 20 million children.

2.2.4 Gaps

There are also critical gaps in services, which do not reach small and marginalised groups such as migrant workers, itinerants, and nomads; people living in small and remote hamlets, or tribal and mountainous areas; the disabled; children of pavement dwellers, sex workers, TB and HIV+ patients, prisoners, etc. The list is merely illustrative.

2.3 A Critical Appraisal

The above review makes it abundantly clear that, in spite of the constitutional directives and a plethora of laws, policies, and programmes announced from time to time, the gap between the need and the actual provisions remains vast. Not only that, there is not even adequate information about the services existing on the ground, leave alone assessments of quality. In addition, there are imbalances both at the spatial and the social levels, so that some sections are even more severely neglected.

Issues relating to ECCE have received considerable attention at the national level in the last two decades, since NPE (1986)¹³ and POA (1992)¹⁴ were adopted. A number of committees, task forces, and study groups have been set up to make recommendations to translate

the policy into action, and several evaluation studies have been conducted of programmes, which have also made recommendations.

The basic reason for the failure to translate policy into action appears to be the adoption of a fragmented approach and divided responsibilities, with no concrete action plans in place, no provision of funds, and no clear delegation of responsibilities worked out to implement policy recommendations. While NPE and POA were conceptualised and developed by DEE & L in the MHRD, the responsibility for the actual implementation of ECCE programmes was handed over to DWCD at the Centre (Social Welfare in the States). Similarly, Education is a State subject while ICDS is a national programme implemented by the States. This has led over time not only to the limited concrete actions already described, but also to a lack of coordination.

As early as 1990, the Acharya Ramamurthi Committee¹⁵ made some observations that still hold good; a few illustrations are given below. For example, the committee mentions (5.1.2) that Article 45 has always been interpreted narrowly as being applicable only to children above the age of 5 or 6, and that NPE does not refer to the constitutional imperative to provide ECCE to all children (5.1.6), or make a clear policy declaration on this issue. The fragmented approach adopted in the operational design is also commented upon. While the ECCE role in Universal Elementary Education (UEE) and women's development is recognised, the operational implications are spelt out only in the chapter on ECCE. Though ECCE has the potential to be a major generator of skilled employment for women, the chapter on Vocational Education makes no

¹³ GOI, 1986

¹⁴ GOI, 1992

¹⁵ Ramamurthi, A. 1990

reference to it, and neither does the chapter on Education for Women's Equality. Similarly, the chapter on Teachers and their Training is silent on the issue of the training of personnel for ECCE. While 5.1.4 refers to the 'intersecting needs of women, children and girls', few steps have been taken to link the anganwadis with the needs of working women or girls. Again, DWCD was expected to play the role of the nodal department as regards ECCE, that is, in coordinating, stimulating, and monitoring the efforts of other departments and agencies that employ or deal with women in large numbers, such as Labour, Agriculture, Tribal Welfare, Works and Housing, Irrigation, Rural Development, etc. There is little evidence to show that this is being done even today.

In fact, even coordination between the Departments of Education and WCD within the same Ministry is poor. The committee clearly states that DEE&L cannot abdicate its basic responsibility for ECCE because of its links with primary education and UEE, nor its responsibility for the preparation of teachers at all levels.

In fact, the Acharya Ramamurthi Committee Report has also addressed in detail several other issues such as how to make ICDS a decentralised community-based and community-managed programme under the umbrella of PRIs, and also how to raise the requisite additional funds so that 70 per cent of all children below age 6 are covered by 2000, a goal which we are still very far from achieving.

While it is not necessary here to go into further details, the conclusion clearly emerges that not only is it necessary to bring ECCE firmly within the framework of EFA and UEE, but also that there must be much greater attention paid to assigning responsibility, demanding accountability, and overseeing coordination. ECCE is concerned with issues relating to the period

0–8 years in a child's life; DEE&L must take responsibility for all programmes relating to a child's life from age 3 upwards, as well as for teacher education; DWCD should focus on the age group 0–3, with, however, well-established mechanisms for coordination between the two departments.

3. CRITICAL ISSUES, SOCIAL REALITIES, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A number of serious consequences flow essentially from the continuing 'unrecognised' nature and status of ECCE, which so far has not been accepted as an integral part of the system of education.

3.1 Societal Divides: Equity, Access, and Quality

The first consequence is the sharp contrast in quality between the services available to different segments of the population, divided along the lines of urban–rural and rich–poor, and discriminating against various groups such as the Dalits, the tribals, isolated communities, socially marginalised groups, the disabled, etc.

The second consequence is the polarisation between public and private services. It would be an oversimplification to say that the former cater to the poor rural classes and the latter to the rich urban classes; the divisions are overlapping, as indicated in Table 3.1, leading to the emergence of a double track in education right at this stage.

The public services are mostly run or supported by DWCD through the programme known as ICDS, launched thirty years ago, which provides for six services for children 0–6 years of age. This programme is conceptually holistic, comprehensive, and integrated, but it is poorly implemented in the field and is highly variable in quality. In practice, the emphasis is on preschool education for children aged 3–6, though the

Table 3.1 Social Divides in ECCE Programmes

Class	Rich/Middle	Poor
Location	Urban/Semi-urban	Rural
Language	English	Regional
Auspices	Private	Public
Curriculum	Academic	Holistic/Welfarist
Supervising Department	DEE&L	WCD

critical period for nutritional support is 0–2 years. DEE&L has hardly any direct services to children to speak of, since pre-primary or preschool classes exist in very few government schools, a notable exception being the tiny Union Territory of Delhi.

3.1.1 Crèches and Day-care Centres

The deep gender bias in our society and pervasive patriarchal values have prevented the recognition of the need for crèches (0–3 years) and day-care centres (0–6 years), especially for poor working women in rural areas and urban slums; providing these facilities would also enable older siblings, especially girls, to attend school. There is also need for official recognition of the critical importance of the youngest age group, 0–3 years, responsibility for which has been placed firmly within the family domain, with no role envisaged for the State.

In a country where the 2001 Census declares that there are 12 crore working women (and this may be an underestimate), 90 per cent of whom are in the unorganised sector, and most of whom are poor, the abysmal lack of crèches and day-care services is an extraordinary situation. While about 2 to 2.5 crore working women and their 5.5 crore children below age 6 may be in need of crèches and day care, only 4.33 lakh have access to these facilities. (See Table 2.2)

This has serious consequences for both the woman and the child, as evidenced by the large numbers of malnourished children. The prevailing view in a patriarchal society, which assumes that women are primarily housewives and mothers, and that only an insignificant few are in the workforce, clashes with current reality. This attitude is also associated with a middle-class view of society, which assumes that elders and other family members are available to care for the child in the absence of the mother, also a false perception, since among the poorer classes the nuclear family is the norm, and older people continue to work for as long as they can. Among the poor, if someone from the family is left at home or accompanies the mother to the place of work to care for the infant, it is the older sibling, who is thereby deprived of a chance to seek education. Here, too, girl siblings are preferred as childcare givers, boys being drawn in only if necessary. Thus, gender blindness and gender prejudice work at several different levels in relation to ECCE, with special reference to crèches and day care, though possibly there may be equal numbers of boys and girls in conventional ‘preschool’ classes.

3.1.2 Private Sector

During the same period of thirty years, the private sector, which is still completely unregulated, has shown

a phenomenal increase in its response to public demand, and now covers probably more children than ICDS. Today, private-sector services reach many aspiring poor who make great sacrifices to obtain these for their children, while the public sector focuses on servicing rural slums and tribal areas.

Broadly, it can be said that most of the private sector aims, or at least claims, to teach through the medium of English, though this is often far from the reality, while the public sector stays firmly committed to the regional language/mother tongue medium. This is often cited as the reason for the popularity of the former, since knowledge of English is seen as the main avenue to upward mobility. However, this hope is more often than not belied by the reality. Knowledge of English has thus become another major social divide, reflected in ECE as elsewhere.

Within the private sector, too, there is wide variability—ranging from a handful of well-established elite schools of high quality offering excellence, to the great mass of poorly managed, overcrowded, and under-equipped ‘garage’ schools, which squeeze children into tiny unhygienic spaces and attempt to force-feed them with the Three Rs at an unsuitably early age. A recent entry has been the ‘franchised’, imported, and highly expensive model catering to the new urban upper class.

The same deep social divide has grown to an enormous extent in the area of primary education in the last thirty years, with private schools constantly reaching out to newer and newer segments of the population, especially since 1991, with the onslaught of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation (LPG). Even worse, within the public elementary education system itself, two streams have emerged: the regular, fully funded schools run by governments and local authorities with trained and qualified teachers, and the

many diluted forms going by various names such as alternative schools, Educational Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and non-formal education, using only paraprofessionals, and catering only to the most marginalised groups. This has happened in spite of the constitutional guarantees and safeguards not enjoyed by ECCE.

3.1.3 NGO Sector

The NGO sector is very small but vibrant. The spread and nature of the services provided by it are varied, ranging from some of the most innovative and high-quality programmes in the country, including crèches and day care for the children of women workers. However, a part of the NGO sector also follows the model of either the public sector, or tries to copy the private sector with its burdensome formal teaching, which is inappropriate for young children. But this tiny sector can in no way close the vast existing gaps, though it has many lessons to teach. Table 3.2 lists the different characteristics of the three sectors.

3.2 Qualitative Picture of the ECCE Scenario

The general picture about the qualitative dimensions of ECCE is not encouraging, though there are a handful of outstanding examples in all the three sectors.

Research studies have also looked at quality as a continuum of care with minimum safeguards, at one end, to the provision of all services necessary for the holistic development of children, at the other end. A study on the quality of urban early-childhood programmes in Mumbai¹⁶ showed that only 3.5 per cent of ICDS centres in the city were of good quality, while most (45.8 per cent) were of low average quality and as

¹⁶ Datta, V. 2001a

Table 3.2 Characteristics of ECCE in the Three Sectors

Item	Government (Semi-government and aided)	Voluntary	Private
1. Goal	Policy implementation	Social benefit	Profit
2. Name / Worker name	Anganwadi / Anganwadi worker Teacher	Balwadi/child-care centre Balwadi teacher/worker	School (nursery, pre-primary, etc.)
3. Objective and scope	Comprehensive, holistic development	Childcare/development/ and education community needs	Formal education and school preparation
4. Components	Package of six	Varying, mostly education, services in ICDS	Education, some care, and nutrition custodial
5. Approach to teaching-learning	Activity based, non-formal	Varying, informal to formal	Formal, school-like
6. Target group	Defined by policy	Low-income and under-privileged groups	Following social demand
7. Cost to parents	Free	Free/nominal charges	Varying payment
8. Worker preparation	3 months of job training with some ECE component, occasional refresher courses	Varying, informal, non-standardised	Minimal, none or irrelevant training
9. Community involvement	Low	Varying, low to high	Minimal/none
10. Flexibility in programme	None, standardised and fixed from above	Responsive to child and community perceptions, culturally sensitive	Standardised and arbitrarily decided
11. Perceived ownership	Government	Variable, low to high community ownership	Individual/Company bold not needed
12. Management style	Hierarchical, non-transparent	Attempt at participation and transparency	Hierarchical, non-transparent

many as 24 per cent were of poor quality. Whereas among the NGOs (Pratham), 34 per cent were of good quality and 9 per cent were of poor quality, most of the ICDS centres got a poor rating for teaching methods while only 17 per cent of Pratham centres got such a poor rating, indicating that there was not much happening in the early-childhood programmes. Similarly, a study on day care showed that while family day care¹⁷ was an appropriate form of care for young children because of the home-like environment and small group size, it did not provide for stimulation of children. A study in Tamil Nadu¹⁸ was done to understand the relationship between quality of early childhood education and learning competencies

of children. Children's cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and perceptual-motor abilities were studied. The Tamil Nadu Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (TECERS) was developed to measure the quality of the programme in all the three sectors. The study showed a positive relationship between the quality observed in centres and the children's performance, especially in cognitive and language competence, even after allowing for the effects of home and social background.

3.2.1 The Public Sector

As far as ICDS is concerned, Table 3.3 is a broad indicator of its quality.

Table 3.3 Children Aged Three to Six Years: Review of Programmes

ECCE Centres	Balwadis	Day-care Centres
Dwindling numbers because of ICDS universalisation	Being phased out because of ICDS universalisation	Need to be more developmentally appropriate
<p>ICDS: The main provider, but ECCE is one of its weaker components.</p> <p>Coverage: Less than one-fifth of the target group.</p> <p>Poor access: Location and caste/community of anganwadi worker (AWW) are relevant factors.</p> <p>Poor services: More nutrition centres than preschools, especially in northern states.</p> <p>Underutilisation/non-utilisation: Weak infrastructure, lack of materials, alternative day care required for rest of day, poor quantity/quality of nutritional supplements and irregularity of distribution.</p> <p>Unmotivated workers: Inadequate incentives, unrealistic job charts, occasional mismatching between training and work situations.</p> <p>Poor monitoring and lack of community ownership.</p> <p>Overall: Overburdened, cannot take on more responsibilities without new supportive inputs such as modified design and financial/human resources. Needs strong Information Education Communication (IEC) component, supervision of mushrooming private schools.</p>		

Source: 'Reaching Out to the Child': An Integrated Approach to Child Development, Human Development Sector, South Asia Region, World Bank, September 2004.

¹⁷ Datta, V. 1994

¹⁸ MSSRF 2000

3.2.2 *Current Practices in ECE in the Private Sector*

Though there are islands of excellence and many good private schools, especially at the higher social levels, the majority are characterised by most of the following undesirable practices:

- **From burden to boredom:** Great variation is observed. At one end of the spectrum, some children experience great pressure, being burdened with unrealistic and undesirable expectations. At the other end, there are centres where little action takes place; the same routine is repeated, and children are required to sit quietly in one place. Children find this routine monotonous, uninteresting, and boring.
- **Admissions:** Interviewing the child seeking admission and his/her parents is a common practice followed by many private schools. The child is tested for general knowledge and made to perform tasks, which are expected of him in the class after he gets admitted. This results in pressure, tension, and anxiety for both parents and children, and has harmful effects on children.
- **Early start in structured learning:** Most ECE programmes today are merely a downward extension of primary education. The heavy curriculum exposes children to very structured and rote learning at an age when they are not developmentally ready for it.
- **Expected competencies in conflict with children's developmental stages:** The curriculum offered in such preschools is developmentally inappropriate. Children are required to sit in one place and write for long durations. Few cognitive skills are taught and holistic development is ignored.
- **Overcrowded classrooms:** As many as sixty children are huddled in a classroom, giving them neither the opportunity to move within the classroom nor any chance for social interaction with others. The teacher is unable to give individual attention to each student. Such an environment is not conducive to the all-round development of children.
- **Formal method of teaching and evaluation:** Children spend most of the time writing, working with workbooks, or engaged in number work. Limited activities for art, music, Environmental Studies (EVS), or indoor and outdoor free play find place in the daily routine. There is a lack of awareness of and concern about the all-round development of children.
- **Appraisal:** Evaluation also focuses on competencies that are more appropriately taught at the primary school level, such as competency in reading, writing, dictation, mathematics, and drawing. No emphasis is placed on evaluating the child from the developmental point of view.
- **Homework:** Children are often given homework, which is written work. Children at this stage are not ready for writing, and struggle for hours at this task. This robs them of playtime, which is their right at this stage in their life.
- **Lack of suitable equipment and play materials:** There is a limited supply available, and sometimes these are used more for purposes of display than actual play. At times, as a special event or treat, children are allowed to play with the equipment and materials¹⁹.

¹⁹ Seth, 1996

- **Teachers' remuneration:** Most teachers are untrained and lack knowledge about the methodology of working with young children. Their remuneration is low and varies from school to school.

3.2.3 Risks of Early Instruction

Surveys conducted by NCERT of 'prestigious' schools in ten major cities of the country uniformly indicated that play-based, development-oriented ECE programmes as advocated in the NPE are more of an exception than the norm. The curriculum surveys in all major cities indicate that children as young as 3 to 4 years old are being taught the syllabus prescribed not only for Class I but even for Class II, for which they are neither cognitively nor physically mature enough. Children are made to give regular tests and examinations, and are assigned regular doses of homework^{20, 21}.

Multidisciplinary research studies have shown the harmful effects of early instruction on children. Gulati²² observed the effects of pressure on children's health and personal and social development. In the area of health, respiratory problems, pain in legs, hands, and back, recurrent fever, and poor weight gain were commonly seen. As many as 82 per cent had irregular bowel habits, and this had also affected their sleep patterns.

Exposure to formal instruction is causing harm to children, according to Elkind²³. The harm comes from what he terms miseducation, which puts the children to risk for no purpose. He notes that the risks are both short term and long term. The short-term risks include the manifestation of stress

symptoms among children. The long-term risks include far-reaching effects on the children's motivational, intellectual, and social behaviour. The danger of early instruction is seen in the potential harm done to the child's motivation for learning. Young children have their own set of learning priorities, and this is self-directed. When adults intrude into this area of self-directed learning and insist on imposing their own learning priorities like reading or writing, they interfere with this self-directed impulse and undermine the child's sense of initiative.

Katz²⁴ believes that the early introduction of academic skills may undermine the development of the child's disposition to use the skills thus acquired. The early drill and practice given for reading undermines the child's disposition to become a reader. According to her, there is no compelling evidence to suggest that early introduction to academic work guarantees success in school in the long term. The other effect is on the child's socio-emotional development. Children who cannot relate to the content or tasks required of them in the formal structure are likely to feel incompetent. Repeated experiences of being unable to relate to schoolwork are likely to lead to so-called 'learned stupidity'²⁵.

3.2.4 Overview of the Private Sector

- The majority of these 'schools' are of very poor quality and sometimes of a kind that can have damaging or even dangerous consequences for children. Yet they are allowed to affect millions of children.

²⁰ Kaul, V. 1997

²¹ Upadhyay, G.C. 2000

²² Gulati, A.K. 1992

²³ Elkind, D. 1987

²⁴ Katz, L. 1987

²⁵ Kaul, V. 1997

- Their influence is pernicious, resulting from issues of class and power. Yet they are setting standards and becoming pacesetters for both the public and the voluntary sectors.
- There is a marked tendency among parents to shift their children from public-sector schools to private-sector schools as soon as it becomes economically possible to do so, and often at great cost and sacrifice, under the impression that their children will benefit from this new environment. This trend is obvious not only within communities but also among communities and across regions.
- The government's lack of interest in improving, regulating, or even surveying the private sector has been reinforced of late by the emergence of the ideologies of privatisation and liberalisation and the belief in the sacred nature of the market, bolstered by appeals to respect the individual's freedom of choice.
- The recent constitutional amendment has unfortunately only served to legitimise this derecognition, and made it legal to 'turn a blind eye' to appalling atrocities.

3.2.5 Care Component

Studies of day care have revealed that disadvantaged working mothers are the most affected, as nearly 66 per cent of them take care of their children without any kind of help²⁶. These mothers work as agricultural labourers, contract labourers, pieceworkers, and self-employed women. Sethi²⁷ made similar observations regarding working mothers from the

unorganised sector. Migrant mothers with no family support were the most affected, as D'Souza²⁸ observed; as many as 78 per cent had no help for their children and 40 per cent had to leave them unattended.

It is a common practice with mothers from disadvantaged homes to leave their young, growing children in the care of older siblings. These caregivers are children themselves, having no childcare skills²⁹. A study in Maharashtra has shown a definite relationship between different categories of caregivers and the health status of children³⁰. The incidence of severe malnutrition was 55 per cent in young children who were looked after by older siblings, 6–8 years of age, as compared to 21 per cent in children attended to by grandparents and 8.5 per cent in children under the mother's care.

In a study of crèches supported by the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) in 1998 conducted by National Institute for Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD)³¹, which at that time numbered about 13,000, it was found that more than half of the children were above the age of 3, though the scheme is intended to cater to children aged 0–6 of working mothers. Further, the work status of many mothers was unclear as records were not maintained. It was found that the quality of care in most cases was very poor. This was attributed to the lack of training and motivation on the part of workers, the poor wages of the workers, and the lack of supervision and adequate materials resulting from the very limited budgets. However, no studies have been undertaken of the quality of the many ECE centres going by different names such as balwadis,

²⁶ *GoI 1985*

²⁷ *Sethi, R.M. 1982*

²⁸ *D'Souza 1979*

²⁹ *Sriram, R. and Ganapathy 1997*

³⁰ *Shah, P.M. et al 1979*

³¹ *Gopal, A.K. 1998*

crèches, day-care centres, etc. run by NGOs with support from national, international, and denominational agencies.

Among the urban middle class, the presence of 'latchkey' children is a common feature since negligible services are available for them when they return from school. Alternatively, a popular practice in urban middle-class families is to depend on a domestic helper, or ayah, who along with performing domestic chores also looks after the children. However, the children under this form of care scored very low on intelligence and social maturity tests compared to children in other forms of care³².

The above data suggest that the care component of ECCE is weak and that urgent attention is required to cover the large number of children who are either not receiving proper care or who are left to fend for themselves.

3.2.6 The NGO Sector

This is yet another area about which little is definitively known since there is no survey or estimate of the actual number of NGOs engaged in childcare, or of the kinds of services that they provide. Although there are some outstanding institutions that have played a pioneering role in the development of innovative programmes, these are only a handful. Among the rest, some make attempts to follow the pattern of private schools, while others offer day-care and balwadi services.

As regards the innovative programmes, a study of eight such innovative institutions undertaken by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in 1994–95, called the Suraksha Series, produced the following insights³³. Some of the common factors contributing to the quality of these programmes were:

flexibility and responsiveness to local needs and contextuality; community involvement and supportive linkages; diversified funding and mobilisation of community resources; workers' training that was process oriented leading to both competence and confidence, and with strong community support leading to heightened self-esteem; strong leadership along with participation in decision making and internalisation of values; and good two-way communication. High quality was related to high cost, but not the other way around, that is, high cost did not ensure high quality. Table 3.4 on the relationship between cost and quality is revealing.

On the other hand, all the programmes studied were small in scale and had plans only for moderate expansion, indicating an inverse relationship between scale and quality.

3.3 Ensuring Quality for All

Quality is the most important factor that determines the outcome of any programme for children. Studies show that well-designed early-childhood programmes can make a positive difference to the lives of children. Further, for programmes that were comprehensive and those that intervened early, the effects were stronger; if they had a follow-through component, it helped to maintain the gains³⁴. Broadly, quality early-childhood programmes must promote healthy and normal physical and psychosocial development for which children's daily experiences are important. Evolving quality programmes requires concerted efforts on many fronts. (See Figure 3.1)

3.3.1 Developing Norms and Standards

Indicators or standards will have to be defined in relation to the objectives laid down for ECCE

³² Datta, V. 1994

³³ MSSRF and NIPPCD 1996

³⁴ Karoly et al

Table 3.4 Cost-Quality Relationship

S. No.	High Cost/High Quality	Low Cost/Low Quality
1.	High worker-child ratio	Low worker-child ratio
2.	High worker salary and good working conditions, leading to satisfaction/motivation	Low salaries and poor working conditions, leading to absenteeism, apathy, poor motivation, and low job satisfaction
3.	High supervisor-worker ratio	Low supervisor-worker ratio, or no supervisor
4.	Flexible programming	Fixed programming
5.	Continuous training	No/minimal training, or one-time initial training only
6.	Community involvement and structures for local initiative and decision making	Centralised decision making with little/no scope for community involvement

Source: *Learning from Innovation*.

programmes and also in relation to each objective. While some variation may be expected, Indian and worldwide experiences³⁵ have identified the following **basic or essential elements of quality**:

- 1. Curriculum:** Activity based, child-centred, age appropriate, aiming at all-round development, adapted to context, and flexible.
- 2. Teachers:** Motivated and appropriately trained to work with young children through experiential 'hands-on' training; recognised with status of teacher; rewarded with appropriate pay.
- 3. Ratio and group size:** Help adult-child interaction, varying with the age of children.
- 4. Infrastructure:** Supportive of children's needs, low cost, and culture specific.
- 5. Supervision and monitoring:** Encourage attempts at improving quality³⁶.

Considering the diversity of levels, needs, contexts, and perceptions, there can be no one single uniform standard laid down for all. There are also programmes that offer different components, or different combinations of components. However, there can be for each group only a certain range of variation. While several instances of 'best practices' can be used as examples and models, there must also be a minimum number of these.

To determine the indicators, it is essential to involve all the players-educators, classroom teachers/childcare workers, parents, the community, and the government (at appropriate levels/tiers). Educators can provide the basic inputs; the needs and views of parents must be listened to with respect; teachers' problems must be understood and addressed; and community participation with special emphasis on the involvement

³⁵ Evans, J. 1996

³⁶ Love et al

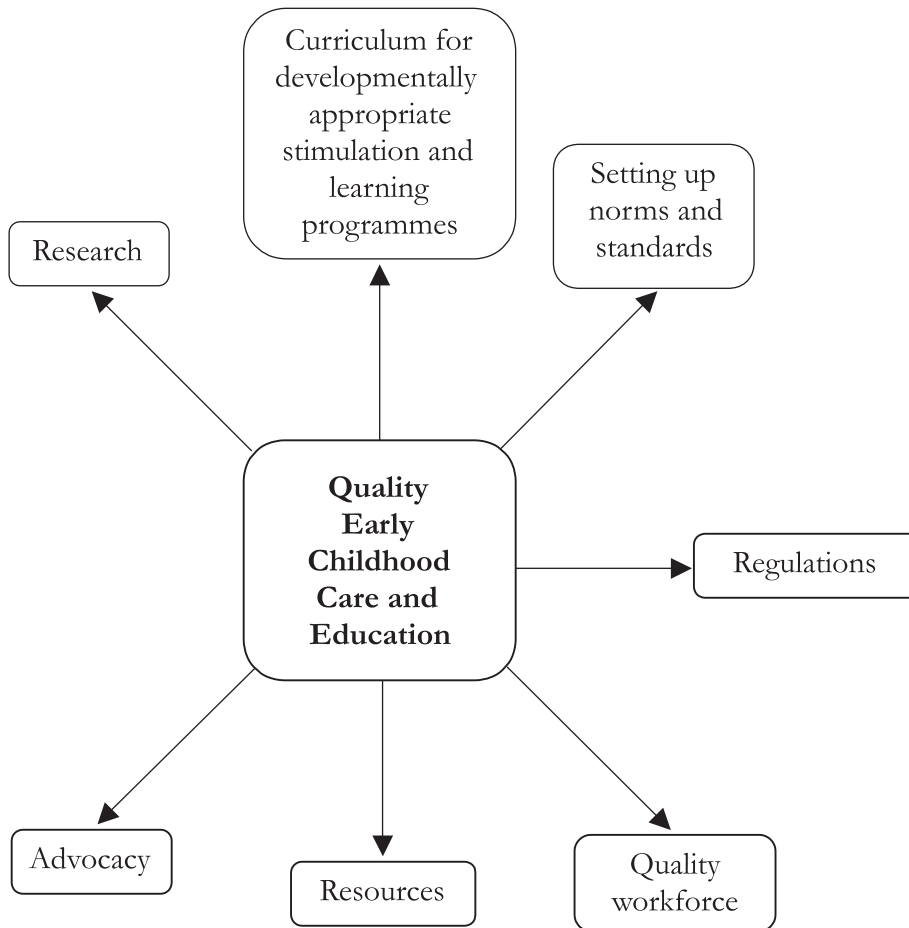


Figure 3.1 Strategies to Ensure Quality

of women should be made an essential requirement. The government must play the role of watchdog and protector of children’s rights to development and education (as enshrined in the CRC).

3.3.2 Regulation

The review in the earlier pages clearly reveals the poor quality of ECCE programmes, and particularly of those in the private sector. It is imperative that the government take up the responsibility of controlling the mushrooming of poor-quality ECCE programmes through appropriate regulatory processes. Different

strategies and approaches will have to be developed to address the three sectors— public, private, and voluntary. These are indicated below:

1. *Government sector:* Directly provide good-quality services, with priority accorded to the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups, through the various departments of the government as needed, keeping in mind context specificity, relevance, and flexibility.
2. *Private sector:* Encourage diverse services and allow them to charge what the market will bear, but at the same time ensure adherence to norms and

standards, prevent exploitation of the vulnerable, and discourage sectarian and exclusionary practices through appropriate regulations.

3. *Voluntary sector*: Encourage, promote, and support diverse services, but at the same time also ensure the maintenance of minimum standards of quality, and discourage sectarian and exclusionary tendencies through regulations; provide incentives to enter difficult sectors and develop innovative practices.

While licensing is a method followed by many countries to ensure minimum standards in the private sector, this may not be feasible in the Indian context considering the large administrative machinery that is required for this purpose and the likelihood of malpractices emerging within the licensing system. Registration is an in-between method, which makes it mandatory for programmes to register and follow certain norms. However, such methods depend a great deal on the will of the management to provide the minimum requirements, and also on the parents to report malpractices, so that deregistration can occur in deserving cases. Supervision and monitoring are important methods, but these are generally adopted in the case of programmes that have to report to funding agencies. Though accreditation is the highest form of quality control, it is also one of the most difficult to implement. However, it can yield good results in taking programmes through self-evaluation and in enhancing quality.

When we are dealing with the development of young children, there has to be some way to ensure that the quality of the programmes being offered is appropriate, so that the outcomes for children will be positive. As of today, there is no indication from the government about who should run the programmes, how they should be run, and how they should work

towards achieving optimum quality in order to produce the most positive outcomes for children's development.

An example of a voluntary effort towards regulation has been by the Maharashtra Child Development Board, set up by the Maharashtra FORCES (Forum for Crèche and Child Care Services), IAPE (Indian Association for Preschool Education), Mumbai, and the Maharashtra Bal Shikshan Parishad. The Board has created a system of enrolment, registration, recognition, and accreditation. For each stage, norms have been created and recognition/accreditation is given on a star system for a fixed period of time. Such a system encourages voluntary participation and helps ECCE centres to progress from minimum to best practices. Second, the registration of an organisation within the system helps in compiling a database of the numbers and types of programmes available. This system should be carefully studied and piloted and perhaps even modified, rather than introducing or adopting completely new processes. Since regulation is a state responsibility, such child development boards should be funded and recognised by the government. The involvement of early-childhood professionals in the regulation process will ensure the introduction and implementation of fair and appropriate practices.

3.3.3 Advocacy: Empowering the Parents, the Family, and the Community

An essential step aimed at involving parents, communities, and local authorities in monitoring and promoting quality standards is the creation of widespread awareness about ECCE, its purpose and nature, as well as advocacy for quality ECCE. Here the government must play an important role, particularly in providing funds and involving the mass media in promoting positive examples of good practices in

ECCE and giving negative publicity to poor quality and in highlighting its negative impact.

To begin with, parents from all walks of life and at all levels, that is, the public in general, have little or no awareness about the significance of this period in the life of their children, or about how to promote their children's development. Further, increasingly parents are being influenced to believe in the importance of an 'early start' for their children supposedly for their later educational achievements and hence chances to achieve upward social mobility. The only model available—again because of the lack of sustained advocacy about the role, content, and process of effective ECCE—is the 'formal' preschool, which merely tries to teach young children from age 2 or 3 onwards the basics of the three Rs in a mechanical way, which ends up in mere memorisation. In the public sector, on the other hand, though lip service is paid to the right concepts, there is little understanding of them at the practical level; this is because teachers are poorly trained and supervised, materials are woefully inadequate, and hence the actual quality of services is poor. While parents who prefer to send their children to private-sector schools are offered false choices, for which they are required to pay, parents who send their children to public-sector schools have no choice but to face poor quality. Hence, the need for a massive advocacy campaign using all the available media.

The message should be the same—the significance of this period of life for human development and brain growth; the dangers of early malnutrition and neglect; the purpose, content, scope, and meaning of ECCE; the dangers of introducing too early formal methods unsuitable for the age group; the importance of transacting the curriculum in a language familiar to the child; the integration of health and nutrition with care,

development, and education at this stage; the dispelling of false myths and replacing them with accurate information in the child's interest. At the same time, there is a need to address the aspirations and dreams of parents. Sometimes parents may have unrealistic aspirations. If parents know the significance of ECCE in the overall context of learning and development, pressures for formal teaching and learning at the preschool stage will be reduced. As for the involvement of parents in the process, this hardly exists in the private sector, where there is often a hostile attitude towards parents, and there is little communication between the school and parents. In the public sector, on the other hand, contributions in kind are often expected under the rubric of 'community participation'. The NGO sector has perhaps moved the most in the direction of involving the community by various means, ranging from parent and community education and using ECCE as an entry point for raising or introducing other community issues and services, to mobilising community resources for ECCE.

Parental and community involvement in planning, implementing, and monitoring ECCE programmes is the key to quality enhancement. This will also empower the community in planning and monitoring programmes, supporting teachers, and mobilising resources. The appropriate structure for this is the local authority (PRI) to which parents can address their needs and aspirations directly, as well as their grievances and complaints, and can assist in mobilising resources and in making direct contributions to the programme.

We should plan for a future when large-scale programmes (like ICDS) could be decentralised down to the cluster level and given greater autonomy in functioning, which would allow for both greater community involvement and support and greater curricular flexibility and diversity. The role of the concerned government

department would be to specify the necessary norms and standards; offer capacity building, resource materials, guidance, and monitoring; and, of course, guarantee financial support.

3.3.4 Quality Workforce

The staff running an early-childhood programme is the single most important factor in determining the quality of the programme, and yet it is the most neglected aspect of the educational system. Training, which is very crucial, is hardly emphasised. It will take a long time to close the gap created by the vast backlog of inadequately prepared or unprepared 'teachers' in ECCE, while also training newcomers entering the field. The notion still prevails that any person who likes children, or who is herself a mother, will be a good staff member in early-childhood programmes. Further, what is offered as training for the staff varies tremendously in terms of the duration of training,

methodology, and exposure to theory and practice. At one extreme, there are university- and government-recognised courses with fixed curricula and duration and some standards set for trainers and organisations³⁷. At the other extreme, there are private institutions (which have multiplied in the era of globalisation), which run their own courses with no standards for curricula or duration, producing individuals who are unable to develop healthy programmes for young children. (See Table 3.5.)

However, there is no demand for trained staff as no State government has laid down any norms for staff qualifications or remuneration, nor any guidelines for the recognition of ECCE staff as teachers. It has been seen that as many as 83 per cent of Mumbai day-care staff were untrained³⁸, while about 37 per cent of staff in ECCE government programmes or grants-in-aid programmes were untrained. The length of training varied from one month to one year^{39, 40}. Within these

Table 3.5 Existing Training Programmes on ECCE Personnel

A. Government— all three levels, semi-government, and aided Sector	Project or programme based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Purely functional, without scope for aided sector upward movement or recognition for jobs in the same area
B. Voluntary sector	Project or programme based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tiny in size, but qualitatively rich. Courses fading away due to diminishing employment opportunities for the trainees.
C. Private sector	Preschool and nursery teacher training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some good programmes are threatened by specified norms ● Proliferating as teacher-training shops with no norms or standards.

³⁷ Kaul, V. 1998

³⁸ Datta, V. 2001 a)

³⁹ Datta, V. 2002

⁴⁰ Christina, J. R. 1999

training programmes, there is a general lack of input regarding children's learning and development. The ICDS programme (earlier it was a four-month training programme, and now its duration is one month) has one of the most organised staff-training programmes at the national level, and yet it is often criticised for its failure to create effective manpower. The curriculum of anganwadi workers, even though based on the principles of holistic development, does not give workers adequate input about early childhood education, and so anganwadi workers are unable to relate activities with development or to be creative in developing their own programmes and activities⁴¹. In recent times, private schools have begun to employ staff with B.Ed. and D.Ed. degrees as early childhood educators, but these individuals have not been trained to apply the principles of child development, or to use pedagogy that is more appropriate for young children.

Linked to training and professional development are working conditions. Studies across States show that staff in early childhood development programmes are poorly paid, have no social security, no opportunity for climbing the career ladder, and no status as teachers^{42, 43, 44}. Given these concerns, the training of professionals in the field of early childhood requires new thinking about and careful consideration of the following issues:

1. Create training programmes that will provide opportunities to teachers to teach in any programme that caters to children up to 8 years.

2. Introduce flexibility in training by creating modular programmes, which help teachers to move from a certificate to a diploma to a degree; each of these achievements will make them eligible for specific programmes, like being day-care teachers or balwadi teachers or schoolteachers.
3. Prepare modules to upgrade skills and knowledge of teachers/caregivers. After completing five years of service, teachers should be able to take refresher courses.
4. View any new initiatives in training along with existing training programmes (B.Ed., D.Ed., AWW, Balsevika, and a host of private training programmes).
5. Take concrete steps to enhance the capacity of existing training institutes and trainers.
6. Introduce well-planned training inputs for supervisors, helpers, and other staff.
7. Some cadres of child-care workers like family day care may require special inputs.

Training for early-childhood professionals in all sectors for all types and levels of programmes has to be addressed by DEE&L. It is important to give priority to capacity building of trainers, building of resources in terms of teaching and instructional materials, provision for field experiences, and funding and institutional support. The basic principles for building training capacity⁴⁵ can be laid down as follows:

- Address the needs of diversity by catering to a variety of situations, contexts, components, and levels (ranging from helpers to teacher-educators).
- Encourage flexibility and innovativeness.

⁴¹ Datta, V. 2001a

⁴² Christina, J. R. 1999

⁴³ Datta, V. 2001b

⁴⁴ Shanmugavelayutham, K. 2003

⁴⁵ Swaminathan, M. 2003

- Emphasise practical 'hands-on' training rather than resorting to outdated, formal, and heavily theoretical approaches, particularly in those aimed at grass-roots-level workers.
- Short and medium-term programmes should emphasise in-service training rather than pre-service training.
- Develop innovative and practical in-service courses, distance-education models, etc. spread over a period of time, to meet the needs of the vast numbers of the so-called 'untrained', especially in the private sector.
- Develop training approaches and courses employing participatory methods to involve the various players, especially teachers.
- Certify and recognise ECCE training to promote both self-employment and employment that can deliver quality services.
- Strengthen inter-sectoral development, sharing, and networking of resource expertise and resource materials in ECCE.
- Undertake capacity building of trainers to evolve a process-based methodology of teaching.

To achieve the above objectives, multiple models of training need to be created and implemented. Programme-specific vocational training courses, mobile training, formal university degree courses, distance learning, and many such models will have to be recognised in order to develop appropriate trained personnel for various programmes in diverse contexts. (See Figure 3.2.)

The quality of training will determine the quality of personnel in ECCE programmes. As of now, the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) is the only body that grants recognition to teacher-training institutes (there are 68 ECCE training centres in the entire country). However, more appropriate methods

of accrediting training institutes/courses need to be evolved. A monitoring/accreditation system that is recognised by the government for monitoring training institutes has to be established. The system needs to take into consideration the different inputs required for ECCE programme personnel across care and education, and should involve professionals in the accreditation processes.

3.3.5 Curriculum

A good curriculum covers all those things designed to help children's learning and development. This calls for a child-centred approach that empowers the child and makes her an active participant in the learning process. In India, the contextual diversities should be an important consideration in providing for curriculum flexibility. Thus, the curriculum should help evolve an environment that is conducive for sociality, provides linguistic richness, and engages children mentally and physically amidst safety and gratification. The details of the curriculum are discussed in Section V.

3.3.6 Research

The field of education cannot progress unless strong links are established between policy, practice, and research. (See Figure 3.3)

Research has to feed into policy and programme practices. At the same time, issues related to programme practices need to be studied in order to understand how they impact children and to strengthen the good practices in ECCE. Most countries today are investing a great deal in research on children and creating a rich database to be able to guide programming. Research becomes a strong guiding force in developing specific interventions or even in providing an understanding on the cost effectiveness of interventions. Though

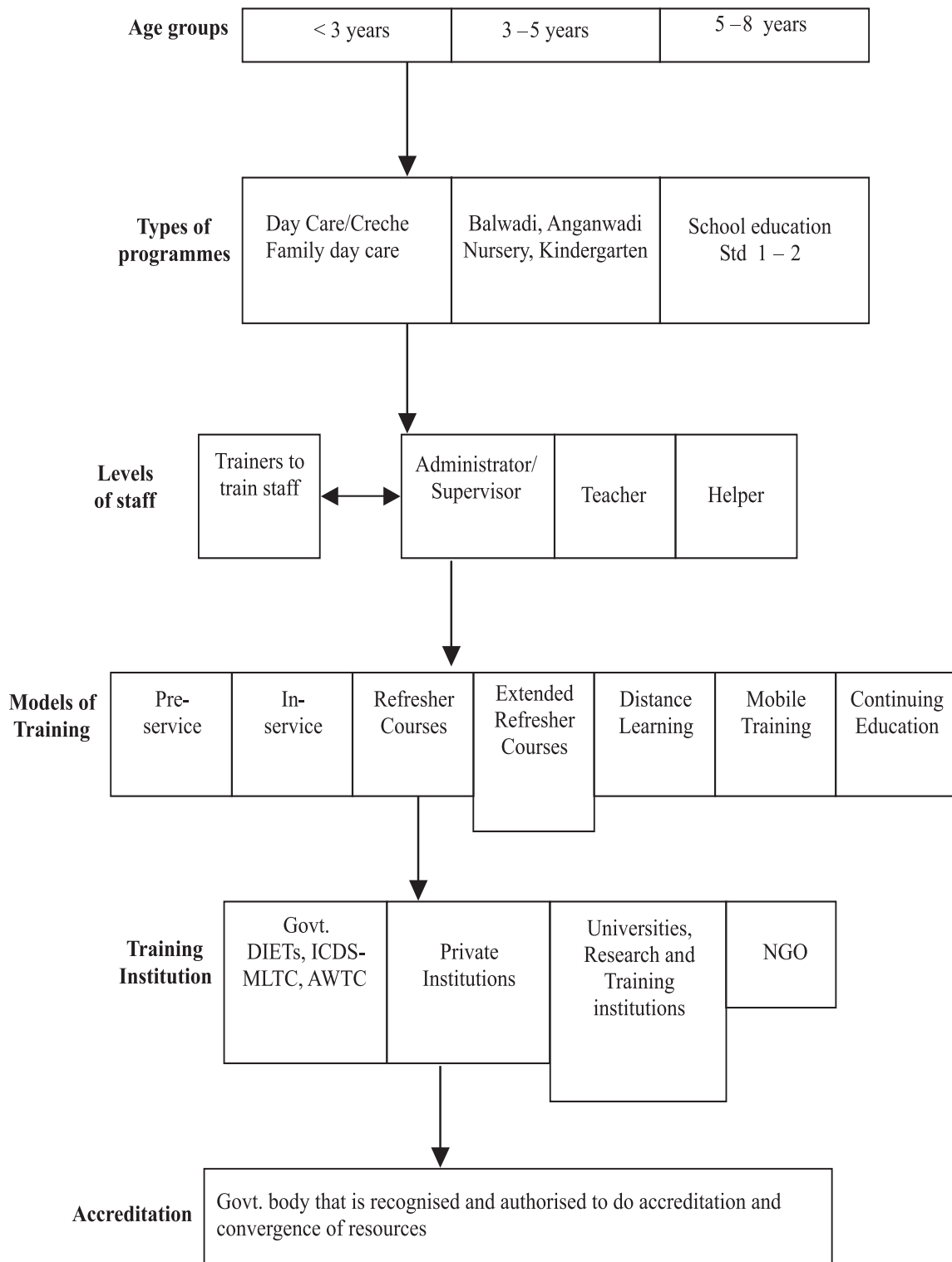


Figure 3.2 Towards a Quality

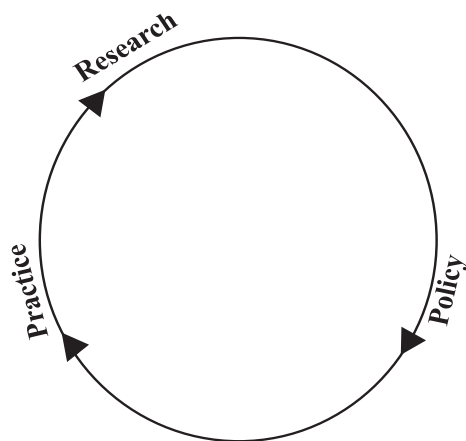


Figure 3.3 Research, Policy, Practice

research in India does take place on a modest scale, it does not feed into policies and programmes.

3.3.7 Resources

There can be no compromise in the matter of investments in our children's care and development. Finances and resources, both human and material, have to be poured into the early childhood sector.

1. Finance

While the government cannot deny its responsibility in this field, it could also develop various strategies to enhance funding. Some of these could be:

- Spend a fixed percentage of the GDP, at least 1 per cent.
- Create a cess for all employers.
- Give block grants to states.
- Coordinate funds from other programmes/ departments.
- Develop a state–centre partnership.
- Mobilise local and community resources.
- Offer tax incentives for donations to the ECCE fund.

2. Human Resource Development

Human resource development has to be undertaken by government departments, other institutions, the community, and parents. People who have direct responsibility for the programme will need constant inputs for programme development, and the others will need to create a demand for quality ECCE programmes. ECCE has always been nobody's baby. It now needs to be owned and nurtured by all stakeholders.

3. Teaching and Learning Materials

Considering that the ECCE curriculum is activity based, there is a need to develop a lot of creative learning materials. Even though teachers will create their own materials, and also use the available resources in the environment, some basic equipment related to physical activity and cognitive and language skills needs to be made available to all programmes (See Figure 3.4.)

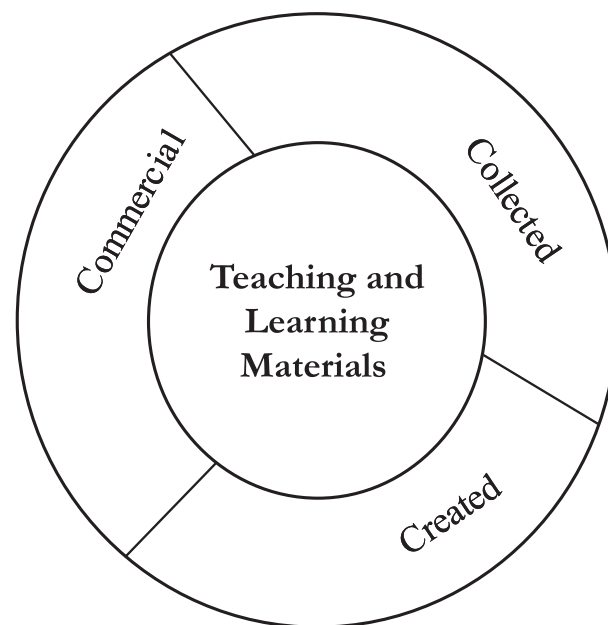


Figure 3.4 Types of Teaching/Learning Materials

3.4 Language Issues

Language plays an important role in communication, exchange of information, development of reading skills, reading with comprehension, and, in later years, academic success. Yet little attention is being paid to language activities and experiences in ECCE programmes.

Teaching through the child's first language, or mother tongue, is internationally recognised as the most appropriate way of working with children in the early years of concept formation. Children who attend preschool programmes conducted in their own mother tongue face fewer problems of comprehension as compared to children whose mother tongue is different from the medium of instruction. This is also a common-sense view, which all parents instinctively recognise and understand.

But language teaching is a complex issue in a multilingual country like ours, where teachers may be required to cope with a number of languages at the same time in a classroom. Any Indian language used as a medium of instruction in preschools, especially in towns and cities, poses problems for children coming from different language backgrounds and dialects. To these children, it is like learning a foreign language, and it is also a challenge for the ECCE worker. The teacher's sensitivity and training are both essential to help the child overcome the gap between the home language/dialect and the school language.

Children should be allowed to express themselves in their home language while they gradually acquire the regional/school language through exposure. This should be possible since during this period listening and speaking are the major activities in the classroom, as well as free play with peers. Teachers should also

attempt to learn a few words and phrases of the child's home language. In a multilingual classroom, children should be encouraged to express themselves in their own language and to pay attention to and learn from each other. This is a natural and easy process in play situations.

On the other hand, it is well known that young children can learn new languages easily. Indeed, research shows that the years before age 7 are probably the best to learn new languages, and observation supports the view that young children learn new languages much faster than adults. Table 1.1 suggests that the period 2–5 years may even be the best for learning multiple languages. Further, the Census reveals that about 20 per cent of the Indian population knows two or more languages, not including English. Much of this is learnt out of school, through informal learning of languages in the environment, so it is obviously not difficult for ordinary people without much education to learn additional Indian languages. It can also be observed that large numbers of children comfortably study in schools in the regional-language medium even though they use a different language at home. The early childhood years before the child enters primary school are obviously the best time to familiarise him/her with the regional/school language. Multilinguality and children's learning abilities are, therefore, not the issue here, but rather the ability of the educational system to address the issue and find the appropriate solutions.

This argument applies with even greater force to children in tribal areas who enter directly into a primary school that uses the state language totally unfamiliar to them. A recent study⁴⁶ documents the tremendous difficulties that such children face in various parts of

⁴⁶ *Jhingran, D. 2005*

the country, often resulting in their inability to read with comprehension the state language even after Class V. This is compounded by the sense of failure and inadequacy that such children experience day in and day out in a teacher-centred system of education, which may ultimately force them out of the educational system altogether.

Here is a clear case for following the ECCE pedagogy, of introducing the new language through oral means alone (listening and speaking) at the preschool stage, before going on to reading and writing at the primary stage. If ECCE cannot be introduced in these areas, then the first year of primary school should be utilised for learning the regional language through such informal means. A sympathetic attitude, some knowledge of the tribal language or dialect on the part of the teacher, or the employment of a teacher belonging to that language group, and the orientation of the teacher—all these steps would go a long way to help.

3.4.1 Demand for English

Another issue is the widespread and growing demand for English. The majority of parents, of all classes, occupations, and regions, would like their children to know English, since it is seen as the path to upward mobility, and this is a legitimate desire in today's world. Unfortunately, most people confuse learning English with the so-called 'English medium', and hence the growing popularity of so-called 'English-medium' schools has become closely linked to the rapidly increasing privatisation of education at the primary and preschool levels. English has become the line dividing the privileged from the rest, and the base of the continuing dual track in our educational system. These are issues of class, power, and social inclusion rather than of pedagogy, and hence have to be approached

from a political standpoint. If the curricular framework has to respond to parental aspirations, then this is a major issue. Whatever be the ideal age for the introduction of a second language from an academic standpoint, from the point of view of socio-political realities it has to be introduced early, either in Class I, as several states have already done, or at the preschool level. Academicians then have to find the best methodologies for teaching it.

At the level of policy, there are two questions:

- Can we convince the public and parents that all education, both in the private and the public sectors, must be in the medium of the child's home language, or, failing that, in the most familiar language or regional language? This requires the cooperation of the private sector; it is linked with the issue of regulation raised earlier.
- Can we convince them that a second language, which could be English, can be introduced early, say, in the ECE years?

The two questions are closely linked. A rational language policy aiming at proficiency in one Indian language for all children is the other side of the coin of introducing English as a second language as early as desired.

At the level of practice, there are two issues:

- How can we teach English to children through teachers who do not know English, especially if it involves teaching children from homes where the parents do not know it either?
- How can the methodology of ECE be applied to the learning of English?

3.4.2 Teaching of English through the Mass Media

A response to the first question involves a radically different approach to any that has been used before in our country. A massive public campaign to teach

English to teachers (or indeed to all adults) is needed, which would involve spoken English classes on:

- Radio (AIR, community and FM);
- Television (Doordarshan, satellite channels);
- Distance education (open universities and schools);
- New educational satellite networks; and
- All other possible media.

3.4.3 Such attempts are being made in China, for example

Such facilities, though targeted at teachers, could be availed of by any adult or student, and would have wide utility far beyond the target group. However, this is a totally new approach in India, involving cooperation between the educational sector and the mass media and ICT, and requiring a new use of educational technology. Can we rise to the challenge? And do we want to break the cycle of inequity represented by the two-track system?

In response to the second question, the ECCE perspective, or a developmental pedagogy, would suggest that language should be learnt by processes in the following order: 'Listen—speak—read—write.' This is the exact opposite of what can be observed in most schools, where language in the early years (whether English or any Indian language) is taught by first requiring children to write, then read, sometimes to listen, and almost never to talk! This is another major contribution that the ECCE methodology can make to the learning of language, particularly in the early years of primary school.

4. MOVING AHEAD: CHANGING POLICY PARADIGMS

Since many of the current problems and issues in ECCE are the outcome of earlier policies and historical

developments, any attempt now to give young children a fair deal will require some major policy shifts before one can speak of implementing curricular reform. Otherwise, curricular changes will be meaningless and cannot be expected to alter the present iniquitous system.

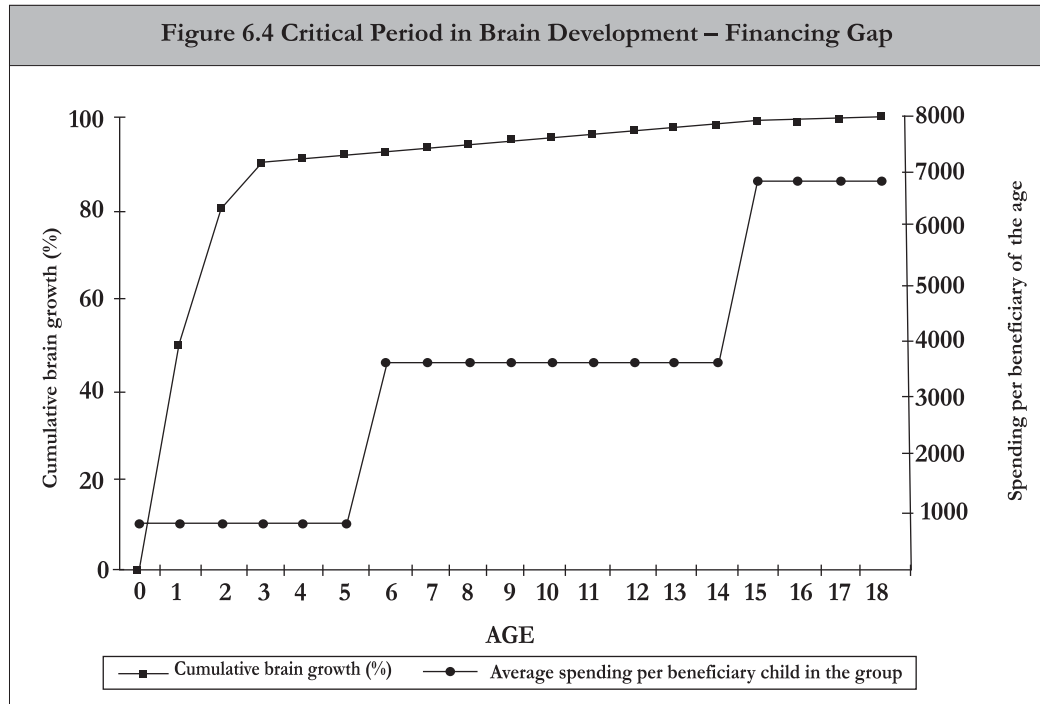
4.1 Value of ECCE and Recognition as Part of EFA

The first and most important step is the recognition and acceptance of ECCE as a vital developmental need of all children, and that hence every child has a right to ECCE of equitable quality. This may seem a utopian demand in the light of the recent constitutional amendment disenfranchising the young child for the first time in our history. However, Article 21 together with the Unnikrishnan⁴⁷ judgement provides an opening that can be used to rekindle the debate and reverse the policies in place. This may take time, but the process has to start right now. The aim is to make ECCE accepted as an integral part of the curriculum for all children, and for it to be seen as part of EFA.

4.2 Resource Allocation

The intention to provide ECCE of equitable quality for all means that there will have to be a vast enhancement in resource allocation. While global research indicates that 85 per cent of a child's core brain structure is already complete in the early years, the trend indicates that actual spending per child on children below 6 is almost one-eighth of the spending on children in the 6–14 age group, across all states, indicating a gross neglect of the foundational years of childhood. (See Figure 4.1) This situation will have to be drastically altered by mobilising resources from all levels.

⁴⁷ Supreme Court 1993



Source: *Reaching Out to the Child*, HDS, World Bank, 2004.

4.3 Ensuring Quality for All: Strategies and Instrumentalities

The existence of multiple models, diverse sectors, and different programme approaches that have developed over time must be recognised and accepted, but within a common core framework, along with adherence to some basic norms and standards, as well as adjustment to different contextual realities and a meaningful language policy. Justice and equity must be assured. Whether a programme is run by DEE&L or DWCD or by an NGO or a privately managed institution, all must adhere to basic norms and standards, and adapt to contextual realities without sacrificing or diluting the former. In this context, it is interesting to note that child development specialists in India are already developing norms for the evaluation of ECCE programmes and giving more weightage to teacher–child interaction, transaction of the curriculum,

and human relationships than to infrastructure, buildings, and elaborate equipment, so that those with greater economic wealth are not unduly favoured.

4.4 Advocacy

To sensitise the public at every level, from parents to policy makers, an extensive and sustained campaign for advocacy involving the mass media is needed. This requires that adequate resources be provided and that the government take the lead, including discipline-based experts and experienced practitioners from outside the government to prepare the requisite materials. These materials should be in various forms, all designed to convey the significance of this period in a child's life, to warn against the dangers of neglect, and to describe the scope, purpose, and meaning of ECCE. This advocacy campaign should be propagated by the mass media, the folk media, and through face-to-face contact by local fieldworkers.

For example, it is strange that in a country where the Supreme Court has recently made noon meals mandatory for schoolchildren, no such rule has been prescribed for the age group 18 months to 3 years, which is the most at risk for malnutrition and its consequences. This underlines the need for advocacy among all sections, from the wealthiest classes to the humblest parents, who are all yearning to secure a better future for their children.

4.5 Capacity Building

The next important task is to begin straightaway with a massive and long-term programme of capacity building at all levels. To begin with, this requires acceptance of the fact that there are several varieties of teachers/crèche workers/caregivers, etc. and that all of them need recognition of their roles, confirmation of their status as workers or teachers, and appropriate rewards or fair wages for their work.

There must be a diversity of courses at three levels—the basic teacher/childcare worker, the helper, and the higher level of supervisor, trainer, and head. Again, there must be not only pre-service training courses for new entrants to the profession, for which minimum salary levels at each level should be laid down, but also a variety of short or extended refresher courses for the vast numbers of the existing ‘untrained’, especially in the private sector, who may have long years of experience and even some skills but who lack formal training. Most important is capacity building at the planning, administrative, monitoring, and evaluation levels, not only for officials but also equally for members of elected bodies and various civil society bodies. Responsibility for such capacity building must be shared across all implementing agencies, with DEE&L playing a significant coordinating role, building on existing capabilities and institutions wherever they exist.

4.6 Convergence

Convergence among all the ministries concerned with the young child, coordination among the various autonomous authorities already in existence (like NCTE) and others that will be set up in the future, and networking among various academic institutions dealing with different aspects of this issue will be another essential responsibility of DEE&L in handling this huge, diverse, and complex programme.

In addition, attention needs to be paid to the following key elements:

- Development of reporting systems leading to the compilation of a database, starting with simple enumeration and later registration, interfacing with the existing data-gathering and national reporting and accounting systems.
- Setting up the necessary institutional mechanisms at every level, coordinated by appropriate agencies.
- Appropriate structures and institutions for research, monitoring, and evaluation, set up at different levels and coordinated by nodal agencies.

4.7 Conclusion

It should then be possible to take the following steps needed to make the curricular reforms work:

1. Frame appropriate curricula and diverse programmes for each age group intended to maximise development, while keeping in mind the factors mentioned earlier such as cultural, social, and economic diversity, local context and need, and different institutional frameworks.
2. Frame appropriate content and methodology for training courses of various types at each level, again keeping in mind the need for diversity and flexibility, the need to cater to different educational levels, and the requirement to evolve different approaches such as pre-service, in-service, refresher training, and distance mode.

3. Develop capacity at the higher level to accomplish the above-mentioned goals, that is, by training teacher-educators, developing resource and training materials, and providing adequate practical experience and exposure to them.
4. Set up basic norms and standards both for preschool centres and training courses/institutions.
5. Develop appropriate regulatory frameworks for the private and voluntary sectors.

These are the basic tasks before MHRD, which will follow as an outcome of the recognition of ECCE as part of the educational mainstream.

5. CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK FOR ECCE

The importance of this period of life, and the need for a curriculum that provides for sound and holistic growth and development of the child, has already been established. What kind of curriculum can contribute to such a development? The following pages will lay down some broad principles underlying a suitable curricular framework. These are suggestive guidelines and are not to be taken as prescriptions.

The curriculum is the sum total of all the experiences available to the child, and cannot be reduced to a syllabus. It has to be constructed to suit the child's requirements in different contexts, and should be in tune with the age, needs, and abilities of the child; it requires the full involvement of the teacher, both in building it and in transacting it in the classroom. It is equally important to reiterate that the curriculum should not be the drab, meaningless, and often cruel schedule that passes for preschool education today, according to which children are forced to do things most inappropriate for their age and needs. The child has a natural desire to learn, but often what is being done ends up destroying not only the child's urge to learn more and more but also the child's self-confidence and

self-worth, leading to poor academic performance and dropping out at a later stage. Many of the practices encountered at this stage are not only boring and meaningless routines for the child, but can even be damaging and dangerous.

5.1 The Pedagogical Process

The general objectives of ECCE can be described as follows:

- a. Laying the foundation for a healthy, productive, and satisfying life in the future by enabling the child to develop his/her maximum potential;
- b. Preparing the child for entry into and success in primary school; and
- c. Providing support services to women and girls to enable them to enter/continue with education, training, and being part of the workforce.

To achieve these objectives, the curriculum should be:

- Developmentally appropriate, activity based, and related to the child's needs, interests, and abilities, according to age;
- An integrated set of experiences to foster holistic growth and development in all domains, such as health and well-being, and cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language development through an interlinked approach;
- Flexible enough to suit the diverse social, cultural, economic, and linguistic contexts of our country, as well as adaptable enough to suit individual differences among children;
- Able to help the child to adjust to the routines of primary school as well as to the demands of more formal teaching.

5.2 Basic Principles of the Curricular Framework

From the earliest times, thinkers have speculated about the nature of childhood and the process of

socialisation. Plato's ideas that young children should be guided in state-run schools were as radical and unacceptable in his time as centuries later Gandhi's ideas about craft-based basic education were to his contemporaries. Western thinkers like Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, Montessori, and others have been pioneers in the movement of early childhood education. Their ideas have opened the way for sensorial and practical activities forming the curricular content. Their insistence on and insights into the importance of play, art, rhythm, rhyme, movement, and active participation led to the inclusion of these elements in classroom dynamics. Indian thinkers have also been guided by their observations concerning young children and their findings about the child's interest in activities using different materials. Gandhi, Tagore, Gijubhai Badekha, and Tarabai Modak were the first Indians to conceptualise a child-centred approach to the care and education of young children.

In more recent times, scholars in Developmental Psychology and Child Development like Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky have further emphasised, based on their research, play and activity as the child's natural modes of learning. Based on the insights and philosophies of these practitioners and thinkers, we now know that these programmes should be based on an understanding of the patterns of learning that define the essential nature of childhood. The ECCE teacher must be equipped with an understanding of the following basic principles:

- Play as the basis for learning
- Art as the basis for education
- Recognition of the special features of children's thinking

- Blend of the textual (basic literacy and numeracy) and the cultural
- Mix of formal and informal interaction
- Experience of both familiarity and challenge in everyday routines
- Primacy of experience rather than expertise
- Developmentally appropriate practice and flexibility
- Use of local materials, arts, and knowledge
- Integration of health and well-being based on healthy habits

Before spelling out the implications of these principles in greater detail, it would be helpful to look briefly at the following:

- a. The various domains of development;
- b. Developmental characteristics of children at different ages; and
- c. The nature of children's learning needs.

a. Domains of development

These may be categorised as follows:

- The motor domain
- The sensory domain
- The cognitive domain
- The language domain
- The emotional domain
- The social domain
- The personal domain

The development of various skills within each domain is a continuous process; details about the stages of growth can be found in standard books on child development and even in teachers' manuals⁴⁸.

The domains of development are all interrelated. Children's learning does not occur in narrowly defined subject areas; development and learning are integrated.

⁴⁸ Swaminathan, M.Daniel, P 2000

Any activity that stimulates one dimension also affects other dimensions.

For example, storytelling in the classroom: 3-year-olds will listen to very short stories. Their interest can be retained with the use of puppets and the accompanying play of words or rhymes. The narration of the story will also help children understand sequences, explore their own emotions, and focus on the language. By inculcating the skill of listening in children, the teacher will help them gain competence even in expanding their vocabulary and widening their cognitive range.

At the level of developing fine motor skills, Gesell's norms describe children's changing competencies. For example, 3-year-olds can copy a circle or a straight line; 4-year-olds can copy a cross; and 5-year-olds can copy a diamond or triangle and even a prism. Based on this understanding, children can be engaged in pattern drawing, an activity that promotes readiness for writing.

b. Developmental characteristics of children at different ages

Infants and toddlers (0 – 2+)

Infants and toddlers learn by experiencing the environment through their senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling), by physically moving around, and by being in the midst of socially responsive adults. Infants who are not mobile also absorb and organise a great deal of information about the world around them, and benefit from caregivers who carry them around and show them interesting events and people. Mobile infants and toddlers increasingly use toys, language, and other learning materials in their play. Adults play a vital socialisation role with infants and toddlers. Warm and positive relationships with adults help infants develop a sense of trust in the world around them and engender feelings of competence in them. These interactions are critical for the development of

the child's healthy self-esteem. The trusted adult becomes the secure base from which the mobile infant or toddler explores the environment. Solitary play (0–2 years) is the norm at this age. Children enjoy playing with an adult or older child but cannot interact much with peers.

Important skills are being acquired during these years, including personal-care habits such as toileting, feeding, and dressing, all of which serve as key life skills. The most appropriate teaching technique for this age group is to give ample opportunities to the child to use self-initiated repetition, to practise newly acquired skills, and to experience feelings of autonomy and success. Infants will bat at, grasp, bang, or drop their toys. Patience is essential as a toddler struggles to put on a sweater. Imitation, hiding, and naming games are also important for learning at this age. Realistic toys will enable children to engage in increasingly complex types of play.

Two-year-olds are learning to produce language rapidly. They need simple books, pictures, puzzles, music, and time and space for active play such as jumping, running, and dancing. Toddlers are beginning to acquire social skills, but in groups there should be several of the same toy because egocentric toddlers are not yet able to understand the concept of sharing.

3 to 5-year-olds

Three-year-olds love to talk and listen but they also need activity and movement, with major emphasis on large-muscle activity. They enjoy dramatic play, wheel toys and climbers, puzzles and blocks, and opportunities to talk and listen to simple stories.

Four-year-olds enjoy a greater variety of experiences and more small-motor activities such as using a pair of scissors, doing art work, playing with manipulative objects like puzzles, and cooking. They are more able to concentrate and remember as

well as recognise objects by shape, colour, or size. Four-year-olds are developing an understanding of basic mathematical concepts and problem-solving skills. At 3+ children like to play with two or three others; by 4+ they can readily participate and cooperate in activities involving five to eight children in a group, and are also ready to manage and handle group play independently.

Some 4-year-olds and most 5-year-olds combine ideas into more complex relations (for example, number concepts such as one-to-one correspondence) and have growing memory capacity and fine motor physical skills. Some 4-year-olds and most 5-year-olds display a growing interest in the functional aspects of written language, such as recognising meaningful words and trying to write their own names. Activities designed solely to teach the alphabet, phonics, and penmanship are much less appropriate for this age group than providing a print-rich environment that stimulates the development of language and literacy skills in a meaningful context.

Most 4- and 5-year-olds can go beyond the child's immediate experience of self, home, and family. Five-year-olds are developing an interest in the community and the world outside their own, and enjoy special events and trips.

6 to 8-year-olds

Six-year-olds are active and demonstrate considerable verbal ability, and develop concepts and problem-solving skills based on these experiences. By now, children are able to understand rules and play elaborate games with rules. Competitive and team games can come only after this stage has been reached. Most 6-year-olds and many 7- and 8-year-olds may be more mature mentally than physically. Therefore, hands-on activity and experimentation are more appropriate for this age group than fatiguing mechanical seatwork.

Seven-year-olds seem to need time to catch up with and practise their many newly acquired physical and cognitive skills. They become increasingly able to reason, to listen to others, and to show social give and take.

Eight-year-olds combine great curiosity with increased social interest. They are now able to learn about other, more distant peoples. During Classes I, II, and III, children can learn from the symbolic experiences of reading books and listening to stories. However, their understanding of what they read is based on their ability to relate the written word to their own experience. Primary-grade children also learn to communicate through written language, by dictating or writing stories about their own experiences or fantasies. The same is true of the development of number concepts. Children's mathematical concepts develop from their own thinking during games and real-life experiences that involve quantification, such as cooking or carpentry.

c. Nature of a child's needs

Children need the following kinds of experiences in order to attain their developmental goals:

Freedom from undue adult restraints through

- Exploration
- Experimentation
- Encouragement
- Challenge

Happiness of achievement for the individual through

- Opportunity
- Guidance
- Support
- Security and safety

Adapting to be a member of a collective by

- Cooperating
- Listening
- Sharing
- Empathising

5.3 Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers (0–2+)⁴⁹

These observations apply whether the child is in the home or in an institutional setting. In case of the former, caregivers in the family may require guidance by various means. In case of the latter, the importance of training must be reiterated.

Young children can become distressed and anxious easily. They need a more sensitive and responsive environment, and a ratio of more adults to fewer children, to provide a nurturing milieu.

ECCE settings for the very young usually need to be colourful and rich in manipulative objects or rocking toys that appeal to infants and toddlers, with careful supervision and intervention when required. Warm and responsive adults provide trust and support, creating dependable adult–child relationships. Children learn to relate to others through rich sensorial activities, which provide the base for concept formation. Infants and toddlers learn through their own experience of trial and error, repetition, imitation, and identification. An appropriate programme for under-3-year-olds invites play, active exploration, and movement within a reliable framework of routines and protection from excessive stress. Warm and supportive social relationships are a significant and essential contribution to the quality of children's experiences.

All infants are unique, and their needs and states vary from moment to moment. Adults must respond to infants' changing signals with sensitivity. Continuity and consistency in caregiving are vital. The schedules of adults must adapt to the rhythms of babies' needs. Holding and touching are determined by babies' preferences.

Within the home, the mother massages the baby, sings infant rhymes, and plays baby games that stimulate the child to distinguish the familiar face from the

stranger's face, a skill mastered by the time the baby is 9 months old.

During the later part of the first year, the child is fast producing the rudiments of linguistic sounds and needs reassurance from the language environment. Babies need to be held, spoken to, and rocked and cuddled. This also stimulates a desire for physical movement. Babies begin to understand that people and objects exist despite their short absences. Such playfulness fosters positive love relationships, motivating exploration and experimentation.

For the caregiver, whether in the home or in an institution, it is important to know that both routine and responsive acts are necessary for the everyday experience of babies. There must be visual stimulus and objects to hold and manipulate. Non-mobile children need to be held and carried around to enable them to value movement, and later exploration.

Meals should be provided at regular intervals, and health-care procedures and sleep periods worked out carefully.

In the second year of life, the infant is able to recognise people and has the beginnings of language. Conversations, picture books, and objects are an essential part in the infant's environment. Outdoor play and being with other playmates fosters curiosity and willfulness.

Two-year-olds need sand play, ball play, and many experiences of filling and pouring to allow for fine motor experiences.

Adults guide and supervise this learning by ensuring that the environment is safe and emotionally supportive. For the care and nurturance of the under-3-year-olds, adult–child interactions need to be linguistically rich and playful, allowing for active and collaborative exploration. Children sitting next to the

⁴⁹ Swaminathan, M. 1989

mother in the kitchen playing with pots and pans while the mother cooks are engaging in active play in an emotionally secure setting. In day care or other institutional settings, the careful arrangement of objects will have to be planned. The guiding principle for the under-3-year-olds is the importance of relationships with familiar adults.

5.4 Curricular Framework for 3 –5+ Children

The curriculum is the sum total of everything that happens in the classroom, and its contents can be drawn from the child's entire natural and social world. The strategies and methods to be followed by the teacher must be drawn from these basic principles, and should be adapted to the age of the child.

5.4.1 Play as the Basis for Learning

Most ECCE thinkers have in some way communicated the centrality of play to children's learning. This is because play is natural, spontaneous, attractive, enjoyable, and rewarding to children, and it is self-initiated. Children do not engage in play because of its learning outcomes, yet it has been⁵⁰ shown that play prompts growth and development in each domain of development. For example, it stimulates curiosity and exploration, leads to mastery of body control, encourages creativity and social skills, and develops emotional balance and language skills. However, parents at all levels often view play as a waste of time in opposition to learning. Hence, the term 'activity-based curriculum' is sometimes preferred to 'play-based curriculum'.

The different kinds of play activities that foster the development of skills in each domain at this stage

are summarised in Figure 5.1⁵¹. I hope this has been sent to you. It did not come with your files. At the same time, each activity addresses several domains, since all domains are interrelated and every activity has the potential to contribute to development.

ECCE settings must cater to the requirements of supervised play with objects such as balls, sand boxes, swings, and rocking toys. The play area should be appropriate for explorative activities and for gaining mastery over physical competencies. Playing on a jungle gym and spending time in walking and balancing areas will help children gain confidence. Running, jumping, and balancing are necessary for 3–5-year-olds. Free play can be both indoors as well as outdoors. Outdoor play is more beneficial for the development of gross motor skills while indoor free play such as beading, peg boards, and puzzles is largely beneficial for the development of small-muscle skills. Mechanical toys are helpful in enhancing fine motor skills. Indoor free play also provides time for play in small groups, for example, solving puzzles and engaging in doll play or other acts of imitative play.

Play can include drawing lines, dabbling in colour, and sometimes in matching-and-pairing activities. Worksheets can comprise matching familiar objects and occasionally colouring within outlines. Such activities need to be balanced with opportunities for free drawing where colours and crayons are the modes of expression.

5.4.2 The Arts as a Basis for Education

With ECCE being the foundation for initiating an interest in and forming positive attitudes towards learning, contexts of joyful expression and

⁵⁰ Piaget

⁵¹ Swaminathan, M. and Daniel, P. 2004

comprehension can be created through using the arts in many forms. The arts are integral to developing children's interests and have the propensity of naturally invoking a flow of children's responses. Time divisions should afford freedom for children to explore their desire for movement. Aesthetic experience through music and art can easily be a part of the daily routine, for example, beginning the day with songs, group movements, and physical exercise. Each day needs a song time, when children can repeat songs or rhymes.

Creative drama is a particularly enabling experience that sharpens children's gaze and observation. Drama can be introduced as a classroom resource in many different ways, such as having a doll's house where children get familiar sets to explore and the opportunity to pretend to be the people with whom they live. It allows free rein to fantasy as well as offers insights into the social and emotional areas of the children's life beyond school. Children can also have access to baskets of props (such as sandals and shoes, old pairs of spectacles, purses and bags, dupattas, walking sticks, and other safe objects) to play with and impersonate adults inhabiting their environments for the sheer joy of being 'the other'. Such opportunities lead to acts that foster curiosity, confidence, and conviviality.

If possible, children should be allowed to experience the presence of local artists. Working with artists provides a peep into the worlds of work and art. The teachers of young children must themselves be adept at using the arts in everyday transactions with children.

5.4.3 Recognition of the Special Features of Children's Thinking

The ECCE curriculum has a major impact on children's interests and performance in the later years of

schooling. Children have a natural desire and capacity to learn and to make sense of the world around them. They develop concepts about themselves and others, and the world around them, through interacting with people and real objects and by seeking solutions to concrete problems. They learn mathematics and science by pouring water into bottles, filling cups with sand, counting beads, and distributing plates for snacks. They enjoy sorting objects and arranging them in ascending or descending order. They learn about transformation in the environment by watching plants grow. The ECCE teacher needs to draw the children's attention to such acts through conversations. Children learn to communicate, express themselves, and comprehend the world around them in an atmosphere of trust. Storytelling, talking about their personal likes and dislikes, and describing their emotions and feelings are examples of children's meaning-making processes. Making such active choices and claiming the space for dialogue allows children to reflect on their acts of learning, and thus grow and mature. The ECCE teacher can help children gain self-confidence and stoke their interest in going on to the next stage of the educational system by encouraging their natural capacity to learn.

5.4.4 Blend of the Textual (Basic Literacy and Numeracy) and the Cultural

One of the complaints voiced most often about a play-based curriculum is the absence of emphasis on the teaching of the Three Rs—Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. It would be unfair to young minds at this stage to expect them to grapple with the abstract. Yet learning the vocabulary of quantity— heavy–light, more–less, few–many— and understanding the difference through activities would clarify

pre-numeracy concepts. Children can grasp these notions through games, worksheets, and other sensorial sources such as play with objects or dramatic acts. Pre-literacy involves play with shapes and sizes and learning to master fine motor skills to be able to gain mastery of neuro-muscular functions. Art activities converge with pre-literacy tasks. Children need to participate in as many activities that will promote familiarity with labels and help them identify sounds and words. Listening to stories and poems, going on field trips, looking at charts and posters— These activities are all basic to initiating an interest in reading and writing.

5.4.5 Mix of Formal and Informal Interaction

Play interspersed with sit-down activities can help channel the restlessness, energy, and active disposition

of young children. Children must feel safe and should be able to express themselves without fear of loss of identity. Such security is possible only if the child experiences familiarity. ‘Personalising the pedagogical spaces’ (or making children feel at home in the classroom) is most crucial for young children. A special time can be set aside when children are encouraged to talk about their personal preferences and choices or describe events that hold special meaning. The classroom will hold a special meaning if children are permitted to work in small groups and join together to perform a large group activity. Classrooms need to be organised so that they have both small group areas as well as ‘big circle time’ for the whole group to meet and interact. A child who wishes to work alone for some time should also have the space and freedom to do so.

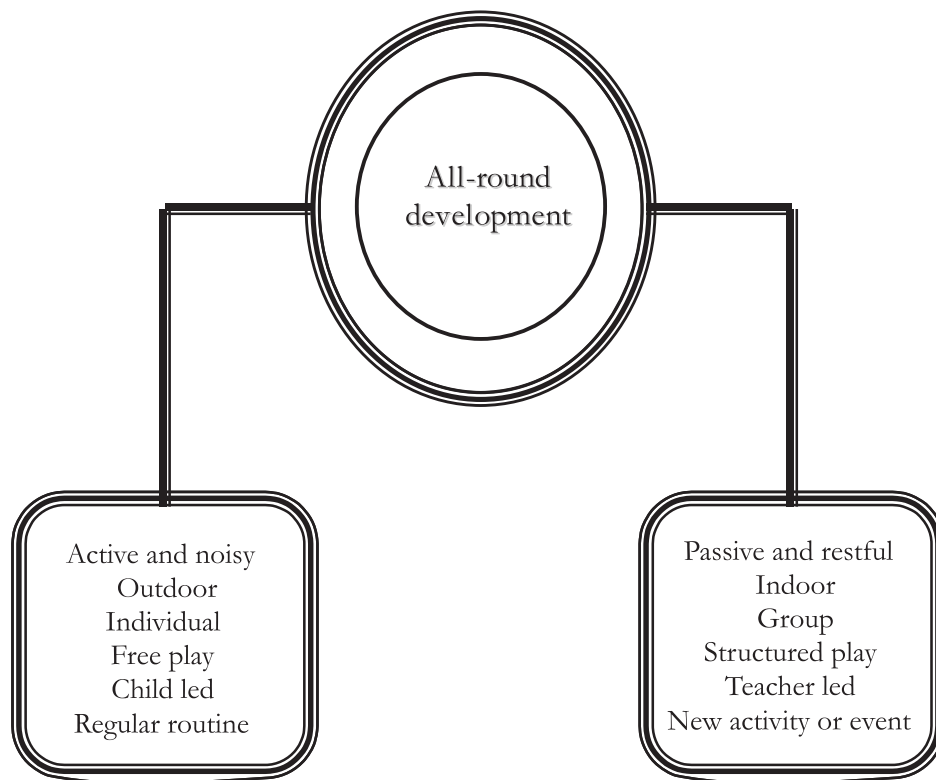


Figure 5.2 Balanced Timetable

5.4.6 Familiarity and Challenge in Everyday

Rhythms

Children need to repeat not only songs and stories but also activities. During the early years, repetition is an essential form of learning. Therefore, the daily timetable should include certain basic activities every day. (See Figure 5.2.) This gives children a sense of security. But the routines should not be rigid. They should be flexible, open to suggestions from children, able to accommodate unexpected events such as a visitor or a celebration, and be able to adapt to children's changing attention spans and shifting moods. Variety is basic to any activity that seeks to challenge.

5.4.7 Primacy of Experience, Not Expertise

The ECCE classroom must be lively and offer wide-ranging activities for children to be intellectually curious. Often the inputs tend to be guided by anxiety about what the children may not be able to accomplish. It is true that we cannot advise embroidery as a task, yet children can learn to see that fabrics have many textures and colours. Children need to experience a diverse range of activities such as songs and music, and learn about different people's dresses, food habits, celebration of festivals, etc. Awareness about social diversity is of special significance for teaching tolerance and inculcating attitudes of peace in multicultural contexts. A multilingual classroom is a rich resource in this regard, and can be drawn upon by the teacher.

5.4.8 Use of Local Materials, Arts, and Knowledge

One of the easiest tasks for any ECCE teacher is to pick up leaves, pebbles, and flower petals from the ground and use them for sorting activities according

to colour, shape, or size. Rangoli, kolam, and alpana are floor arts prevalent in different regions of India, and children can be helped to use the materials creatively. Local languages assign different names/ words for common objects. Such knowledge can also foster tolerance through learning about different language registers. Both in rural areas as well as in metropolitan contexts children can gain a great deal by being exposed to local arts and crafts, stories and folk tales, songs and language variations. The inclusion of these elements makes the ECCE setting an extension of the community. Such experiences enhance children's social competence and awareness about the socio-cultural backgrounds of different people. At the same time, children in rural preschools should not be deprived of opportunities to use contemporary materials such as crayons and paints or the chance to learn popular songs.

5.4.9 Developmentally Appropriate Practices

The practices need to cover all areas of development—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive—and to be linguistically rich in ways that are age related, individually appropriate, as well as contextually meaningful. Learning activities must be concrete, real, and relevant to the lives of children as learning is an interactive process. The organisation of learning should be multicultural as well as sensitive to gender and caste/ethnic concerns. A flexible approach will lead to plural and context-specific curricular models reflecting the enormous social, cultural, ecological, economic, and linguistic diversity of our country. Above all, the curriculum has to be transacted by the teacher, and the significance of the teacher's role and guidance cannot be over emphasised⁵².

⁵² Vygotsky

5.4.10 Health, Well-being, and Healthy Habits

The ECCE setting can orient children to life-skills learning such as keeping clean teeth and nails, washing behind the ears and between toes, as well as create awareness about indicators of poor health and avoidance of certain practices. Children in the 3 to 8 age group are in the process of forming habits. Teaching children healthy habits is equipping them with attitudes of self-care and clean living, and encouraging them to develop self-monitoring competencies.

The noon meal is an opportunity not only for providing nutrition but, more importantly, for sitting together, sharing food, and eating in a pleasant atmosphere. Whether the food is provided under the Noon Meal scheme, or cooked in common, or whether the children bring their own food from home, this is a unique opportunity for social as well as cognitive and language learning. Names of plants and vegetable ingredients, identification of the different kinds of tastes, and personal preferences and likes and dislikes can form topics of discussion. The social learning of caring and sharing, and of overcoming social barriers by sitting together, is equally important.

5.5 Other Issues Regarding 3 – 5+ Children

5.5.1 Parents and the Community

Parents must be familiar with the routine of the ECCE programme. Reports on children's progress and their daily rhythms can be made known through parent–teacher meetings, or home visits. Special times must be set aside for parents who wish to know about their children's classroom routines. The ECCE centre must ensure the involvement of parents in their children's interests and choices, and maintain close relations with the community and community leaders. This is important both from the perspective of child

development as well as securing community support for the centre.

5.5.2 Adult–Child Interactions

- Be alert and responsive, offering warmth and guidance, rather than being instructive and stern.
- Allow children to express themselves through conversation; encourage them to voice their thoughts.
- Facilitate successful completion of tasks.
- Build self-esteem among children by encouraging them in their social interactions and manner of communication.
- Accept, respect, and comfort children because this is crucial to their self-concept.

5.5.3 Evaluation

Careful monitoring of children's progress needs to be done through continuous and consistent observation. No quantitative assessment or use of standardised test is recommended. In fact, it is prohibited. Children should not be tested or subjected to oral interviews in order to pass or move to higher settings of learning in the early years.

Teachers can write about children's participation in classroom routines and their skills in getting along with others, both children and adults. A checklist for the observation of behaviour and skills can be created to keep track of the progress of the child in the major domains of growth.

5.5.4 Language in the Classroom

The language of interaction and communication in the ECCE setting would normally be the child's 'first' language, or home language, since it is obvious that the young child can only grasp concepts and express herself in a language that is familiar to her. In most cases, this may be the regional language or the school

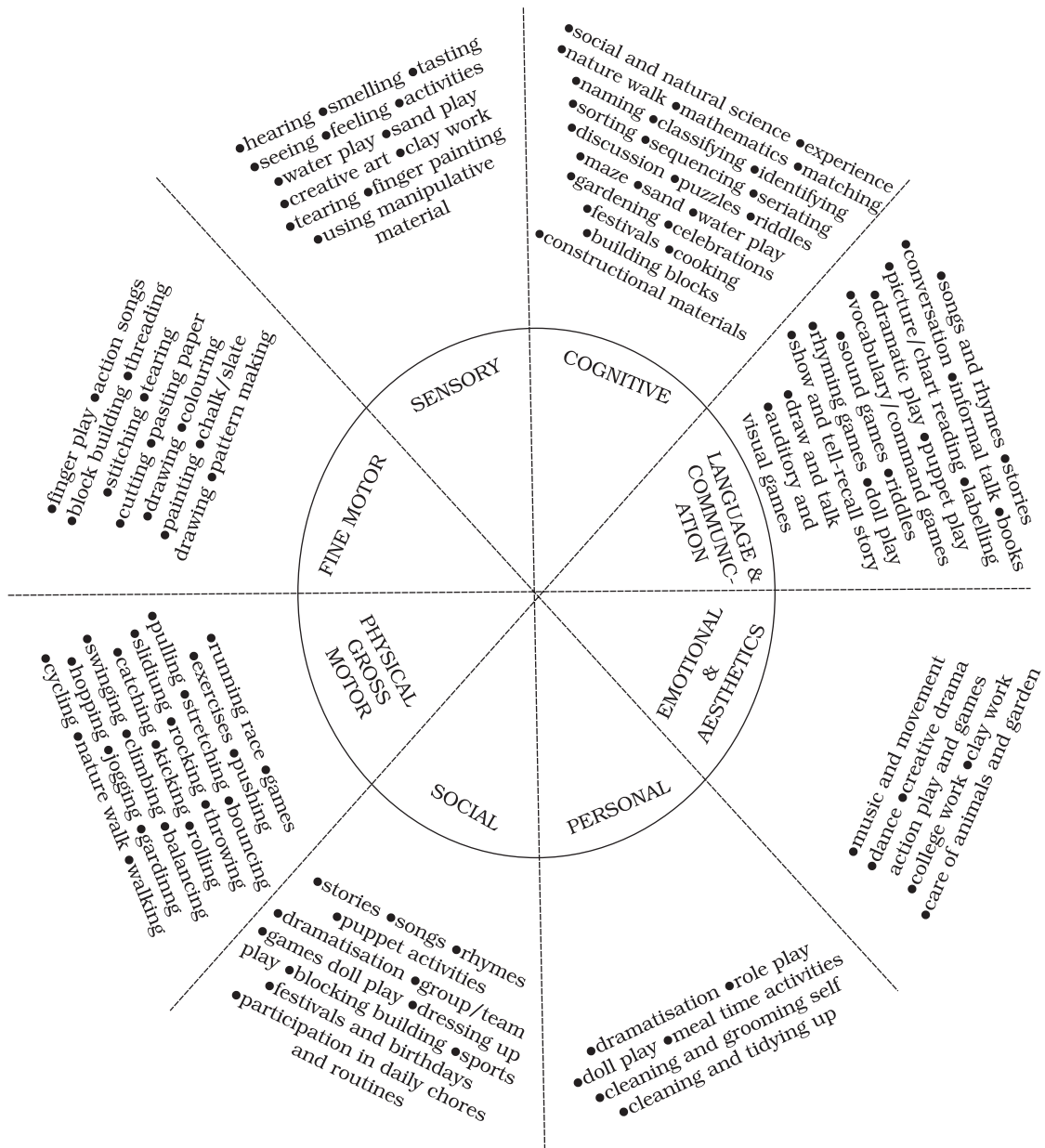


Figure 5.1 Suggested Play-Based Activities

Source: Play Activities for child Development: A Guide to Preschool Teachers. Mina Swaminathan and Prema Daniel National Book Trust, New Delhi. 2004

language, which will be the medium of instruction from Class I onwards. However, if there are children in the group who come from different language backgrounds, or who are more familiar with one language than another, or who can speak one language but only understand another, then these years are the best time to help children learn to understand (or use) more than one language, and at the same time to adjust themselves gradually to the language that will be the medium of instruction later. This can be done by providing a rich linguistic environment, encouraging children to speak in their own language while also learning the languages of each other, and playing together in small groups where they can easily pick up words from each other. This also fosters respect and tolerance for other languages.

If the teacher knows more than one language, it would be helpful. If not, she should make a genuine effort to pick up at least a few words from the children with different home languages, which will give them a sense of acceptance and emotional security, especially in the first few weeks. Since language at this stage is largely oral, and language activities appear in the natural sequence of listening and speaking, to be followed later by pre-reading and pre-writing activities, this should not be difficult. As the year goes by, the teacher should make efforts to speak more consistently in the regional/school language and encourage the children to do the same, so that they will be fully prepared for entry to Class I. Belonging to different language groups, and knowing multiple languages, should be a matter of pride and joy rather than a cause for isolation or low self-esteem.

If there is a social demand for it, and if the teacher is well prepared and confident of her ability to handle spoken English, then it can be introduced as a second language even at this stage. However, much depends

on the teacher's knowledge of spoken English, and her training and orientation, and it should not be forced on those who are not prepared for it. Forcing children to repeat by rote something that neither they nor the teacher understand is contrary to the whole spirit of ECCE.

5.4.5 Inclusive Education

An inclusive education will ensure that all children have unimpeded and supportive opportunities to participate in activities, belong to peer groups, and still receive the individualised attention that they need in order to acquire developmental skills. From the child-rights perspective, the State must ensure that no child is rejected because of disability and that the child with disability gets an opportunity to attend programmes in the school or the community. To ensure this goal, the Government of India has passed the Persons with Disability Act, 1995. But there is still no clear understanding of what kind of education will work in the Indian context—special education in special schools, or education in normal schools with resource centres, or complete inclusion with only occasional special classes. Some educationists feel that children with severe and profound impairment will require special education, at least up to the pre-primary level.

Considering the realities of ECCE in India, the following actions may be initiated as a first step:

- Existing ECCE programmes should be made accessible to children who are differently abled.
- ECCE teachers should be trained and must have the necessary skills to identify differently abled children.
- Referral services should be easily available.
- Parent support programmes should be organised through ECCE centres.

5.6 Curriculum in the Early Primary Grades, 6–8+ Children

At this stage, children need help in getting gradually accustomed to the formal routines of the school as well as in learning the basics of literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy (understanding and applying mathematical concepts and gaining systematic knowledge of the social and natural environment). That is why it is suggested that the basic principles already outlined here should be applied to develop the curriculum for the first two years of primary school. This would help in the transition to a different stage of education; it has to be done by curriculum designers and teachers at the primary level. The following guidelines are suggested:

Goals for Teachers

- Develop knowledge and skills in all areas of development.
- Help children learn how to learn.
- Respect individual patterns and timings of learning.
- Understand individual differences and learning styles.

Strategies for Classroom Interactions

- Provide concrete experiences.
- Teach through peer interaction.
- Encourage cooperative learning.
- Use the project method to initiate integrated learning.
- Work for the active involvement of children.
- Utilise drama for language teaching.

Teacher–Child Relationships

- Allow children to express their feelings.
- Share their trials and triumphs.
- Be responsive and reach out to children.

Ultimately, even the best curriculum can be transacted only by a trained and sensitive teacher. To make a success story of ECCE from 0 to 8 years, a new type of teacher is required, one who is professionally trained and specifically sensitised to the perspectives of child development. The professional preparation of teachers for this stage, hitherto unplanned and uncared for, calls for thoughtful planning of training sequences relevant to the developmental needs of early childhood.

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