

## **Asia Regional Learning Through Play (LTP) Conference 2008**

### **Introduction**

The All-India Learning Through Play (LTP) Conference was held at The Bala Mandir Resource Centre, Chennai, on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2008. The Conference brought together partner organisations of the LTP Programme across India as well as international representatives from The Hincks-Dellcrest Centre, Canada, and Pakistan.

The theme of the Conference was "The Tao of Schooling". Distinguished guests from various schools as well as Government and Non-Government Organisations spoke on a range of issues relating to School Readiness.

The Conference was also a platform for the release of 2 Bala Mandir Research Foundation (BMRF) publications linked to the LTPC: *Seed to a Banyan Tree* and *A Guide Book for Parenting*.

### **Presentations**

#### **1. Methods of Montessori - Ms. Uma Shankar, Centre for Montessori Training**

Thinking for themselves  
Adapting the learning environment  
Own pace of learning

#### **Thinking for themselves**

- Homo Sapiens - The "wise or knowing Man" is naturally a thinker.
- The Child has the natural tendency to think.
- At the pre-school level, we should provide opportunities to nurture this ability.
- Traditionally we believe that we have to teach them to think!

#### **The Environment that Encourages Thinking:**

- Freedom to make choices - To work, to move, to talk, to observe, etc.
- Respect shown by the adult in listening to the child.
- Accepting the child and his work without criticism.
- Allowing the child to experience success and failure.

**Activities that Promote Thinking:**

- When the child chooses to pour water, he has to think about the activity and bring all the materials required to do the activity.
- He then has to check his work and see if he has done it correctly.
- He has to set it right, by mopping-up the spilt water if necessary.

**Scientific Approach:**

- If he is grading the Pink Tower, he has to observe the cubes, compare them and choose the biggest.
- He then has to find the next biggest and so on.
- He verifies the work he has done and corrects it if necessary.
- The mental image of the way in which the tower is displayed serves as a control for error.

**Social Responsibility:**

- If the material is not available, the child has to decide what he is going to do.
- He can wait for it to be put back by:
  - Sitting and observing his friend at work.
  - Choosing another material.
  - Or negotiating to get his friend to put it back.

**Creativity:**

- Children use their creativity with the materials and work with them in different ways.

**Imagination:**

- Between 3 - 6 years, we believe that children need stories based on reality.
- They are becoming aware of the world around them.
- Stories should be woven with imagination and creativity on the part of the adult.
- Children love listening to stories about themselves and their parents as children.

**Fantasy:**

- Fairy tales have all the elements of what is appealing to a child.
- We use these elements to create our own stories based on reality or what is possible.
- Children are ready for fantasy stories at around age 6 when they can differentiate between reality and fantasy.

**Arithmetic:**

- The materials take the child from the concrete to the abstract in a systematic manner, thus laying a solid foundation in mathematical concepts.

**The Child's Needs:**

- To work with his hands and senses.
- To move around with space.
- To have available meaningful or purposeful activities.

**Adapting the Learning Environment**

- Preparing the environment.
- Materials that will aid development and adapting them to the local culture.
- Displaying the materials in a way that children can independently take them.
- Maintaining the materials i.e. clean, complete and intact.
- Presenting the materials to the child according to his development.

**Space:**

- 35 children - 120 sq. ft.
- The adult needs to be creative to organise a working environment in any available space!
- We cannot let constraints of space defeat us.
- "For the want of a nail, a shoe was lost..."

**Our Mission:**

- Fighting for the rights of the Child wherever there is a need...Including space!!!!

**Own Pace of Learning**

- To trust that the child wants to learn.
- To accept that children learn at their own pace.
- To celebrate the differences that make our work challenging.

**Motor Preparation for Writing:**

- All the activities that the child does from the time of using his hands, strengthen them for writing.

- Holding, lifting, folding, carrying, etc.
- Holding the knobs of the Cylinder Blocks.
- Tracing the tactile material develops lightness of touch.
- Tracing geometrical shapes.
- Shaking Noise Boxes develops agility of wrist movements.

### **Intellectual Preparation for Writing and Reading:**

- Developing Spoken language through conversation classes, stories, songs and rhymes.
- Sand Paper Letters.
- Moveable Alphabet.
- Variety of Language Activities.

### **Reward and Punishment:**

- To see that both are two sides of the same coin.
- To realise that punishments cause loss of self-esteem in the child.
- Rewards on the other hand offer short-lived gratification and make the child dependent on them.

### **Strategies for Parent-Teacher Interaction:**

- It has to be a Partnership between parents and teachers, with a common goal of helping the child in his development.
- Parenting workshops.
- Sharing of developmental needs of the child.
- Suggesting ways of interaction at home.

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## **2. Methods of Froebel – Ms. Shakuntala Sharma, Children's Garden School**

The Garden of Children

Approving creativity and motor expression

Open to local children

### **Questions & Answers**

Q1. How are children prepared for reading, writing and arithmetic?

A. We adopt Sense Training Materials for developing and enhancing the pre-reading and writing ability of the child e.g. Lotto for reading, cylinders and other materials with pegs for writing, and number peg board for arithmetic.

Q2. What are the rewards and punishments for children?

A. Our mentor Ms. Ellen Sharma never believed in punishing children. Hence we do not sanction any form of punishment or the use of negative words, such as no, don't or never. We believe in generally encouraging children by words of appreciation. We also do not follow any ranking system.

Q3. How can the methods be used for approximately 35 children in an area of 120 sq. ft.?

A. The Play Way Method is the best option for any trained teacher to attract the attention of all the children so the question of space does not arise. In classes we do not use desks while mats may be used.

Q4. Fantasy, imagination and creativity - Are they important for children?

A. Yes, these are important for children and are expressed through puppetry, dance, music and role-play.

Q5. What are some of the key strategies for parent-teacher interactions?

A.

- A teacher should always be willing to interact with the parent.
- We should not take the negative points of the child to the parent.
- Teachers should be aware of the child's health problems if any, as well as his likes and dislikes so as to understand the child better.
- Strong, positive links between the school and parents helps in successfully dealing with difficult situations.
- Frequent, positive contact between the school and home ultimately benefits the child.

### **The Garden of Children - Methods of Froebel**

- Froebel's ideas were developed not by experience, but by deduction from the nature of man, and were thus attuned to the concept of true human development.
- Froebel opened his first "kindergarten" or Garden of Children - enclosures in which young human plans are nurtured.

- The child is not an adult but a being by himself with a different way of seeing things and learning.
- Froebel believed that the greatest happiness and consequently the fullest development of the child came through play, music, games, contact with nature and occupation involving self-activity.
- This system, which he called the "kindergarten", produces fantastic results with one who understands it, but without its ideals is like a plant, which has neither seen the sun nor has been watered.

### **Accepting Creativity and Motor Expression**

- Almost every subject in the curriculum can be taught in such a way as to stimulate and develop imagination.
- According to Froebel, any occupation which children delight in is play to them.
- The function of the educator is that of "benevolent" superintendence. He thus limits the action of the education but greatly extends the action of those educated.
- The prominence which Froebel gave to action, that man learns through "self-activity", has produced great changes in educational methods.

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### **3. Health Aspects of a Pre-school Child - Ms. Veda Zachariah, Sanjivini Trust**

Teaching healthy habits

Attention to detail

Observing behaviour

#### **To Ensure Growth and Development**

- Regular food habits.  
(A hungry child is a "cranky" child. Playful and distracted children do not eat enough).
- Balanced meals - Avoid junk foods.

- Nutritious snacks.
- Prevent development of "food fads".
- Toilet training - This should have been done by the time the child enters pre-school.
- Regular bowel movements.
- Occasionally the child might have accidents - This should not be reprimanded as it can have traumatic effects.
- Maintenance of hygiene - Small children are prone to infections as they play.
- Regular bathing, grooming and changing of clothes.
- Washing hands before meals, and after using the toilet should be ensured.
- Oral hygiene - Teach brushing of teeth.
- Teach children not to put fingers in their mouth.
- Keep nails clean and short.
- Children are prone to cough and cold, ear infections, diarrhea and worm infestations.
- Ensure adequate rest and sleep - Avoid late nights and have regular bed times.

#### **Good Behaviour Means:**

- Respect for elders / authority figures.
- Sensitive to others' needs.
- Good manners.
- Parents need to be consistent in guidance and behaviour.
- Parents have to set good examples.

#### **Attention to Detail**

- Poor eating and losing weight.
- Constipation / diarrhea.
- Frequent colds and coughs, chronic ear infections.
- Lack of sleep.
- Overexposure to the sun.
- Exposure to bad language.
- Exposure to family violence.
- Physical abuse - Beating, starving.
- Emotional abuse, sexual abuse.
- Discrimination due to gender and colour.
- Ensure regular booster immunisation.
- Provide a safe setting to play, with no hazardous materials around.

- Children can hurt each other accidentally - Adults to be watchful.
- Monitor exposure to the television and computer.
- Teach children about the dangers of talking to strangers.
- Avoid undue punishments and criticisms at all times.

### **Observing Behaviour**

- Thumb sucking - Feeling insecure.
- Bed wetting - Feeling insecure.
- Nose picking, nail biting - Nervousness, fear, anxiety.
- Fear - Traumatic experience.
- Left-handedness.
- Hyperactivity.
- Temper tantrums.
- Jealousy.
- Grief.

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## **4. The Adapted Learning Through Play Calendar (ADLTPC) - Ms. Anne Panghat, Bala Mandir Research Foundation**

### **Efficacy of the ADLTPC**

- The ADLTPC has helped to include all children.
- The messages and pictures in the tool make it easy for professionals, care-givers, community workers and parents to use.
- The splitting up of the different domains in the ADLTPC makes assessment easier for users.
- Pre-school teachers have found the tool to be very useful in understanding the needs of the child before he learns formal reading, writing and math.
- The ADLTPC has helped in:
  - Parent information, education and guidance.
  - Methodology.
  - Understanding that all children are unique and develop differently.

- Each picture illustrates:
  - What children feel at that age and the activities they do, or need to do, at that age.
  - How to take the child to the next level.
  - The methodology for attaining the required skills.
  
- Practical uses and settings:
  - First generation learners.
  - Pre-schools - Understanding readiness for formal schooling.
  - Bridging gaps in development.
  - Understanding developmental delay due to lack of stimulation.
  - Understanding the adolescent.
  - Parents and teachers.

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## **5. Preparing the Child for School - Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)**

### **Objectives - ICDS:**

- Improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age group 0-6 years.
- Develop cognitive skills and motor development in children.
- Educate mothers in better nutritional and child care practices.

### **Components:**

- Ensure nutrition through:
  - Supplementary feeding for children and mothers (including growth monitoring).
- Range of Health Services:
  - Immunisation, health check-up, micro nutrient supplementation.
- Cognitive and motor development through:
  - Pre-school education.
- Education of mothers by:
  - Nutrition and Health Education (Child care and feeding practices).

### **Strategies & Processes:**

- Good nutrition delivery systems in place.
- Good health outreach services.
- Strong workforce for pre-school education and other services.
- Three-tier monitoring system.

**Status:**

- Mechanical supply of ready-made food for children below 3 years.
- Poor quality rice and cereals, untidy storage bins, broken scales, and inadequate or nil supply of de-worming and Vitamin A tablets.
- De-motivated workers and helpers.
- No customised training.
- Routine visits of supervisors.
- Absence of quality control mechanisms.
- Poor monitoring.
- Quality, reach and participation inadequate.
- Absence of focus on the child's nutritional outcomes.
- Lack of focus on service delivery.
- Lack of synergy between growth monitoring, health and nutrition.
- Nutrition main and only agenda.
- No focus on pre-school component.
- So called "thematic approach" stops with reciting rhymes and repeating the alphabet.
- No training to monitor cognitive and emotional development.
- Unused toys and materials.
- Replacement of toys and materials not need based but norms based, and hence quality suffers.
- Absence of sound pedagogical intent and practice.
- Lack of skills training for workers.

**Opportunities:**

- 50,000 centers, 1,250,000 children.
- Rs. 1.69 per child per day on nutrition alone.
- Rs. 150 crore allocation.
- 100,000 women workers (local persons).
- Adequate hardware in place.
- 16,000 Panchayats with 33% women presidents.
- Proximity to schools - Physically and psychologically.
- Excellent organisational and work culture.
- Good logistics system for delivery of materials i.e. eggs.

**Going Forward:**

- Adopt different models.
- Develop appropriate pedagogy.
- Draw ICDS Vision for State and develop indicators to achieve them.

- Design good monitoring systems, focusing on quality and processes, rather than solely quantity based MIS.
- Focus on issues in each component.
- Study and adopt Montessori practices (Ramachandra Trust).
- Develop community monitoring.
- Make workers and staff accountable.
- Create working model centers in every block.
- Government schools have improved substantially. Private schools?

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