

Asia Regional Learning Through Play Conference 2010

Introduction

The Asia Regional Learning Through Play (LTP) Conference, organised by The Bala Mandir Research Foundation (BMRF), was held at Harrisons Hotel, Chennai on 27th-29th September 2010. The theme of the conference was "How Children Learn: Windows Into Parenting". The conference was informal, informative and interactive, consisting of presentations, research findings and dynamic group discussions. There was also a dedicated exhibition area for each of the organisations to display their materials, projects and activities.

The international delegation comprised of representatives from Hincks-Dellcrest, Canada as well as Afghanistan and Philippines. (Pakistan was unfortunately unable to attend). The India delegation included consultants, special educators and BMRF's partner organisations from 4 States - Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

The conference saw the launch of the BMRF website on Parenting and the release of two new publications; "Through the Lens of Culture" by S. Anandalakshmy and "Insights into Childhood from a Tamil Tradition" compiled by Lakshmi Gopal, which form the first in the BMRF Monograph Series and Culture Series respectively.

A Tracer Study meeting was held concurrently at the BMRF Resource Centre with representatives and field workers from Mumbai Mobile Crèches and SEWA. A 2-day field visit to Nagercoil was organised for the visiting delegates after the conference.

Day I - 27 September 2010

Inaugurating the Conference

The conference was inaugurated with a traditional lighting of the lamp and a prayer by Maya Gaitonde, BMRF.

Andrew Reesor-McDowell, Hincks-Dellcrest, delivered the inaugural address, drawing on the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) and LTP. He reflected on the partnership between BMRF and

Hincks-Dellcrest, which began in 1997 and has since grown, adapted and translated back into learnings for the parent organisation.

He focused on 3 important factors:

- Holistic child development across physical, language, social, emotional and cognitive environments.
- A strong economic case for ECD.
- Strong interpersonal relationships and organisational partnerships.

Initiating the Topic

S. Anandalakshmy, BMRF, launched the conference and welcomed all the participants. She highlighted a few predominant issues; firstly that the concept of parenting goes beyond just the parents. Secondly, she touched on the importance of the preschool environment and our understanding of the brain. The brain serves more than a solely cognitive function; it controls everything including emotional development. Thirdly, many of the essentials of child development are similar and common across all groups. Differences do exist but should be looked at in context. Fourthly, she highlighted the value of the Learning through Play Calendar (LTPC) in putting into simple pictures what child development experts have struggled to convey in words. Lastly, she spoke of the importance of connectedness and sharing, which helps to empower and hold people together. She recounted that some women whom she had visited in a village in Uttaranchal observed long ritual fasts, as it made them feel connected to their traditions. The sun, moon and planets guided their observances and they felt governed by forces in the cosmos.

Introducing Participants

Indu Balagopal, BMRF, conducted a short game called "Air Parenting" to introduce all the participants. All participants had been given a 'boarding card' in their conference kits with a designated seat number. Everyone was called to 'board' in order of their seat number and introduce themselves based on the mnemonic - PICNIC:

- P - Place
- I - Institution
- C - Country
- N - Name
- I - In Charge Of

C - Core Nature

The game was a fun and informal way for all the participants to get to know one another.

Indicating BMRF's Vision of Parenting

Usha Ramakrishnan, BMRF, presented the first topic of the conference, which was the Network for Information on Parenting (NIP), with reference to the NIP pamphlet. She broadly defined the Network as the result of many shared, collective voices with a common aim of "redefining parenting". She explained the various facets of the Network - what it is about, its objectives and membership, and highlighted 4 fundamental parenting concepts / dimensions.

- Holistic development of children:
This was illustrated through the 6 domains of SPRUCE - Sense of self, physical growth, relationships, understanding, communication and environment.
- Life cycle approach to parenting:
The life cycle approach identifies 4 cyclical stages of parenting - welcoming the infant, nurturing the child, raising the adolescent and planning for parenthood. Parenting styles have to change and adapt with each stage.
- Parenting includes:
 - P - Pappa
 - A - Amma
 - R - Relatives
 - E - Elders
 - N - Neighbours
 - T - Teachers
 - S - Society
- Nurturing the child involves:
 - C - Communication
 - H - Health
 - I - Intelligence
 - L - Life skills
 - D - Defining self

R	-	Relationships
E	-	Environment
N	-	Nutrition

Inducting Many Countries

Rochelle Fine, Hincks-Dellcrest, gave the Canada presentation on the LTP International Project. She began with an overview of the Science of LTP, the LTP methodology and LTP resources (in addition to the LTP Calendars).

The focus of the presentation was the implementation of the project worldwide. Hincks-Dellcrest works by invitation through partnerships with international Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). Its partnerships, financial and non-financial, span across various countries and continents around the world.

Individual case studies were presented to highlight unique adaptations based on the country's local context. In Peru, an interesting "ripple effect" was observed based on the training of preschool programme coordinators in the Region. The Uganda Chapter of LTP has formed community LTP training committees with the support of Master Trainers. A unique model developed in El Salvador has been working with incarcerated parents, mostly women, enabling them to raise their children for the first 5 years.

A video clip was shown on focus groups with LTP Community Trainers and parents in Kenya to highlight the impact of LTP. Preliminary findings of focus groups conducted in 12 project countries show that there are significant cross cultural commonalities in the outcomes of the programme and that many LTP concepts are universal.

Q&A

1. Rochelle mentioned that participants could see the complete DVD for a fuller overview of the LTP International Project.
2. Minaxi Shukla, CHETNA, asked about the uses of LTP in different environments, such as children with special needs (HIV) and/or man-made or natural calamities.

> Andrew gave a few examples of unique LTP environments such as Uganda (HIV), El Salvador (War and natural disasters) and India (Tsunami). He added that the components of LTP are universal and the core issue, in any environment, is the relationship / attachment between the parent and child.

3. Lakshmi Krishnamurthi, Consultant, asked how differences seen in each country have helped or translated back into action in Canada.

> Andrew replied that a formal study is currently being done on each country's findings, based on a thematic approach, and that he would be happy to circulate the same once it is published.

He noted that each country has been given the freedom to experiment with LTP in their own way and, in many cases, have added their own environment to the pictures i.e. with Asian instead of Western looking people.

Including Afghanistan

Smriti Sharma of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Afghanistan delivered a presentation on "Preparing for Learning through Play - An Afghan Experience". The Aga Khan Foundation, Afghanistan is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network, which works internationally in approximately 20 countries, mainly in Asia and Africa, in a variety of areas. AKF, Afghanistan is involved with community-based approaches to enhance Early Childhood Development, and is preparing to implement the LTP curriculum as part of its Parenting Programme by early 2011.

A brief introduction was given on the specific situation of Afghanistan, and the impact of decades of violence, instability and conflict on familial relationships and parent-child interaction. It was observed that there is little knowledge or attention paid to the psycho-social development of children as most parents are concerned with the basics; survival, safety, health and academics.

This was followed by a synopsis of AKF's Parenting Programme, its successes, challenges and future plans. The programme, started in 2009, comprises 75 community-based preschools as well as an adult literacy component, reaching out to 3 Provinces in central and north-eastern Afghanistan.

Successes:

- Completion of Phase I - Home-Based Activities.
- Only such intervention in these Regions.
- Anecdotal evidence of positive impact.
- Mothers' attendance of meetings.

Contextual Challenges:

- Social resistance to change. An important learning is that we need to understand where people are coming from and contextualise information accordingly. For example, in Afghanistan it is very important to frame things within the Islamic viewpoint for ease of uptake.
- Fear of agenda.
- Opposition to "Western" influences.
- Conflict.
- Poverty.
- Rural areas / marginalised communities.
- Programmatic and organisational issues.

Challenges Faced:

- Low literacy levels. Importantly, this was not regarded as a problem with the mothers but as a challenge for the trainers to improve their delivery skills accordingly.
- Reaching fathers.
- Community Trainer recruitment.
- Timing and length of sessions.
- Movement / migration of people and communities.

Targets for the future included the implementation of the LTP curriculum across its network and strengthening of the ECD Programme through the use of media, etc.

The presentation was beautifully concluded with some photos of the landscape and of mothers and children reached through the Programme.

Q&A

1. Lakshmi asked Abdul Wakil of AKF how he personally felt about the involvement of men and fathers.

> Abdul replied that it would take a long time to realise as early childcare is still perceived to be the woman's responsibility and not many men are

interested in their role as fathers beyond that of "provider". This is inherent in their culture.

Personally, there has been a significant change in his own life as he now spends much more time with the family.

Lakshmi then asked if his friends mock him. He replied that his friends tease him by calling him a name in Afghan basically meaning "sissy".

2. It was asked if AKF had explored working with any existing local, women's groups to help them reach out to the community.

> Smriti replied that there are some local groups, such as community based savings groups, but they generally have their own agenda or work.

3. Indu asked if AKF had tried reaching out to the older children in the family who are often the ones 'parenting' the younger children.

> Smriti replied that they had not but that it was a good idea.

4. Referring to studies / work done with religious groups, Maya pointed out that many positive influences can be found by looking into each religion's own scriptures, such as the role of elders. She noted that it is also often easier to reach out to grandparents, which then has a trickle down effect.

> Smriti concurred and noted that to carry out any work in Afghanistan, it is necessary to first approach the local Mullah.

5. Rochelle gave an example of the West Indies where parenting sessions are conducted in the barbershop to reach out to fathers. She highlighted the importance of thinking out of the box, and going to where your target group is rather than waiting for them to come to you.

6. Smriti thanked all the participants for their inputs and said that they had gained many valuable new ideas to take away with them.

Illustrating Good Parenting Practices in the Philippines

Prescilla Madella, Aldersgate College, gave a presentation on Learning through Play in the Philippines. She began with a brief introduction on Aldersgate College, the Project Sponsor. Aldersgate is a Christian Community College with various Undergraduate and Graduate Schools as well as Research and Development Centres. The Integrated Child Development Centre (ICDC) is in charge of implementing the LTP programme.

An overview was given of the methods of implementation and partnership activities, as well as LTP project successes, challenges and impact. Methods and activities included awareness programmes, LTP training, translation of the LTPC into 3 local dialects, integration of the LTP curriculum and networking / partnerships. The basic partnership model has been to work with groups that are already well organised. It was noted that most Methodist Churches in the Philippines have a Kindergarten, making them easy to reach.

Successes:

- Parents becoming more conscious of how they talk and act in front of their children.
- Increased overall awareness of LTP.
- Positive results observed in the children.

Challenges:

- Involving fathers - Cultural stereotypes.
- Engaging grandparents - Prevalence of traditional practices.
- Difficult circumstances.

Many positive results were observed based on the programme on children, parents and families.

An interesting parting observation was that the teaching of parenting skills is becoming increasingly important in an environment where parents are becoming younger every year, and in many cases are still children themselves.

Q&A

1. Minaxi asked if any changes had been observed in the children as they progressed through school.

> Prescilla replied that no formal study had been undertaken in this regard as they were still in the early stages of implementation.

2. Lakshmi asked if Prescilla had experienced any personal change in her life.

> Prescilla replied that she had changed and benefited in many ways, and has become a better grandparent as a result.

3. It was put forward that grandmothers do have a lot of useful knowledge, and that it may be more effective to include or incorporate some of the practices that have a positive impact.

> Prescilla explained that their approach has always been to encourage practices that complement LTP, and teach parents to evaluate 'why' they do something. She noted that many practices are followed solely because of tradition or superstition.

Interacting with Parents using Innovative Tools and Methodologies

Maya Gaitonde, BMRF, launched the afternoon session with an overview of the LTP programme in India. This was followed by individual presentations on working with the Bala Mandir Institution, NGOs and Schools in India.

A. BMRF

Maya began the presentation by commemorating Bala Mandir's 60 years of working with children in difficult circumstances. She highlighted that Parenting is a Rights Issue i.e. the child has the Right to an informed parent and the parent has the Right to information on child development.

The LTP project in India consists of 5 main branches - the Bala Mandir Institution, Government, NGOs, Teachers and Parents. It was observed that Kindergarten teachers have an increasingly critical role to play in early childcare with the rising incidence of working mothers.

An overview was given of the methods of implementation and main activities, as well as LTP project successes, challenges and impact. Methods of implementation included orientation and training, translation of the LTPC and support materials into various regional languages and the setting-up of a Resource Centre for parents, voluntary organisations and professionals.

The LTP programme in India has been expanded largely through partnerships and linkages with Government and NGOs. It is currently present in 4 States - Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat. BMRF aims to extend the programme to Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal by end 2010 with the support of strong partners in these States.

BMRF has developed various tools and resources based on the LTPC, as well as conducted in-depth action research and studies. A distinguishing aspect of its studies has been the impact of ECCD in the *institutional* care of children. A Tracer Study is also being carried out to assess the impact of LTP.

Since 2004, the LTPC training programme has been modified from 5 to 6 days to include Early Identification of Delays. Various innovative and interactive methods were shown of disseminating messages to the community, such as street plays, parenting songs and learning with children. It was noted that trainers need to be sensitive to cultural practices, and that there is no such thing as negative parenting; only practices that have a negative effect which parents should be made aware of.

Successes:

- Implementation of LTP across different parenting groups and environments.
- Increased outreach and acceptance of LTP across India.
- Integration of LTP into other programmes.
- Development of a Guide Book for the Early Childhood Years relevant to the Indian context.

Challenges:

- Sustainability of community projects.
- Development of Master Trainers.
- Challenging conventional mind-sets.
- Qualitative data analysis and assessment.

The LTP project in India has had substantial impact across various parameters, including parents' understanding of child development, the parent-child relationship and the parenting role. There have also been many positive changes observed in families, children and parents.

Activity

An exercise was conducted to illustrate the uses and applications of the Flash Cards tool developed by BMRF. The Flash Cards are a set of colour-coded picture cards based on the 14 stages of the LTPC.

Each group was given a set of Cards and asked to separate out the ones which had a father and child in them. The exercise helped to simply illustrate the role of fathers/males in the LTPC.

It was observed that when people are presented with only pictures without words, it opens their minds to new, individual thoughts and interpretations. Further, people almost always came out with only positive comments. The Flash Cards lend themselves to various adaptations and are a useful tool in interacting with different communities.

Bansuri Foundation

Dimple Rai was invited to give a brief talk on the Bansuri Foundation, Pune. The Foundation is based on the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility as an obligation of every organisation, and reaches out to thousands of workers and their families across industry. It endeavours to effect change through participation in social initiatives.

Its projects to date have addressed important social issues, such as non-violent communication among male workers and women's self-empowerment. In its next stage, it aims to extend into child development and parent-child interaction based on the LTPC, in partnership with BMRF.

B. The Bala Mandir Institution

Janaki Balakrishnan, BMRF, presented a report on the LTP programme at Bala Mandir, Chennai. She aptly summarised the institutional transition based on LTP as one from "Philanthropy to Professionalism".

The LTP programme reaches out to every child in the Bala Mandir institution and schools. It comprises in-service training of teachers, care givers, social workers and other professionals; parent awareness and training programmes; school readiness, and parental readiness as part of the Adolescent Life Skills Programme.

Bala Mandir has developed its own resources and materials to supplement the LTPC, relevant to the Indian context. These include the Guide Book for the Early Childhood Years, ADLTPC, Toy Manual and Behaviour Cards in Indian languages.

Key ideas and initiatives going forward include devising a preschool curriculum based on the LTP model, developing a SPRUC assessment tool and overall, being a role model for the development of positive ECCD and parenting practices.

"Each one of us was a child once and from our experiences must recall our promises we missed then".

C. NGOs

Activity

The session began with an activity on parenting values. Each group was given some chart paper and sketch pens, and was asked to depict their idea of an enabling and disabling parenting environment. This activity has been successfully done with various groups in the community, allowing for diversity and individuality.

Hema Srinivas, Saranga Trust, gave an overview of the LTP Parenting Programme & NGOs over the last decade. She noted that the programme came to Bala Mandir in 1997, and the institution has since grown with the programme in India. The growth was interestingly correlated with the 3 Vedic stages of parenting.

1. The First Stage (1997-2002) - "Lalavath":

'Learning the art of parenting and translating it into an effective and relevant programme for the community'.

Hema highlighted the contribution of various key individuals and organisations in the early years that helped to lay the foundation for the programme.

Bala Mandir was the first NGO in India to implement the LTP programme, providing a familiar and known environment. The programme subsequently developed around the LTPC tool, as increasing contact with other, varied NGOs (aided through NIP) demanded a more holistic and universal approach.

2. The Second Stage (2002-2004) - "Tadavath" (Discipline):

The second stage saw the extension of the programme from Tamil Nadu to Karnataka, reaching out to NGOs in various parenting environments. The initial training programme had a significant ripple effect in many NGOs, helping to take the programme forward in the community.

Feedback from trainees led BMRF to shift exclusively from training to helping to plan, direct and implement future programmes together with NGO partners. The Tsunami also led BMRF to partner with many NGOs in their rehabilitation efforts.

3. The Third Stage (2004-2007) - "Mithravath" (Friendship):

The third stage saw the expansion of the parenting programme into other States, working in different languages and with different NGO partners across India.

BMRF currently works with NGOs across 4 States - Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Since 2008, BMRF and its partner organisations have begun a Tracer Study to qualitatively assess the impact of the LTP parenting programme in the 4 States.

The presentation incorporated many interesting photos and insights from working with NGOs in the field. It was observed that in working with pavement dwellers, many of the parents could not read but were still able to learn and take away key messages based on the pictures in the LTPC. Adolescents were also very passionate about taking the messages forward to the community through innovative methods, such as street plays.

D. Schools

Prema Daniel, Consultant, gave the final presentation of the day on LTP & Intervention into Teacher Training. The LTPC has been used for teachers of different socio-economic levels, in rural and urban schools.

An overview was presented of experiences from the ECCED teacher-training programmes held over the last 5 years, and the positive feedback received.

Future programmes and plans included a Diploma course in ECCED, and introducing the LTPE in all, existing training programmes, as well as possibly the new draft curriculum developed by the NCTE.

Activity

Everyone was given a piece of newspaper and glue. They were first asked to tear the paper into pieces, and then join the pieces back together. Each group / table were then asked to come up with a story based on the joined pieces.

Stories:

- A girl who loved to fly kites.
- Ranbir Kapoor shopping for clothes.
- A family torn to bits, helped and guided by a wise man.
- A convocation ceremony attended by politicians, foreign delegates and celebrities, and reported in the newspaper.
- A school football match / field with a large crowd but garbage all around.
- A man walking and gathering leaves fallen from a tree.

Prema highlighted how such a simple activity brought out all the elements of SPRUCE - Sense of self, Physical, Relationships, Understanding, Communication and Environment.

Day II - 28 September 2010

Injecting Enthusiasm

Day II was launched on an informal note with a game. A basket was passed around containing chits with a simple parenting value on each, starting from A-Z. Participants were asked to pick out a chit and expand on the corresponding parenting value.

Comments:

- K - "Kindness" - Knowledge for children.
- T - "Trust" - Encourage children to be truthful.
- H - "Happiness" - Children bring happiness to all.

- R - "Rewarding Effort & Participation" - Rewards are not always necessary and should not be limited to material incentives alone.
- Z - "Zest" - Deal with the child's boundless energy and curiosity with zest.
- Q - "Quest for Knowledge" - Learning something new everyday helps parents to stay young, connect with their children and be humble.
- I - "Integrity & Honesty" - Involve children in decision-making.
- D - "Dedication" - Dedication and devotion are important elements of duty.
- J - "Joy" - Join together in making parenting a joyful activity, not a task.

A second game was played later in the morning of 'Snakes & Ladders'.

Prema Rangan, Bharathi Vidya Bhavan, Erode and Dr. Swarnalatha, Suraksha, Nagercoil gave a brief overview of their organisations and the LTP programme.

Inquiring into Impact through Research - A Tracer Study

Veda Zachariah, Sanjivini Trust, and Lakshmi Krishnamurthi led the session on the Tracer Study, moderated by Aruna Balachandra.

Activity

A group activity was conducted as a prelude to the formal presentation. Each group / table of participants was asked to discuss and note down 5-6 incidents from their childhood that made them feel bad.

Incidents and issues shared included a sudden loss of friendship, poor academic results, not being allowed to express opinions, lack of trust, comparison between siblings, humiliation, gender / racial discrimination, and sexual abuse.

The main learning was the importance of sharing and expressing these issues, and then beginning to resolve them. This activity has been successfully done with various groups in the community, including mothers, field workers, and children.

The presentation began with the evolution and "birth" of the Tracer Study. The primary objective of the project is to trace the impact of good parenting practices (based on the LTFC) on the development of the young child, over a period of time. This is premised on the extent to which caregivers have become aware of, and internalised the information given.

A few important points highlighted were firstly, the qualitative nature of the study, and the many variables attached. Secondly, the need to demystify research so as to democratise the process and promote real sharing. A third issue was home visits, and the balance between working at a human level and a recording level.

BMRP began the Tracer Study in 2009, in collaboration with selected partners from each of the 4 States where the LTFC has been implemented - SEWA, Gujarat; Mumbai Mobile Crèches, Maharashtra; Suraksha, Tamil Nadu, and Society for Development of Women and Children (SODWAC) / Saranga Trust, Karnataka.

Common parenting issues:

- P - Pregnancy
- R - Readiness
- I - Involvement of family
- D - Discrimination
- E - Early Childhood Care

Challenges included:

- 4 diverse organisations, each with a different focus, language and location.
- Wide range of educational backgrounds of field workers.
- Organisations were comfortable with materials being given to them, and a "top down" approach to training.
- Understanding and focusing on the intangible, psycho-social domains of development of the child.
- Dealing with existing socio-economic issues in the communities, which impinge on the parenting aspect.
- Workers/parents from deprived backgrounds also need "nurturing".

An overview was given of the levels of parent awareness and observations on key issues relating to child development in the communities. It was

concluded that the Tracer Study is still at the stage where parenting messages are being disseminated to the community, and hence it is difficult to predict outcomes, but trends show that the study is on the right track.

The presentation was followed by individual reports from each of the 4 partner organisations, outlining their methods, challenges and outcomes/successes.

The NGOs also creatively illustrated some of the prevailing social issues in their communities. Mumbai Mobile Crèches re-enacted an instance in their community where a group of women supported a pregnant mother by taking active action and talking to the husband about smoking and drinking. SODWAC recited a traditional poem in Kannada on sibling discrimination, and performed various role-plays to highlight issues of nutrition, family relationships and childcare.

Instilling Confidence - Intelligences Explained - Integrating Special Needs

Usha Ramakrishnan led the afternoon session on the Accepting Diversity Learning through Play Calendar (ADLTPC), which is the adapted version of the LTPC. The expansive purpose of the ADLTPC is to accommodate children with special needs in the child development profile. Co-speakers during the session included Anne Panghat, Hema Srinivas, and Kala Mohan, as well as representatives from Vidya Sagar and Bala Mandir, who shared their experiences as end-users of the ADLTPC.

Usha began her speech by thanking Hincks-Dellcrest for the opportunity to share the work on ADLTPC across the forum. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, propounded by Howard Gardner, was advocated as one of the most powerful methods of assessing the child's unique potential. She highlighted the 8 dimensions of the Multiple Intelligence Theory, which catered to the needs of the 5 developmental areas of the LTPC. In addition, the Oval and Quadrant Reporting Criteria were explained. She reiterated that a child needs to be carefully and holistically assessed through multiple sessions, to get a clear profile on the current level of functioning.

The first co-speaker, Anne Panghat, shared her experience based on a case study of a 4 year-old child. She illustrated how a family could

actually hinder the child's development by over-protecting the child and limiting his or her independent functioning. She highlighted that parents need to understand and appreciate that self-care and motor development of a child are closely connected. Jaya Krishnanswamy noted that this applies equally to normal children for their independent functioning.

Hema Srinivas shared her own grandson's developmental experience with the ADLTPC. She gave a brief account of the parents' initial meeting with Usha who had advised them about the ADLTPC, and how they were taken through the different stages in the calendar to arrive at their child's current level of functioning. She highlighted how the ADLTPC helped the family to properly understand the child's special needs, and prevent misdiagnosis, which often happens when the parents are either over-anxious or have unrealistic expectations. Going further into the child's case history, she pointed out that the ADLTPC helped the family to make correct decisions on referral and diagnostic needs of the child, and that it also educated the parents to a great extent on the development of their child, thereby strengthening their potential role in helping the child. Hema also discussed the findings of a pilot project on parenting primary school children conducted in 2006-2007 to assess the school readiness of children in Std. I and II. The study revealed significant psycho-social deficits among the children, leading to the planning and implementation of various parenting programmes.

Mr. and Mrs. Mohan, who have a 6 year-old child diagnosed with Autism, shared their experiences of using the ADLTPC. They consulted Usha for speech delays in their child at the age of 2, (though all other milestones appeared normal). They shared that their training in the ADLTPC helped them to understand the child's current level of functioning, and monitor the child's progress at every stage, while providing activities to stimulate the areas of concerns. They also shared the profile of the child based on the 5 domains of SPRUC: Sense of self - Stage 14, Physical - Stage 13, Relationships - Stage 12, Understanding - Stage 14, and Communication - Stage 12.

Usha noted that the calendar does not lock a child at a particular level; it accommodates individual differences, and when the child is placed at his own functioning level with the right kind of stimulation and reinforcement, the development would get back on track. The activities provided in the calendar are natural, sequential and culturally appropriate.

She added that the ADLTPC is the best, parent-friendly tool that she has come across in her years of professional practice.

K. S. Uma, a parent professional from Vidya Sagar, shared her experience in using the ADLTPC, stating that the adapted calendar is a powerful, inclusive tool that stimulates and supports early intervention, integrating the holistic development of the child and the underlying parenting skills. She noted that in Vidya Sagar, the ADLTPC is effectively used as a screening tool for disabilities, a guiding manual for the special educators training programme, and as an awareness tool for their community based rehabilitation programmes. The uniqueness of the tool is its individual adaptability to each child, based on his or her developmental levels. She added that it is a parent-centered manual to understand normal child development, while looking for red flags in developmental areas. Jayanthi Narayanan then presented a few organisational case studies, with a detailed case report using the oval and quadrant reporting criteria. She also outlined the intervention plans for the recommended developmental areas.

The last speaker of the session, Janaki Balakrishnan, gave an overview of the implementation and use of the ADLTPC in the Bala Mandir Institution. She advocated that the multi-purpose tool could be potentially used in policy initiatives and school provisions, towards the best interests of the child in early learning programmes. She presented a sample SPRUC Profile, demonstrating that each child is individually different and unique in his own way. Further, she added that looking at a group profile based on SPRUC would help an administrator in educational planning, (apart from making individual educational placement decisions). The gaps in the profile pointed at improving school outcomes and teaching effectiveness rather than looking at the child as the problem. She suggested that it could be used as an initial screening tool, in collaboration with further testing and referral to detect any potential delay.

Usha concluded the session by presenting the ADLTPC as an essential child development tool with various end users. She asserted that the main idea of using any child development measure was to identify the strengths of the child, rather than giving diagnostic labels. She highlighted that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities campaigns against labeling and the Right to be included in the mainstream.

Day III - 29 September 2010

Intending to Entertain

The last day of the conference began with entertaining traditional, cultural performances by representatives and field workers from some of the NGOs.

Mumbai Mobile Crèches performed a puppet show in Hindi, highlighting the issues of gender and racial/colour discrimination. All of the hand puppets used were made at the Mobile Crèche Centres from discarded/waste materials. Field workers also enacted skits on important social issues, such as co-operation of the family in raising the child and the role of grand-parents.

SEWA field workers from Ahmedabad and the Kheda district performed an interesting drama on the girl child and overcoming gender bias, as well as some traditional parenting songs.

Influencing Parenting through Child Rights

Nithya Balaji of Nalamdana gave an interactive presentation on the organisation and its work. As its name implies, the organisation looks at "wellness" in a total concept. Its work is based on participatory communication, and education through entertainment. Theatre and the arts were highlighted as a powerful tool to address and convey many issues in the community.

The theme of the presentation was "Child Rights through the Life Cycle Approach"; dealing with the communication of critical issues/concepts to target groups. The participants were taken through the creation of the Life Cycle Chart together. The Chart helps to introduce critical Child Rights concepts in a participatory manner, helping to simplify and internalise concepts and promote understanding across all sections of society.

Nalamdana are working with BMRF to include the basics of LTPC into the Life Cycle Approach.

Inspiring Thoughts

The book "Through the Lens of Culture" by S. Anandalakshmy was officially released, with the first copies received by Jaya Krishnaswamy and Andrew Reesor-McDowell.

Identifying Practices in Different Cultures and Communities in Rearing Children – Inviting All Participants

An open discussion was held on child rearing practices in the different communities that participants work with. The session was moderated by S. Anandalakshmy, Jaya Krishnaswamy and Lakshmi Krishnamurthi.

1. Is pregnancy celebrated? Is the woman treated with care? Are there any negative practices?

> Abdul - Pregnancy is not celebrated in Afghanistan and little care or attention is paid to the woman.

> Minaxi - Pregnancy is celebrated with love and care. In Gujarat, the girl goes back to her mother's house for the first pregnancy and is given special foods, such as "ladoos" to increase breast milk. Very disadvantaged communities also aspire to celebrate pregnancy but may be unable to due to a lack of resources.

> Nithya - On negative practices, many young mothers barely eat because of morning sickness. Maya commented that it should be the focus of all health workers to encourage pregnant women to eat what they want, when they want.

> Satya Raj, CMC - Pregnancy is celebrated but it depends on the birth order. In some cultures, girls are given bangles to avert "nazaar" (as well as prevent them from being given too much work).

> Veda - Trends observed:

- Due to economic pressures, the celebration of pregnancy can be a source of tension, and burden in the family.

- The mother is pampered, and eats well during the 1st pregnancy, but in subsequent pregnancies, eats less and has little or no milk as she has to take care of the rest of the family.

- There is very little weight gain in the 2nd or 3rd pregnancy as the mother is working and looking after the family.

> Alka Deshpande, Mumbai Mobile Crèches - The 1st pregnancy is celebrated across all communities and States, though this diminishes with subsequent pregnancies.

> Lakshmi - With the ability to determine the sex of the child, does technology come into culture i.e. is there a bigger celebration for a boy?

- Prescilla - In the Philippines, celebration depends largely on social status. There are very few ceremonial celebrations, but pregnancy is celebrated in practical ways, through attention paid to the mother.
- Smitha Chekanath, SEWA - A marriage alliance is sometimes formed between the families of 2 pregnant women from the same village or community.
- In Tamil Nadu, a traditional ceremony called the "Seemandam" is typically held during the seventh month of pregnancy. The expectant mother is gifted a new sari by her parents and in-laws, and various Indian rituals are carried out. The father also publicly announces that the baby is of his lineage.
- Usha - In the West, the Baby Shower is a way to celebrate pregnancy with the presentation of gifts. In Indian customs, new gifts are not given for the unborn child so as not to tempt fate.
- Anupriya - During the "Seemandam", a few drops of herbal juice are squeezed into the nostrils of the expectant mother. This is done for the 1st pregnancy but not for subsequent pregnancies.

a. Are there any practices that affect the child in the 1st year? Are the mothers encouraged to breast feed their children?

- Smitha - The father does not see the face of the child or hold the child until the "Mundan" ceremony is done (after 40 days).
- Maya - In the past, the mother and baby were tied/bonded together and no visitors were allowed for the 1st few weeks. The post-partum period is very important, and we should take the positive points from these traditions.
- Usha - Some physical activities are carried out to stimulate sensation in babies, especially in the case of disabled children.
- Abdul - Many negative traditional practices are still followed, such as delivering the baby in a dark animal shed, although the incidence is decreasing with the intervention of health workers.
- Rochelle - Trends observed:
 - Research now shows that babies should be made to sleep on their back and not on their stomach, following the number of crib deaths in the UK. Interestingly, there were very few Asian families in this demographic as babies mostly slept on the bed with their mother.
 - In the West, it is discouraged for mothers to sleep with their babies. However, in India, children sleep with their parents until they are over 8 years old, due to reasons of convenience, safety and poverty.
- Jaya - Mothers being kept in a dark room immediately after birth helps the baby to feel as though it is still in the womb. Sleeping with the

mother also helps bonding, as the sense of smell is very prominent in the child.

- > Lakshmi - If the baby is kept separately, is it a point for the individuality of the baby?
- > Maya - The child needs a strong sense of bonding and security to develop into a confident individual.
- > Saulina Arnold, TNVHA - Mothers are encouraged to keep the baby with them but often with the birth of the 2nd child, the 1st child gets removed.
- > Rochelle - It's important to note that while in North America parents do not sleep with their child at night, they still show them love and affection and look after their immediate needs.
- > Anandalakshmy - Most poor communities do not have the choice of space or separate rooms.
- > Vrushali Pispati, Mumbai Mobile Crèches - In the West, there are set routines and timings, such as feeding every 2 hours, while in India mothers tend to respond immediately.
- > Usha - The maternal instinct helps mothers to know when and what to do.

2. Participants were asked to put in order of priority a list of 8 traits of children, based on their own views and of the communities they work with. The top 3 traits stated are listed herewith.

	Self	Community
1.	Being happy and friendly	Achievement in school & Looking smart and cute (fair skin, boy)
2.	Non-fussy & Help with work in the house and is considerate	Help with work in the house and is considerate - Girl & Obedience and getting a good name - Boy
3.	Help with work in the house and is considerate & Good in performing arts	Achievement in school & Getting prizes for sports, fancy dress

Notes:

- Those that worked with disability and special needs listed being happy and friendly first, followed by non-fussy as the top priorities for their community.

- Rochelle indicated that the top 3 traits for the communities she worked with would be achievement in school, followed by being happy and friendly and non-fussy.

Post the activity, Maya asked the participants if there are any points in the LTPC that they find difficult to accept or implement when working with their communities.

Issues:

> Time.

> Hema - Parents feel that alternatives given for dealing with tantrums, etc. don't work and that they are unable to manage. However, Hema observed that these methods require patience and consistency in behaviour over a period of time for the child to understand.

> Minaxi - Sensitivity / Capacity of people.

> Veda - Issues observed with field workers from SEWA:

- Disagreement over the pictures of a child shown in the mirror, and of the father picking up the infant.

- Grand-parents play an important role, especially in rural communities, and are not clearly depicted in the LTPC.

- Health & Nutrition issues, especially in the early years, are not properly addressed in the LTPC (and hence in India, the Guide Book is an essential accompaniment to the Calendar).

- Gender discrimination issues are not very evident in the LTPC.

- Home remedies.

- Family planning.

Comments:

> Jaya - The LTPC is not an encyclopedia or medical journal; it is simply a tool to help/facilitate people to solve problems and promote healthy child development.

> Rochelle - The LTPC is a starting point, to start the thinking process.

> Maya - Many of the messages in the LTPC are not overt but implied, and it is up to the facilitator to take these up, such as left-handedness.

> Prema - The LTPC has been a very useful tool in schools, especially PTAs, in making concepts simple and easy to explain.

> Veda - The LTPC is a fantastic ready-reckoner for those who have some knowledge in the field; it will take time for others to understand and use.

3. School Readiness - How do parents prepare their children for school entry?

> Rochelle - In North America, they have now started full-day learning from 4 years, but the focus of activities is mostly play-based. The work

and findings of Fraser Mustard has significantly changed the way people look at school readiness for young children.

- > Nalini Chugani, AECED - ECCD professionals have not done enough in this area. The NCERT Report has had little awareness and impact. All research done should be published and easily accessible.
- > Jaya - Nursery school education today is a big business, and is effectively seen as a "coaching" stage for entrance into primary school.
- > Lakshmi - We cannot "wish away" the fact that parents do see academic achievement as important, and this will only get worse over time. We need to look at how to tackle the issue while taking this into consideration.

Valedictory Function

A valedictory function was held in the afternoon from 3 to 5pm, with eminent personalities from the field and members of the media.

Invading Cyberspace

The BMRF website www.parentingredefined.com was officially launched by Dr. Vijay Nagaswami, renowned psychiatrist and author.

Dr. Nagaswami gave an introductory address on the idea of "redefining parenting", with insights on responsible parenting in today's environment. He highlighted the importance of the website as a means of sharing credible information, and in the future, becoming a more interactive site for parents and other users.

Illuminating Child Development through Culture

The first publication of the BMRF Culture Series, "Insights into Childhood from a Tamil Tradition", was launched by educationist Mrs. Y.G. Parthasarathy, Dean, PSBB Schools.

Mrs. Parthasarathy commented on the negative trend of mushrooming private nursery schools, reserved only for the elite sections of society. She also highlighted that children should not be separated from their parents at a young age. She hoped that the book would be a first step in bringing society back to its cultural roots.

Imagining the World through the Eyes of Children

Andrew delivered his closing remarks on "Building on Strong LTP Partnerships: New Directions".

"If the child could speak, what the child might say: I want you all to think of what I need most and give that to me so that I may grow up to be a healthy individual".

Andrew highlighted that one of the most effective things that can be done towards ensuring good early childhood care is to teach parents the importance of play.

He reflected on the extended vision of the programme today, based on 3 key factors:

- Increased research on LTP and its outcomes.
- Support partners in their capacity as Master Trainers so that they can take training programmes forward in their regions.
- Develop and strengthen resources based on feedback.

Investing in Children's Happiness

Anandalakshmy gave the closing speech on the theme "The Child's Right to be Heard". She noted that firstly, a collective Initiative, of parents and children, was needed to take the messages of LTP forward. The media was advocated as a powerful tool to spread many of these messages. Secondly, the concept of Inclusion should be extended beyond just the classrooms, into children's hearts and minds. Lastly, she emphasised the value of Imagination in our fact-orientated sub-culture. Calling for a "little bit of freedom", she hoped that parents would relax the intense supervision and monitoring that was evident today, allowing children the "time to dream" and play.

The conference was brought to a close with a viewing of the exhibition.

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