

## BOOK REVIEW:

### Review and Introduction to 'Teaching the Young: The Early Childhood Development Profession in India'

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Children are the future citizens of the world, and they would in time have the responsibility to make decisions and judgements. The consensus on early years is that these are the fastest and most critical years of learning. This is why the current policy documents have made ECCE a central focus of education. To fulfill the aspiration of providing quality education, it is essential to understand its importance and the effective methods of achieving it. This responsibility lies with those entrusted with educating young children. The developing field lacks easily accessible materials from the Indian context that address local contexts and are readily understandable by those seeking to learn from tried-and-tested methods. Towards this, the recent book edited by Kinnari Pandya, Jigisha Shastri, and Vrinda Data, 'Teaching the Young: The Early Childhood Development Profession in India' published by Orient BlackSwan, makes a useful contribution.

The book has 22 chapters written by people who have worked in early childhood development for decades. The diversity in the nature and length of experience of the authors promises a substantial read. The book does not disappoint in the way that it provides many experiences of what has worked on the ground in different contexts and also presents the challenges that lie in the wake of reaching the first leg of sustainable development, Goal 4 (SDG 2023). ECE is a small step, but as is now beginning to be

realized, a crucial step to begin and ensure lifelong learning, and this book explores its principles and practices. Given the emphasis on the period of education in the National Education Policy 2020, this is a topical volume. The wisdom from experience offers profound insights that can resonate deeply. For example, people generally tend to believe that they know and are competent, but they actually are not so knowledgeable, and hence, they need to be more circumspect about reaching conclusions and imposing their ideas. And the process of developing their abilities has to start by helping them realize that they do not know so that their minds are open to observing, thinking, and learning. The other important thing pointed out is that professional development of teachers is essential; it requires resources and patience, apart from respect for autonomy and agency for the roles people are engaged in. There is no one way, and each situation is to develop its own strategy and technique. While we may say there is nothing new about this and it has been said before, the book brings these out in a starkly obvious manner due to the struggles that authors have been through in their works. It is, in that sense, a book worth reading.

The introduction to the book brings out the importance of ECCE and the fact that it requires specific exclusive knowledge and the people in it have a special social role. It is not generalized knowledge or generalized abilities we are looking at. The knowledge

required would not come from training but from being educated. The book differentiates between education and training and suggests that people who work in it must act professionally and be able to make contextually valid decisions automatically. It suggests that while the discipline has its roots in development psychology, it has social dimensions, and the educators must be prepared appropriately. The book emphasizes that educators in this domain have multiple roles, deal with multiple stakeholders, and hence need to reflect on their work and look for more effective functioning.

The introduction also points out that despite many policy referrals to ECCE and its importance in the documents (an increasing trend), the wider social milieu does not know about ECD. The status of practitioners and workers in this field is relatively low. The book raises the issue of establishing ECCE as a recognized profession, given its importance from research and policy perspectives.

The book is organized into four sections. The first section, with four chapters, contains an analysis of the history and policy of teacher preparation for early years. The second section on curriculum and pedagogy of teacher preparation has 8 chapters, while the third on in-service professional development of early childhood teachers has 7 chapters where examples of the work of institutions engaged in this effort are presented and discussed. The final section on resources for early childhood educators includes three chapters with detailed examples of potential activities at ECD centres. This includes details of materials needed as well as how educators and caregivers can be prepared to fill this role meaningfully. The resources cover a wide range of topics, supporting diverse educational contexts. The last chapter on the way forward presents the viewpoints of the editors regarding how ECCE should proceed and what important elements to keep in mind.

The first chapter, by Venita Kaul, one of the doyens of ECCE, analyzes the current state of ECCE institutions in India. Being a part of

the policy development process at the centre and with many states allows her to lay bare the national issues, how the present policy addresses them, and how it can be revised.

The second chapter, 'Higher Education in the Development of Childhood Professionals,' is a practitioner's essay on the need for high-quality higher education for ECCE. The author points out that development in this field has been haphazard, and the available programs address only a few pockets. She also points out that the present preparation of ECCE educators by higher education institutes is not satisfactory, as it may not create an attitude and desire for the ECCE role. She also points out that the research on the effect on the work of ECCE workers due to higher education shows mixed results and suggests holistic practical measures to make improvements in ECCE.

The third chapter is on the important role of NGOs in developing ECCE professionals in India. It points out that these organizations have helped slowly develop in India a greater level of comprehensive commitment and suggests that NGOs have not only played a role with the state and helped it develop people to work in this area and help it set up creches and centres but also have supported evolution, setting up and running of many types of centres that children and parents have accessed. Based on the experience of one of the organization's work, they suggest the steps needed to move forward.

The fourth chapter by Vardarajan and Rajeshri examines Nai Talim's pre-basic teacher education curriculum and comments on its relevance in the current context. The Nai Talim approach from pre-birth to 7 years is in practice very different from the Kindergarten approach. It encompasses the entire framework of ECD, including ECCN and ECE. In contrast to the more cognitive focus in kindergarten, the focus in Nai Talim is on developing self-confidence, self-responsibility, and engaging with work that is part of the work of the community. The authors point out that this approach builds significant relationships between the

teachers and the community and underlines the development of the child as their joint endeavour.

The next section focuses on chapters around the curriculum and pedagogy for pre-service teacher preparation. The first chapter by Kinnari Panday lays the foundation of this section. It presents the framework that must inform the development of the ECCE educator, considering that she must keep track of the curriculum daily up to the entire year. Discussing the elements of this preparation, she emphasizes that its pedagogy must recognize that learners of the course are adults. The chapter by Karma Gayleg is based on the experiences of the effort to develop ECCE educators in Bhutan. As an experience directly from the field, the chapter captures nuances and details. Although set in Bhutan, the chapter applies to other contexts. Asha Singh's chapter, 'Cultural Tools for Children's Literacy and Learning,' suggests that interactions with children, regardless of subject or topic, should have the interests of children in mind, and when given opportunities rooted in their culture, children learn naturally.

She also points out that it's not so much about providing them with opportunities but rather about ensuring they don't lose them and encouraging them to participate in the games they develop on their own terms. As for preparatory schools, the chapter suggests that they should focus on the transmission of facts and activities should focus on the agency of children and involve them in meaning-making. This will only be possible if they are working with instances and examples from their cultural and social experience where they have been able to form an understanding and develop their view. Examples of situations of children engaging in activities that help them develop a sense of the world around them and strengthen their ability to cope through different forms of local arts are both insightful and instructive. They seem to emerge from long experience working with children and those who work with children. The chapter by Neela Dar

is about the TISS program for capacity development. This program, which is a part of the School of Vocational Education, is defined as a work-integrated program. The chapter argues that while the theory is taught in classrooms, skill training is learned in the industry, and the same should be for ECCE 'professionals.' The chapter presents the details of content and how quality checks are maintained across skill training hub sites of the program.

The chapter by Rekha Sen Sharma et al. describes the developmental journey of the IGNOU distance education capacity-building program for ECCE workers. Data about the enrolled students from the start of the program informs the readers not just about the numbers enrolled but also about their age profile, gender, state-wise distribution, and the time taken to complete the program. The chapter underscores the need for quality open and distance learning and blended programs, given the need for a larger capacity required for orienting preschool teachers.

The chapter 5WSIH by Maya Menon suggests that to understand what continuous professional development means, we need to clarify responses to some questions labelled as the 5Ws and the IH. We need to answer the questions [Why, What, Who, When, Where, and How]. The first point argues that CPD is essential because it gives examples of alternative possibilities to replace their own experience as learners as the model for interaction with their students. The second 'w' pertains to learning strategies, and Maya suggests there is no magic formula for it and people had to be taken through a journey from unconscious incompetence to conscious competence. For the third 'w', 'what are the obstacles?' Maya points out that the major one is the lack of any motivation for learning other than for doing well in exams. The other factors, such as the teacher's agency to effect changes, the lack of career growth opportunities, and the inadequate allocation and poor use of funds, are being overlooked. As to 'why is an entire enterprise useful?' The author argues that the results show that

time and funds are well spent on this if there is clarity of purpose and alignment with the implementation.

The next response is to 'who should take up CPD', and here the author says that all should take it as everyone needs this time for reflection and learning. The chapter addresses the next question, 'Who should provide it?', by saying that it should be mostly people who have worked on the ground with children and have sharpened their skills in that process. To 'when', what is the best time for professional development? The author suggests 'any time is a good time'. She points out that we all know that we fail in classrooms, and hence everyone needs to reflect and learn all the time. And to the last 'w' to where to find the time for it, the natural response is that time must be found, and it can be found. Not a large time at one go but small intervals by adjusting. The H is on how we measure impact and how professional development impacts teaching and training. Section 3 has seven chapters (161-252), with a focus on in-service professional development. The section presents diverse approaches that respond to different contexts and situations due to ground conditions as well as the nature of implementing organizations.

The first chapter by Padma Yadav, 'Role of DIETs in Training of Pre-School Teachers' talks briefly about the policy and importance of ECCE in DIETs. It introduces DIETs and their work in the professional development of teachers and details of the diploma course run by NCERT for capacity building of DIETs to enable them to support pre-service program quality improvement. It also talks about NCERT initiatives for realizing the goals of NEP 2020 for ECCE and gives suggestions about what needs to be done based on her long experience.

The chapter by Nilesh Nimaka about the work of the Quest Alliance on ECCE in Maharashtra describes the Palvee model from its genesis through the Ankur program in one block of Palaghat. The chapter provides information on ECCE structure and roles,

including strengths and weaknesses of the Palvee model, which are illustrated through anecdotes from the field. It also talks about the challenges and the need for contextual challenges and specific responses to them. As the road ahead for expansion points out, the Palvee model requires a sustained input of technical and financial resources, which may be seen as a weakness by administrators and funders. The provision of technical and financial resource support to the ground institutions.

The chapter 'Professional Development Strategies' by Vaijayanti K. and Gayatri Kiran is based on the work of the Ashra Foundation. They point out that ECCE programs with well-trained, well-equipped, and well-supported personnel work better and that good and well-run diverse ECCE programs matching specific situations can impact better life preparation, including school readiness for children. From the work of the Akshara Foundation presented in a table and some anecdotal narrations, the authors point out the possible effect of this capacity-building strategy.

The next chapter, 'A Multi Model Approach to In-Service Capacity Development of Anganwadi Teachers' by Yogesh GR, Kinnari Pandya, and M. Sreenivasa Rao is based on the extensive work of the Azim Premji Foundation on ECCE in the Sanga Reddy district to discover possible processes and procedures to make the public ECE system better. The chapter presents six key systemic challenges to the functioning of Anganwadi Centres and experience-based possible tried and tested solutions with learnings from implementing the 10-year-long effort. The solutions suggested do not require many additional resources and are within the scope of district authorities. The materials developed for this multi-model work are given in the appendix and offer a framework of what and how for the task.

The chapter by Many Punnose and Shikha Kumari, 'A Community Approach to Early Childhood Care and Education' talks about Prajayatna's effort. Beginning with the



theoretical framework on the need for ECCE and factors that affect the child development domain, it presents the basics of the ICDS Scheme, which has been a major strategy in the Indian context. It describes Prajayatna's genesis, strategy, and belief to address the system rather than the symptoms. The key to the strategy is building and institutionalizing community ownership of the process through parents, local monitoring and support committees, Gram panchayat, and administration. The team has developed their own ECCE centre curriculum and decentralized teacher development through training, meetings, and materials to ensure learning engagements in classrooms.

The chapter by Gauravi Jadhav et al. emphasizes the quality of teaching and an appraisal system that is collegial and trust-inspiring for the teacher. It presents the effort to develop such a program for the 7 schools mentored by Muktanjan. The performance and developmental appraisal are integrated through a feedback mechanism and include a dialogue between the appraiser and the individual. The authors find that this is a crucial input to improve quality and reduce attrition in teachers. The chapter argues that such a system is an important addition to the appraisal mechanism for which NEP 2020 only proposes a state accreditation body.

The last chapter of this section by Jigisha Shastri and Kinnari Pandya, titled 'In-Service Program for Teacher Educators for Early Years Education,' is about an in-service program for teacher educators through the experience of grooming 16 young men and women post-graduates as ECE educators. Starting with working with children at the AWCs, they were immersed in all dimensions of the Anganwadi system involving interaction with diverse stakeholders and gradually inducted into the role of educators. The chapter describes their development in 4 stages parallel to the development process of an Anganwadi teacher, elements of which are shown in a table. All chapters in the section stress that rigorous in-service

programs rooted in on-site experience can prepare high-quality ECE trainers and also build capacities of existing ECE trainers, albeit through different strategies, modes, and structures of intervention.

The last section with three chapters gives resources from different organizations for crucial aspects of setting up and implementing ECCE, including the teacher, her preparation, curriculum, and materials and infrastructure required. Originating from diverse locations, situations, and experiences, the toolkit would be valuable in many different situations.

The first is an ECD toolkit for quality early-year education from Muktanjan based on experience in a metro. This toolkit elaborates the 5 E's Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate of active constructivism and gives reasons for their need.

The second source provided is the 'Anganwadi Teachers Handbook' meant for the public system, which is based on the work of the Azim Premji Foundation in Sanga Reddy district. It gives key elements of a developmentally appropriate thematic curriculum for multiple abilities children with what the child needs to learn woven in. The handbook suggests 14 themes that could be close to the children and gives guidelines to prepare, a possible timetable with activities that can be done with children regularly.

The last resource is the pre-basic syllabus for the training of teachers published before independence by Hindustani Talimi Sangh. The chapter gives details of how the educational movement within the independence struggle visualized pre-basis teacher development and gives principles, staffing and equipment required, quality of potential teachers, and then the program of training. This was an ashram training with full experience of manual work and community living to develop empathy, cooperation, self-regulation, and self-discipline. The document gives the nature of content and activities for hands-on learning by immersion in a nearby community. Given that it gives more

importance to the integrated development of attitudes, habits, and dispositions in comparison to mere cognitive understanding, it poses a fundamental challenge to the current fragmented processes.

The chapter way ahead speaks about the inclusion of many of the recommendations in the NEP 2020 and the kind of steps needed to improve the quality of ECCE. There are many clear and significant suggestions made and what different structures and institutions need to do to get it laid out.

To conclude, as the book itself repeatedly points out, it does not provide answers that can be applied directly, but it provides important insights into the approach that may work and the materials and methods that may be adapted suitably. The book is an enabler also because the diversity of approaches and the multiple ways of looking at the task suggest and provide opportunities to mix and match. From how to initiate work and run a few institutions to how to scale up, the challenges and difficulties in the wake are reflected. It should be a useful read for all wanting to participate in this space.

One of the key takeaways from the book is the need for localized systems to provide quality

ECCE. It shows that it is possible with the on-the-ground engagement of working closely with the community to develop in them the confidence to own the program and become responsible for overseeing the maintenance of quality. The examples of the efforts from small to not small scale put to rest the ghost of community are not interested. Given the fact that the book gives examples of so many different kinds of programs in different situations, there is a broad canvas from which the needs of specific areas may be matched and some lessons learned. It must, however, be pointed out that the diversity at the level of ECCE and in all the dimensions and aspects that it relates to makes it difficult for any one source to be fully adequate, but the book does provide a fair spread of at least the common bulk categories of situations.

The book is useful for those learning about ECCE as an actor in the field or even as a student of ECCE or some other social program. The experiences presented with some analysis can serve as excellent case studies for the development of ECCE educators. The book is also useful for administrators in the sense it gives them some picture of the variety of things that have worked based on the experience of the actors in the field.