

Play and Playway Method in the Elementary Grades

Is It Really There?

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Abstract

In spite of the role of play in the overall development of children and role of play way method in the learning of children, it has been a neglected realm in teaching-learning at the elementary level of education. However the Mumbai Municipal Corporation, drawing directly from the recommendations of the Ramamurti Committee experimented with the Joyful Learning method (playway approach to teaching-learning) in the District of Amravati and expanded the teacher training to the lower-primary school teachers in 1997. As a part of a larger study exploring the adjustment of children to formal schooling on entry into Grade I, classroom processes were studied to understand what of the Joyful Learning programme would get implemented. Nine schools from a ward in Mumbai, to represent the different types of schools formed the sample. It was observed that more than half of the schools in the study did not have play space. There are shifts in the school system, in almost all the schools. It is a six-hour a day for the children and 8-hour a day for the teacher. There was no free play in the schedule, though there was physical education. While a number of teachers did make efforts in scheduling some activities for experiential learning, it was not possible for all of them to do so. The activities were implemented more to ward off boredom and sleep. Most teachers did have a holistic understanding of what play way method meant. Issues that need to be addressed in formulating policies and in teacher training have been pointed out.

Introduction and Review

In the last few decades play in children has drawn attention of various disciplines, more so of developmental psychology, child development, comparative psychology

and anthropology. It has acquired the connotation of “the business of childhood”. Theoretical positions on play in children have been expressed earlier (for an exhaustive review of the theories and conceptualisation, see

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Rubin, Fein and Vandenberg, 1983). More recently Frost, Wortham and Reifel (2001) have comprehensively reviewed the literature and have attempted to pin down the characteristics of play. Play as a means of learning/higher order thinking in childhood, and as a platform for learning social and other skills for adult life predominate the theories. Klugman and Fasoli (1995) have attempted to define play, as there is a need for a common understanding of play if it is to be encouraged in various settings of childhood. Play way method has been the dominant means of transacting the curriculum in the kindergarten and nursery years. The Play Way method incorporates the characteristics of play and has been found to be effective in the early school years. Recognising these characteristics, the Government of India, Ministry of Human Resources Development reviewed the education policy of the country (Committee for Review of National Policy on Education, 1990), which has come to be called the New Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986) Ramamurti Committee Report. The Government of Maharashtra, along with UNICEF implemented certain aspects of the report in the elementary schools of Amravati district in Maharashtra. The package has been called *Amravati Zilyatil Ananddayee Prakash* (Joyful Learning Experiment of Amravati District). It was also implemented in the municipal schools of Greater Mumbai in 1997. A study was conducted to understand the process of transition and adjustment of pre-school children to Grade I.

This paper highlights teachers' understanding of Joyful Learning (JL) package, and what was implemented in the classrooms. Initial sections of the paper details the theoretical understanding of play, comparison of play and learning, and how it gets transformed according to child's context. The next section describes the study in detail. The paper concludes with implications for teacher training and classroom practice.

The fun and frolic associated with children's play, taking place predominantly more during the span of childhood, when the child does not contribute in economic terms to the family has made parents and other adults in society to view play as frivolous. Play is characterised by the active involvement and action initiation by the child. It fulfils a need or needs of the child, is generally filled with fun and pleasure, is self-perpetuating, and it involves the mental faculties (Klugman and Fasoli, 1995). According to Vygotsky (1978) it takes places in the zone of proximal development and therefore contributes to various kinds of learning, has a social flavour and fulfils needs of the child. Piaget posits play as an assimilative process in cognitive development of the child. Gregory (1997) views play as a powerful means of communication by the child and as having a role in the adaptive process. This not only provides an alternative theoretical position on play, but has implications for using play as a therapeutic means (Frost, Wortham and Reifel, 2001). The psychoanalytic position views play as an adaptive mechanism of childhood

in dealing with the pressure/stress caused by societal limitation. Fantasy brings control to the child's world, and the learning is transferred to other real world contexts.

Bruner and colleagues have put but together various theoretical positions and literature on play (Bruner, Jolly and Sylva, 1976; cited in Frost, Wortham and Reifel, 2001). One of the predominant themes has been of play as a problem-solving activity. Play as cooperative and competitive social interactions, learning sex roles, cultural acquisition, language and scope for creativity are viewed as other functions of play. The activity encompasses the entire life contexts of the child. According to Bruner play is a foundation for problem-solving and thinking. Play separates the action (doing something) from contexts in which they normally take place; separates it from knowing "it". This psychological separation frees the mind for experimentation and paves the way for trying alternative solutions to the problem. These can then be practiced in the real world. The psychological separation could be resulting in relaxation that results when anybody plays, be it the child or the adult.

The nature of play tells us that it is all encompassing, it aids cognitive development, has emotional and social value for the child, mostly it is a pleasant activity, self-indulged/initiated; it is also creative and constructive in nature (providing further scope for understanding spatial relations in the real world). Furthermore, when play creates anxiety it can be discontinued.

One could compare this with learning, and see what it has to reveal, because society, in the form of parents and legislators (to a lesser extent, the teachers), wants the child to learn and not play. Learning as any textbook or treatise on learning will say is a permanent change in behaviour as a result of practice or experience. Practice and experience is provided by the physical and social world around the child. Social provision is in terms of who interacts with the child and how the learning material is presented to the child. Further, the child is put in formal or contrived situations "to learn" by the adults. It becomes other directed, and when it is other directed it becomes extrinsically motivated. Extrinsically motivated behaviour/learning requires incentives. Formal systems, like the school then try to provide incentives.

In formal systems of learning, because a lot of learning is made extrinsic, and if learning material is not presented in a way to nurture the child's curiosity, learning is hampered. However, when the child engages in play, such a problem does not exist. Child can explore and take initiative to learn. Driven by curiosity, he or she can direct one's learning. Exploratory, self-directed, opportunity for hands-on learning and adults to aid/explain in the learning process (intervening in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development) is what aids learning. School education is a platform for learning; it is later in the adult world that the child can practice what he or she is learning. Play is also such a platform, and therefore makes a strong

case for teaching through the playway method. Through the years various efforts in this direction have been undertaken, both at the pre-school level and the elementary school level. However the practice has been more characteristic of pre-school years than of the elementary school years in the Indian context.

Trends in nursery/pre-school education have been directed by the works of Kindergarten, Montessori, Dewey, Froebel and others. In the Indian setting Montessori Method, and *Tarabai Modak's Shishu Vihar* approach have been in operation. More recently Emlio Reggio's ideas are in operation in Italy (Gardner, 2000), and are being imported to the U.S. also (Gardner, 2000). At elementary education level guidelines and critiques of the system by John Holt (1972), Bloom (1987), Comer (The Comer process of education; Mahalomes, 1999), Howard Gardner (2000) have directed the elementary education programme. In the Indian setting, Bhadeka's *Diva Swapna* (1991), Eklavya's Hoshangabad Science Programme for middle school, Eklavya's *Prashika* – the Primary Education Programme (Agnihotri, Khanna and Shukla, 1994), *Ananddayee Prashikshan Prakalp*, (Amravati's District, Maharashtra's experiment, 1997) have been some of the pointers.

Edward Fiske (1999) has discussed a number of school innovations that emphasise a child-centered exploratory approach. Comer's school systems have documented the success, again of the child-centered, hands-on, exploratory methods in the teaching-

learning process (Mahalomes, 1999). More recently the concern of child psychologists, child development professionals and educationists has been on the trends in play in children, especially the urban children. Children are playing less (Kirn and Cole, 2002). Children are watching more television than playing (Gardner, 2000). This is true of Indian urban children too. The concern is one of creating more scope and space for play in the lives of children. In Mumbai, play space for children is limited, play parks and open spaces are few and far between (not close enough to the homes) and poorly maintained to seriously promote play in children (Balu, 1996). Such a situation prevails in spite of national efforts. In the 1980s, a conference on play and children's development was held, and issues on environment for children's play and its implications (Chowdhury, 1984), planning and organising play in children (Chiam, 1984), and even the how to revive traditional games (Thakkar, 1984), were discussed.

The concern for play has also emerged because the play and/or recess time has come down or does not exist in the school time-table. The economics of the situation, parental beliefs and understanding of play, need for more instructional time and safety concerns, have forced play out of the school time-tables (Dale, Corbin and Dale, 2000). A review of need for recess in the U.S. schools by Jarrett (2002) says that recess has gone out or schools are planning to abolish it in approximately 40% of the schools. Maxwell, Jarrett and Roetger (1998) conducted a qualitative study to see

how children view recess and why it is necessary for them. Fourth graders pointed out that a physical education class, being teacher-directed does not fulfil their need. They need recess to 'charge back', 'relax their brains', 'get their energy out', and 'blow off steam'. They needed recess because they could choose their activities, they could choose their playmates, and that showed "respect for children" – a right to their own time similar to what their parents and teachers had! Recess has shown to have salutary effects on the classroom learning, concentration and behaviour of children. Recess still exists in the Indian schools, but in the urban (e.g., Mumbai) time-table it is 30 minutes; in this 30 minutes the child has to eat too. This is lower in comparison to a generation ago when it was 45 minutes, and there was invariably a free play period for about twice a week in addition to the physical exercise time (which was teacher-directed). The reduction in school time in India is because of increasing population and the pressure it creates on the school resources. There are two shifts of about 5 and a half to 6 hours each in the school.

Child development professionals and child psychologists seem to have a daunting task in the face of the economics of the situation, and have to cry hoarse to bring home the point that play is indeed essential for the learning process and for need fulfilment of children. Jeanne Goldhaber's (1994) article "If We Call It Science, Then Can We Let the Children Play?" Goldhaber describes the case of a kindergarten teacher first being bogged down by

no-time, no-resources situation, to overcoming the hurdle to convert the science session into a play session. The teacher in question was able to cull out the similarities in a play situation and a science exploration session. Advocates of exploratory, hands-on experiences situated learning, learning for doing are either not heard or are heard inadequately. John Holt, Bruner, Bloom, in the 1960s, Howard Gardner in the 1980s, Kuroyanagi's Toto Chan (1982) – narration of Tomoe Guken's experiment in Japan, Perkins (1991), and more recently Comer Maholmes (1999) have presented strong rationale or have actual examples to prove how learning, the exploratory, playway method can take place. In the Indian context, Eklavya's *Prashika* programme (elementary school experiment in the public school systems in parts of Madhya Pradesh: Agnihotri, Khanna and Shukla, 1994) was successful in its techniques, but had to be withdrawn as parents protested against the playway method. They said that they wanted their children to study and not play. So the Government withdrew the programme. School Systems everywhere are experimenting and demonstrating to the State how an effective means to learn can work.

In the Indian context too, the pre-school is relatively a place for play, recreation and some preparation in terms of listening skills, learning alphabets and numbers. Not so the school years. Taking the child-centered perspective, the present study was conducted to understand children's adjustment to Grade I (Konantambigi, 2000). This paper is a part of the larger

study on transition and adjustment of children to Grade I. The broad context and rationale for the study is briefly explained, and the focus for the present paper is laid out.

A study was conducted to understand children's adjustment to Grade I. Grade I in the schools system of India gets to be more formal and structured than the kindergarten or the nursery years. The expectations from significant others in the child's life get formal too. The school set-up, the classroom, the activities and the behaviour of the teachers like-wise, tends to become more formal. There is a shift from informal activities, like playing, singing, dancing and indulging in art work, to a more "serious", academic work, written work, answering questions, etc. Vis-à-vis behaviour too there are likely to be more formal expectations, e.g., sitting quietly for long hours. It is not uncommon to hear parents tell their 6 year-olds, 'you are in first grade now. You have to become serious...'

Developmentally the child's reasoning is different, s/he does not as yet think like an adult. S/he has yet to develop visual eye/hand co-ordination which will facilitate child/s looking and writing (especially copying complex patterns – alphabets, numbers – from the blackboard), (Lefrancois, 1990). The child is learning more from doing rather than understanding from reading. The teaching methods, however, tend to be focused on abstract thinking and more adult-like approaches.

The Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra introduced *Ananddayee Shikshan Prakalp*

(method of Joyful Learning) in Mumbai. All teachers in the early elementary Grades from I to IV had to undergo this training. This intervention was therefore incorporated into the study. Joyful Learning (henceforth referred to as JL) was put together on the basis of Committee for the Review of National Policy on Education Policy 1986, (Ramamurti Committee Report, 1990). Other recommendations were, no formal evaluation, "examinations" for children, and not to burden the child with written and other material and not make the school bag heavy, evaluations were to be informal, and were to be incorporated in the day-to-day interactions. JL was first experimented in certain schools of Amravati District, Maharashtra, India (*Unicef* and the *Amravati Zilla Parishad Vibhag*, Maharashtra, 1997). The aims of JL approach have been to make school learning a joyful experience. For this purpose, Vygotsky's theory and methods which support a child-centered approach have been included in the training. Situated learning, moving from the known to the unknown, use of playway method, extensive use of attractive visual materials, using means of recreation and hands-on experience in the learning process have been included in the package. The first training was for 2 weeks. The inclusion of JL prior to the collection of data for the present study made it mandatory to examine what of JL the teachers would practice in the classroom. Of particular interest was in seeing how teachers conceptualise "playway method". Curiosity in this regard has emerged because of the commonly aired views

on play by adults in different contexts of parent-child interactions and child care workers (personal observations and experience).

Methodology

Population and sample of the study

A north-eastern suburb of Greater Mumbai was chosen as sample, it was convenient to visit the sample a number of times. Since the study was qualitative, accessibility of the sample was a significant factor deciding the locale of sampling.

Marathi and English medium coeducation schools catering to lower middle, middle and upper middle class families were chosen. The criteria of schools to be a part of the sample was set, and then the schools were chosen using the simple random method. Random number table was used for the purpose. A total of 9 schools were included in the study. In all there were about 62 aided schools (Municipal), and 40 unaided schools, and out of the unaided schools, very few were private schools for low income group children. In the study about 8.8% of schools in the suburb were covered. Children in Grade I (one of the divisions in a school was chosen, some with morning shift and some with afternoon shift) were included in the study as transition to formal schooling was one of the aims of the study.

Measures in the study

The objectives of the study dictated that I look at the processes in the classroom throughout the year. This included interviews of the teachers and

repeated observations of the classroom processes (teacher-child interactions included). One of the objectives was to examine the process of the curriculum transaction, and the manner in which the teacher's perceive it. The methods of enquiry were primarily qualitative in nature. (In the larger study, the focus was on home school transition and the child's adjustment and performance). Parent interviews vis-à-vis adjustment of children, teacher's academic and non-academic evaluation of children, PTA meeting observations and child's IQ were the other dimensions of the study.

Interview guidelines were drawn up, and subsidiary questions and probes were used to elicit the required information. To understand what and how of the Joyful Learning experiment, questions were included to know what was learnt by teachers at these training programmes, what were the strategies in use, what the teachers thought about the joyful learning approach, how did it compare with the old method, etc. The attitudes towards the new method, their understanding of children, and their learning would determine the effectiveness of new training and approaches. Since the JL was just being introduced, it was believed that the old approach, methods, and attitudes would not change overnight, but it was important to understand the perceptions of the teachers towards the new approach.

Procedure

Prior permission was sought from the Education Department of the Municipal Corporation and schools

and a pilot study was conducted. Three teacher interviews and three observations were spread over the academic year, the first one being within 15 days of the commencement of the academic year. Teacher interviews were conducted predominantly by a research assistant after brief training and observations were done by the principal investigator. Inter-observer reliability was established by involving 2 research assistants and observations were recorded by all for 3 different schools for a period of one hour each.

Another method was used to cross-validate the observations. Broad categories of my observations were provided to two field specialists of the Institute, along with the objectives of research and three samples of the observations (as well as the interviews). They were asked to denote the categories that mentioned in the data samples provided. The observation was of a narrative style. The classroom environment in terms of physical structure, ventilation, light, pleasantness of the room, decorations in the room, and seating arrangement of pupils was recorded and so were the physical characteristic of the school. A general format for the observation was prepared. There had to be the mention of starting time, finishing time, and date of observation, activity in progress, the narration, any specific comments, elaborations and explanations. The last three could be added immediately after the observation hour.

Data analysis

Qualitative analyses as suggested through the works of Strauss and his

colleague were utilised (Strauss, 1987, Strauss and Corbin, 1991). Systematic treatment of the data through open coding (developing coding memos), axial coding to see what themes hang together (developing conceptual maps), developing a case study of each school, and finally comparing the cases were the main steps in analysis.

Findings of the Study

Physical characteristics surrounding the schools and the activities in the schools reveal the background information that defines the schools. This section will highlight the physical conditions under which the schools functioned, including the availability of space for indoor and outdoor play and the nature of activities going on in the classrooms. Teaching strategies used by the teachers and its relation to children's behaviour, with a special focus on playway method, and the teachers' comparisons of old and the new (JL) approach, some parent opinions and apprehensions about JL will form the bulk of the findings.

Physical setting of the school

In rural and tribal areas of India, the schools are very likely to be in pleasant surroundings, and also have scope for play. There is bound to be space for outdoor play; at times this may not be immediately adjacent to the school. In the urban areas, especially of a metropolis this facility is not given. So also, adequate toilet and drinking water facilities may not be present. The following information from the nine schools in the study provides an idea of what prevailed in our schools (Table 1).

Table 1
Physical Features of Schools

<i>Features of the School</i>	<i>No. of schools</i>
Location of the School	
In Pleasant surroundings (Pvt. Schools)	5 schools
Not very pleasant	3 schools
Unpleasant surroundings (Situating in a slum)	1 school
Playground Facility	
Good space Available (but play not feasible)	2
Some playing space (schools with horizontal structures)	2 (Municipal Schools)
No play space (vertical school structure)	5
Hygienic Conditions	
Poor hygienic conditions around and in the school	1 Municipal School
Poor hygienic practices	2 Municipal Schools
Lighting	
Adequate	8
Need for better lighting	1
Inadequate	0
Ventilation Adequate	9
Description of the indoors	
Well painted and decorated with posters/charts = Very pleasant	1
Decorated with posters and charts = Pleasant	4
Well painted only = Pleasant	2
Not well painted, no posters	2
Scope for indoor play/activities	4
No scope for indoor play/activities	5
Adequate space for free indoor activities or in the building	2
Multiple classes in one room	1
Total Schools (N=9)	9

Most private schools in the study were in pleasant and clean areas. Only one municipal school was situated with a lot of garbage, open drains running around it; spaces around it were used to even defecating. In this school certain parts of the schoolstank with the smell of urine. This was situated in a slum. The other two municipal schools and a private school in the study were gray, unappealing structures - there was no proper painting of the walls and during monsoons, one school faced a severe problem of leakage.

Pleasant surroundings and hygiene in the schools seemed to go together. The municipal schools together with drab surroundings also tended to have poor hygiene practices. The toilets and their surroundings meant for children stank of urine even though there was adequate water supply. In the other schools, such situations were not observed.

Five out of the nine schools in the study did not have playgrounds, and 2 of these same schools did not have a facility for outdoor activities. The

other 3 schools could have exercise sessions and yoga. The above 5 schools in question were private schools. One private Marathi medium school had a huge playground close-by. The playground was dominated by older adolescents and young adults who indulged in playing cricket and the teacher said that therefore young school children could not feel safe and were therefore not allowed to play in the same premises.

A private English medium school and a private Marathi medium school had big classrooms, and there was scope for free movements, singing and

dimensions of the class (see Table 2). Floor space per person in the classroom is also indicated in Table 1.3.

The Joyful Learning Scheme advocates *yogasanas* (yoga) and physical exercises. More than half of the schools could not seat and accommodate the children comfortably, let alone provide space for activities like dancing, exercises and *yogasanas*. Such activities could then be perceived as an imposition on the schools, could be performed perfunctorily; increasing the burden of teachers without the requisite output, and in the long run reduce the morale.

Table 2

Number of children in the schools and the floor space availability

Municipal Schools				Private English Medium School				Private Marathi Medium Schools			
Sh No.	No. of Chn	Room Size (in ‘)	Space per Ch (sq. ft.)	Sh No.	No. of Chn.	Room Size (in ‘)	Space per Ch. (sq. Feet)	Sh No.	No. of Chn.	Room Size (in ‘)	Space per Ch. (sq. ft)
1	43	17’x17’	6.7	5	40	10’x12’	3.0	3	78	15’x20’	3.8
2	42	12’x12’	3.4	8	60	12’x15’	3.0	4	43	18’x20’	8.4
7	43	10’x15’	3.5	6	50	15’x15’	4.5				
				9	63	16’x16’	4.1				

Note: Sh = School, Chn = children, Ch = child, sq ft = square feet and ‘ = Feet

dancing. Two of the municipal schools did not have adequate classroom space. The space could also have been utilised for small-group activities, or alternate sitting arrangements, facilitative of more face to face interactions between the teacher and the children. Though space was utilised for exercising or yoga, it was not put to maximum use.

An idea of space availability for children would perhaps be clear on looking at the data on number of children per class, and the physical

Playground facility, facilities for play and recreation is a rare commodity in the metropolis of Mumbai. This suburb was no exception. Only two schools had the facility, and they were not elite schools.

Activities in the classroom

The following chart provides the two predominant trends that prevailed in activity patterns. Though there were individual differences across the teachers (schools) and one

could say whether the activities were predominantly abstract, very academic-oriented or activities like

had the right understanding. As the techniques relate to a teaching strategy, this aspect is dealt within

Chart — School and activity patterns

<p>Municipal Schools and the PMM* for LSES*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities of singing, dancing, teaching numbers and alphabets through the means learnt in the Joyful Learning programme. • Less time spent on disciplining. • Celebrations of festivals. • No outdoor activities.
<p>English Medium Schools (and one PMM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on academic activities using routine methods. • Emphasis on writing. • Teacher checking the work of children. Some time spent on nitty-gritty. • Little use of visuals. • Not much indulgence in singing and dancing. • Some exercises, and yoga, some extra-curricular activities. • A little more time spent on disciplining (Larger classrooms). • No outdoor activities.

*Note: PMM - Private Marathi Medium School, LSES - Low Socio-Economic Status Group

only singing and dancing took place, the reporting is done for two schools.

The Municipal schools are directly under the control of the education department and we perhaps therefore saw teachers implementing the new activities recommended. However as individuals, there were differences in the interest and effectiveness with which the activities were implemented, and how often were they implemented. There were individual differences in the preferences for activities and the techniques used in conducting them. Following is drawn by comparing what teachers had said about playway method:

- For most teachers singing and dancing meant the playway method. Only the teacher from School no. 4, private Marathi Medium School,

the appropriate section.

- Shortage of space is a major challenge. Four schools took children for field trips, and there was some activity related to planting trees (as a part of their curriculum on environmental studies).
- Yet again, one noticed that most schools had some extra-curricular, and art and craft activities, which are essential for various aspects of development in children. However, the activities had the focus of completing the tasks and doing the work neatly rather than emphasising the process and learning involved in these activities. In a couple of schools these activities it seemed were institutionalised. The teachers' (School No. 5 and 8) were particular about what colours

were to be put on the pictures! One of the teachers was very aggressive about it, and provided negative reinforcement to the defaulters. Again individual differences were noted. Teacher of School No. 4 was totally enthusiastic, child-oriented, innovated activities, and taught in the JL approach recommended. A couple of teachers were good in implementing the activities, but did not have in-depth understanding of children's learning. Yet others were rooted in the old approach, which was teacher-directed and concentrated on academic teaching; they taught using the rote learning method most of the time. One class had 78 children in the class and the teacher spent most of the time disciplining the children. Some of the time was spent on correcting the notebooks of children (nit-picking all the while on, 'Why there was no date'? 'Why is it written on page so and so?'), giving instructions, copying from the blackboard and scolding children for various misdemeanours. In contrast to these glum proceedings, there was a change in this classroom itself, when the art teacher or the school headmistress were there (replacing the teacher about once a week) for drawing work or to tell stories. Here children were relaxed and enjoyed themselves. (*Field Notes of School No. 3*).

- In other schools, time was not taken up with disciplining activities like in School No. 3, but they were not as child-oriented as School No. 4 either. There was some pattern (see Chart).
- It was observed that children did not concentrate on the task on hand if they did not know how to go about it and, in all probability, when they felt diffident for some reason or the other. Lack of tasks, or when they finished their tasks and waited for the teachers to check on their work, did they get into other activities which could become noisy and disruptive for the teacher to carry on her tasks. It could, at times, disrupt the neighbouring classes.
- Another significant finding regarding physical activity relates to the restlessness in children. Certain teachers observed that toward the end of the day, or at times immediately after lunch, children could not concentrate; got restless too. Therefore, one teacher said, she schedules the activities in such a way that everyday there are some extra-curricular/art/craft kind of activities, especially after lunch. Teachers of school 9 and 4 also reported that they took care of the schedules so as to make the entire day interesting. Exercising them on and off, got children to shake off their sleep, boredom and restlessness, the teachers said. To quote, "... during the day of about 6 hours in the classroom, the teacher also needs a break, it gets very tiring otherwise. Mondays I do not have a break and the children do not have any extra-curricular activities. To avoid this chaos I call in a teacher to sing bhajans (devotional songs) for the children." (*Field Notes of School 8*). Almost all

schools used exercises and singing which were performed by children with gusto (especially by the boys), “to ward off lethargy”, was what the teachers reported.

Most teachers admitted to focusing on reading and writing, (especially the English medium schools and a private Marathi medium school), as the parents told them that they want their children to learn them. Moreover, these teachers were in a way convinced that the children coming to their schools, *meant for middle and upper income groups (my addition)*, had already indulged in activities involving materials in K.G., they knew their alphabets, and it was not relevant for them.

Teaching strategies

A dimension to the use of particular teaching strategies has to do with classroom strength. Almost all teachers reported that teacher to child ratio should be 1:40, otherwise classes became unwieldy; and that they were capable of managing 40 children well was in it commendable. One teacher of school No. 3 was found exasperated with 78 children.

Teacher in school No. 8 did not verbally express her exasperation with 60 odd children in the classroom, but she seemed to be in a hurry to complete the tasks, and egged the children on to complete the tasks. Her brusque behaviour in various actions,

not taking time to explain, bore testimony to the pressure she felt in handling the class. Teacher of school 9 did mention and said that the new learning methods (the Joyful Learning approach) require fewer children to a class. She especially mentioned evaluation to be exhaustive as specific questions are to be asked to the child, and after this tiring process, one had to make sure that the child learnt and moved on to higher competency levels. It was also observed that a lot of her time was taken up with correcting children’s work (so also of the teacher of school 8).

Almost all teachers spoke about the role of visual aids in enhancing learning in children. Only about 3 schools used them actively.

Exploring teachers’ teaching strategies and recording the observations revealed their awareness regarding what helps children learn or how children learn (Table 3). The findings are interesting in the sense that awareness or knowledge does not translate into action and certain actions of the teachers could aid children’s learning. Some of the knowledge seems to be from the JL approach, especially the strategy on teaching in an integrated way, providing hands-on experience to children, the relationship of audio-visual aids to memory and small group activities. However the message of playway method *per se* has not percolated to most in the sample.

Table 3

Awareness and/or lack of awareness about teaching strategies**Awareness of**

1. Committing something to memory, i.e., by-hearting something, or/and being able to rattle off the contents of a textbook were no indications of being able to read. (School No. 7).
2. What constitutes a demonstration (equipment may not necessarily be used). (School No. 8), School Nos 1, 2, and 4.
3. The integrating functions of audio-visual aids in strengthening memory (School No. 2), No.4, No.6; and other school teachers, did not appreciate it enough to put them into practice.
4. Teaching in an integrated way rather than separating subjects taught in the classroom. (School No. 2; School No. 4).
5. Creation of small groups of children, based on their learning capacities, to further assist in their learning. (School No.2; School No. 4, teacher was aware, but expressed difficulty in carrying it out).
6. Playway as a recreation technique only (all schools except school no. 4), or used to teach alphabets and numbers.
7. Hands-on experience, games and play were enjoyed the most by children. Activities kept children focused and out of mischief.

Lack of awareness of

1. What constitutes rote learning? Most teachers who practised the rote technique believed that they made children understand by explaining rather than by making them by heart something.
2. The entire process of children's learning (except teacher of school. No. 4).
3. What teacher efforts are required for effective teaching (Except teacher of school No. 4).
4. The meaning of playway method in its entirety.

Discussion and Conclusion

Situating learning in an environment, organising for play for the sake of letting children play and using games to increase insights into learning and engaging children continuously in the classroom require settings which provide for clean spaces, some ventilation, light and a pleasantness which will enthuse the participants to

action. The experience and research findings both reveal that unpleasant environments can depress students, and make students inactive. Similarly, crowding results in aggressive and non-helping behaviours. Play and activities recommended by the Education Department cannot be conducted in more than half of the schools in the study. A number of

our Municipal schools presently do have these facilities. But one cannot be sure that the situation will prevail for long. The condition of parks and playgrounds has been found to be poor (Balu, 1996). As issues stand today, children have reduced facilities for play in Mumbai. It is a privilege if housing complexes have some space for play. How many can afford to utilise paid services is the question. Education planners, policy makers and the concerned stakeholders need to address these issues. However, one can enhance management of the schools in such a way that the schools are pleasant settings to be in.

Reflections on play, observations of children at play and theoretical positions on play beg the point that play needs to be encouraged in children for a variety of reasons (health as well as psychological development). More than half of the schools in the study did not have play space. This concern assumes more significance given the facts of television viewing and playing. Studies on television viewing by children in India (NIPCCD, 1987) and elsewhere in the world (Bloom, 1987; Kirn and Cole, 2002) reveal that urban children play less and watch more television per week.

Resource crunch and the population problem, especially in urban India, have made the school day shorter. There are shifts in the school system, in almost all the schools of Mumbai. It is a six hour day for the children and 8-hour day for the teacher. School time table was viewed while looking at activities of the classroom. There was no free play in the schedule, though there was

physical education. What goes out of the time table is the play time. This is akin to what is happening in the U.S. too (Jarrett, 2001). The beneficial effects of physical exercise and activity were pointed by teachers themselves in this study. Complementary to this finding is one by Dale, Corbin and Dale (2000) which revealed that children's activity levels did not increase after a day in school without play and exercises.

While a number of teachers did make efforts in scheduling some activities, it was not possible for all of them, and everybody concerned did not make all the efforts. All systems are not in place. There is space crunch, either because they share the classroom with another class and/or the size of classroom is too small (in comparison to the strength of the class) to conduct activities. Under such circumstances, the activities are not done in the required manner. This gives a message to the children that these are things to be done for the sake of doing, and that they are not serious. Cynicism could develop.

Strength of the classrooms (and multi-level grades in one classroom, especially in our rural areas) has been mentioned as an impediment to playway, activity based learning. Perkins (1992) says that generally a hue and cry is raised about maintaining high teacher-student ratio. In schools with size of classrooms varying from 20 to 40 pupils not making a difference to teaching effectiveness has also been reported (Eggen and Kauchak, 1991). He has compared certain educational outcomes in the American (USA) schools and those in China and Japan. He is

of the view that teacher-student ratios has also to be seen in the context of time available for teachers' lesson plan preparations, time for them to reflect on their classroom practices. Chinese and Japanese teachers were more effective in larger classrooms because they had honed their skills by more preparation and reflection to impart better "understanding". Administrative duties within the education system and outside ate into the teaching time of the teachers in the study.

The activities were implemented more to ward off boredom and sleep; not for making learning experiential, more so in the private schools. Unaided schools tried to do mostly what they had been doing (one English medium school had already adopted a number of strategies suggested by JL) – some activities were incorporated to show the observers that changes had been instituted. Activity-based approaches were seen as being appropriate for the pre-schools and because the education system has no way of enforcing certain standards in the private schools, the implementation of an approach or method boils down as to who control's the purse strings.

The new approach or the Joyful Learning programme needed to rationalise the workload and provide other logistics support if a there is to be change. Of significance have also been teachers' comprehension of why evaluation and how of evaluation. Issues, duration and effectiveness of training programmes and their follow-ups need to be addressed.

While elaborating on the strategies used, almost all the teachers spoke

about the playway method. When explored what this playway method is they (except teacher from school no. 4) said that it is to sustain a child's interest, to make them like school, and for this purpose games and songs were formed a part of the activities. The understanding of the technique seemed limited to the method's usage of holding children's attention, and creating a playful environment to be in. But as a strategy it involves knitting syllabi into play activities so that new concepts are learnt or old ones assimilated as children play. Forming teams and giving points/rewards to the winning team would be an example of helping assimilation of some learned facts. Similarly material has to be carefully chosen, rules set up or so that children explore new concepts as they are asked to play a game. Joyful Learning has introduced the technique, but the teachers (at least in the study) do not appreciate the meaning in its entirety. Furthermore, knowledge did not translate into practice and there could be a number of reasons. The reasons could range from practical aspects of classroom management, strength of the classroom, leadership and many a times to the basic social psychology that could unfold in organisational setting (from dyadic interactions resulting in limiting one's performance to dynamic leadership and organisational practices with employees).

Some of the schools were able to implement the JL approach to an extent, and include certain hands-on activities for children. Playway method as teaching strategy could not become

operational in most schools. It has been about 10 years now since the implementation of the Joyful Learning Programme, there needs to be a more thorough review. Implementation of Ramamurti Committee's recommendations hinged on the understanding of playway approach. A paradigm shift in understanding how children learn, and the value of play in the entire process needs a plan of action which is systematic and sustained. Teachers from the unaided schools and the parents from the lower Socio Economic Status (SES) backgrounds seem to have certain beliefs about how learning and play are distinct and that how one cannot be mixed with the other, and they also have apprehensions regarding the new method. Parent's beliefs and can go a long way in instituting change in education practices and negative influences could be perpetuated without adequate understanding of the teaching-learning processes by the parents (Mahendru, K. of Eklavya, personal communication, 2005).

Issues could be more compounded when there is no consensus on what constitutes playing (Frost, Wortham, and Reifel, 2001; Klugman and Fasoli, 2000). Time and efforts need to be sustained in bringing about educational change. What Perkins (1992) has to say about change in this regard is very relevant. Sustaining change, making the teachers accept new method/strategy and making it a part of their repertoire of teaching strategies is an arduous task; needs to be very systematic, and the momentum has to be sustained till it is internalised. Croll, Abbott, Broadfoot, Osborn and Pollard (1994) also have a

similar suggestion. Various checks are suggested. One important component according to Perkins is not adding on to an already burdened schedule and activities of the teacher. Looking at some of the teacher feedback in this study it appears that our systems do not attempt to reduce the burden of the teachers. Some teachers complained repeatedly about this in the study.

There is another dimension to the issue of knowledge and its practice in the classroom setting. Some teachers in the study were aware but did not practice what they knew. A few were not able to realise that they did not "know" that they were using the rote-method. In the overall context of the school system, it seems that knowing is not enough. Teacher training has to aim at the issue of not just the cognitive dimensions but also at the affective and conative dimensions. Affective issues can become significant in bringing about the desired results, as in the case of teachers of School No. 4 and 2. The teachers need to strongly feel about implementing the knowledge that possess they and how they will implement it. It brings forth the issues of motivations and sensitivities of teachers and what does the education system function by. If these issues are not addressed by the system, individuals interested in the teaching and learning so that children retain what they learn, there is a need to strategise by interested educators/teachers, and like Jeanne Goldhaber (1994), we need to ask our policy makers and education administrators, "...if it is education, can we let our children play?"

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