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## About the Journal

*The Primary Teacher* is a quarterly journal brought out by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi. The journal carries articles and researches on educational policies and practices, and values material that is useful for practitioners in contemporary times. The journal also provides a forum to teachers to share their experiences and concerns about the schooling processes, curriculum, textbooks, teaching-learning and assessment practices. The papers for publication are selected on the basis of comments from two referees. The views expressed by individual authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the policies of the NCERT, or the views of the editor.

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# The Primary Teacher

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## CONTENTS

**Editorial**

### Issues and Policy Perspective

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Why this *Kolaveri* about Teaching Vowel Sounds at HKG Level? | Sanjay Arora and Anshika Arora | 5 |
| 2. | Issues of Inclusive Education in Manipur | Wangkheirakpam Bidyabati and Lairellakpam Seilendra Singh | 13 |
| 3. | Engaging with Disability for a Common Right | Quazi Ferdoushi Islam | 19 |
| 4. | Early Mathematics Learning Assessment | Satya Bhushan | 24 |
| 5. | The Unheard Voices behind the Telephone | Vandana Kerur | 32 |
| 6. | Linguistic Roots — Mother Tongues of Indian Children in South Africa | Debjani Naskar | 37 |

### From the States — Maharashtra

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Chavadi Vachan* — The Social Audit of Learning | Vikas Garad | 43 |

### Book Review

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Culturally Proficient Instruction — A Guide for People who Teach* | Amruth G. Kumar and Dinesh G. | 45 |

### Did You Know

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A University dedicated to Children | Harshad P. Shah | 48 |

### My Page

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Mirage of Assumptions | Varada M. Nikalje | 51 |


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# CHILDREN'S BILL OF RIGHTS

A child is every person under the age of 18 years. Parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The State shall respect and ensure the rights of the child.

**Dignity and Expression**

- I have the right to know about my Rights. *(Article 42)*
- I have rights being a child and no matter who I am where I live, what my parents do, what language I speak, what religion I follow, whether I am a boy or a girl, what culture I belong to, whether I am disabled, whether I am rich or poor. I should not be treated unfairly on any basis. Everyone has the responsibility to know this. *(Article 2)*

- I have the Right to express my views freely which should be taken seriously, and everyone has the Responsibility to listen to others. *(Article12,13)*
- I have the Right to make mistakes, and everyone has the Responsibility to accept we can learn from our mistakes. *(Article 28)*
- I have the Right to be included whatever my abilities, and everyone has the Responsibility to respect others for their differences. *(Article 23)*

**Development**

- I have the Right to a good education, and everyone has the Responsibility to encourage all children to go to school. *(Article 23, 28, 29)*
- I have the Right to good health care, and everyone has the Responsibility to help others get basic health care and safe water. *(Article 24)*
- I have the Right to be well fed, and everyone has the Responsibility to prevent people from starving. *(Article 24)*
- I have the Right to a clean environment, and everyone has the Responsibility not to pollute it. *(Article 29)*

- I have the Right to play and rest. *(Article 31)*

**Care and Protection**

- I have the Right to be loved and protected from harm and abuse, and everyone has the Responsibility to love and care for others. *(Article 19)*
- I have the Right to a family and a safe and comfortable home, and everyone has the Responsibility to make sure all children have a family and home. *(Article 9,27)*

- I have the Right to be proud of my heritage and beliefs, and everyone has the Responsibility to respect the culture and belief of others. *(Article 29,30)*
- I have the Right to live without violence (verbal, physical, emotional), and everyone has the Responsibility not to be violent to others. *(Article 28,37)*
- I have the Right to be protected from economic exploitation and sexual exploitation, and everyone has the Responsibility to ensure that no child is forced to work and is given a free and secure environment. *(Article 32,34)*

- I have the Right to protection from any kind of exploitation and everyone has the Responsibility to ensure that I am not being subjected to be taken advantage in any manner. *(Article 36)*

IN ALL ACTION CONCERNING CHILDREN, THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD SHALL BE A PRIMARY CONSIDERATION

All these rights and responsibilities are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. It contains all the rights which children have all over the world. The Government of India signed this document in 1992.

Source: National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), Government of India

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## EDITORIAL

Childhood is the most crucial stage in a person's life, as it is during this period that foundations are laid for motor, sensory, cognitive, language, social and personality development. This makes the role of a teacher an important one since it is the teacher who serves as a link between the children and parents, and children and the outside world. Besides, the teacher has to address students with diverse needs, including Children With Special Needs (CWSN) and those belonging to varied socioeconomic backgrounds. This issue of the journal focuses on 'inclusive education', apart from covering other important topics regarding the teaching–learning process.

The first article titled 'Why this *Kolaveri* about Teaching Vowel Sounds at HKG Level?' by Sanjay Arora and Anshika Arora is based on teaching vowel sounds to children at the higher kindergarten level in a Jaipur public school with the help of a textbook titled *Step Up with English Primer*. It points out how teaching from such textbooks can distort the very foundation of students and induce inappropriate learning style in them. It emphasises that teaching of sounds is the base of spoken English.

The next article titled 'Issues of Inclusive Education in Manipur' by Wangkheirakpam Bidyabati and Lairellakpam Seilendra Singh aims to find out the issues challenging inclusive education as regards to disabled students in schools located in Manipur's Imphal East and West districts. It underlines that none of the schools have trained teachers and resource persons. Besides, they do not prepare Individualised Education Plans to cater to CWSN.

The paper titled 'Engaging with Disability for a Common Right' by Quazi Ferdoushi Islam also tries to understand inclusion from the perspective of disability, and policies and programmes initiated by the government for their inclusion in mainstream education.

The paper titled 'Early Mathematics Learning Assessment' by Satya Bhushan underlines the significance of mathematics education at the early grades of schooling and how mathematical concepts learnt at this stage impacts future learning.

The article 'The Unheard Voices behind the Telephone' by Vandana Kerur acknowledges the work of Alexander Graham Bell and the role he played in the life of Helen Keller, a blind and mute girl.

In the article 'Linguistic Roots — Mother Tongues of Indian Children in South Africa', author Debjani Naskar elaborates how government policies can lead to the rise or fall of a language, taking the example of a large Indian

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diaspora living in the country. English is the primary language for most of the Indians living there. The history of South Africa, in terms of policy and society, had a strong impact on Indian communities adversely affecting the growth of vernacular languages. The author stresses it is important for the Indian community in South Africa to keep their native languages alive, and preserve their cultural and linguistic identity.

In the section, 'From the States', Vikas Garad talks about the implementation of *Chavadi Vachan* programme in villages across the State of Maharashtra. The programme, a social audit of reading, aims to promote the mother tongue among students.

The issue also carries its regular features — Book Review, Did You Know and My Page.

In the review of the book, *Culturally Proficient Instruction — A Guide for People who Teach*, by Kikanza J. Nuri-Robins, Delores B. Lindsey, Randall B. Lindsey and Raymond D. Terrell, reviewers Amruth G Kumar and Dinesh G share that the book serves as a manual of culturally proficient instructions for teachers and educational institutions.

The 'Did You Know' section introduces the readers to the world's first Children's University located in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, which works under four dimensions — education, research, training and extension. It covers child and adolescence development — starting from foetus till the attainment of 18 years of age. It also runs health awareness and child rearing programmes for expecting mothers, apart from postgraduation courses in many subjects.

In the 'My Page' section, author Varada M. Nikalje explains how one's assumptions are not always correct or justifiable. In the article titled 'The Mirage of Assumptions', she elaborates on 'mirage' with some examples of assumptions, which may perhaps be embedded in some parents, teachers and other stakeholders in education. This would, in turn, impact the teaching–learning process, and hence, learning outcomes.

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# 1

# Why this *Kolaveri* about Teaching Vowel Sounds at HKG Level?

Sanjay Arora*
Anshika Arora**

**Abstract**

*There is an aggressive rage or haste (kolaveri) in India to teach spoken English (especially, in English medium schools) because of the increasing demand of urban elite and middle class parents to make their wards learn fluent English. Parents coming from economically weaker sections of society, too, have become aware of the importance of English due to media exposure, including social media. The article is based on teaching vowel sounds (through one of the English textbooks) to children at the higher kindergarten (HKG) level at a public school in Jaipur. The first part of the paper discusses how the teaching of vowel sounds is undertaken at this level through the textbook, Step Up with English Primer. This is followed by a discussion on how teaching from such books can distort the very foundation of students and induce inappropriate learning style in them. The paper emphasises teaching of sounds as these are considered to be the base of spoken English.*

## INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning English as a foreign or second language has been pervasive in India for decades. According to Krashen (1985), acquiring a new language is a bit more challenging for young learners than adults. Moreover, young 'acquirers' are always taken for granted. This paper tries to address one of the misconceptions related to developing verbal communication skills in young learners, in general, and vowel sounds, in particular. Even after more than seven decades of gaining Independence from the British, methods of teaching English in the country have by and large

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been confined to the same obsolete conventional patterns. There is no denying the fact that these conventional methods have their own advantages.

In this regard Mark Twain says, "...foreigners always spell better than they pronounce." These words underline the essence of English language teaching and learning in India. Students are able to spell the most difficult tongue twisting words. The 'Spell Bee Competition', organised in the USA every year, in which Indian children participate and win, stands testimony to that. The basic reason behind this is that most students bank on rote learning and gaining theoretical knowledge, irrespective of the subject. This is true about the teaching–learning system in India, in general — for example, in science, it is theorems and valances, mathematics has formulas, history has dates, and civics is about rights and duties. Similarly, in English, it is spellings, sounds, structures, poems, passages and rules of the language about which most of the learners have a somewhat theoretical understanding.

The idea of educating the youth for building a new India sounds promising but the irony is that if these youth (constituting 60–70 per cent) have a weak foundation at the primary level, such thoughts seem to be hollow. It is all the more so in institutions of higher education, in general, and central universities, in particular, where the medium of instruction in all departments is English. Little attention is paid to the fact that a majority of students come from villages and rural areas of the country with hardly an exposure in English. As a result, they keep struggling all through their academic years, trying to comprehend the subjects being taught in English.

While going through an English textbook being used in one of the reputed English medium schools in Jaipur, it came to light that it is not just students coming from rural areas of the country and belonging to economically weaker sections of the society who have little exposure to English. In fact, 'privileged' students, whose parents can afford expensive public schools, are also being imparted incorrect information through 'substandard textbooks'.

In these schools, the students get an edge over those deprived of this opportunity in rural areas as they have an English environment. As a result, most of them become better oral communicators in the language. But at the factual level, they are weak and this starts taking root at an early age through the use of substandard textbooks. The textbook on which this article is based is *Step Up with English Primer*.

## Teaching Vowel Sounds and Phonemes

The book consists of 34 (actually 33, error in numbering) short chapters carrying colourful illustrations. The 64–page book covers sounds (vowels and consonants), articles

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(definite and indefinite), demonstratives and possessive pronouns, verbs (action words), open-ended responses in case of 'yes' and 'no' to simple questions, prepositions and some 'wh' question words.

## Analysis

It was analysed that too many topics have been covered in the book. Moreover, it seems that the book has been written to impress parents and teachers rather than serve its basic purpose, i.e., imparting retainable knowledge to the 'young' students. It was also found that none of the topics has been dealt with in detail in the book. Every topic has just been touched upon as if to add to the number of chapters and pages. If sounds are considered to be the basis of speaking, then all sounds should have been dealt with appropriately but the book fails to do so. Moreover, chapters that talk of vowel sounds give factually incorrect information. Each chapter talks about one particular vowel. So, in all, there are five chapters that talk about the 'five' vowel sounds, i.e., a, e, i, o and u (Appendix A), and not '20'.

It seems that the publisher has extracted information from multiple books and has created a compiled version, bothering little about the damage it may cause to learners in their formative years. Table 1 illustrates the sounds that have been given in each vowel chapter.

**Table 1: Vowel sounds as given in the textbook, *Step Up with English Primer***

| Chapter No. | Contents | Actual sound(s) as per RP[1] (IPA[2]) represented through examples in the chapters | Examples of other sounds given under the same head |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Revision of alphabet | — | — |
| 2. | Sound of the vowel 'a' | /æ/<br>e.g., bag, cat, rat, tag, lad, etc. | /eI/<br>e.g., say, way, lay, take, lake, etc. |
| 3. | Sound of the vowel 'e' | /e/<br>e.g., hen, pen, red, wed, wet, etc. | /Iə/<br>e.g., dear, ear, gear, near, etc.<br>/i:/<br>e.g., beep, deep, keep, jeep, etc. |
| 4. | Sound of the vowel 'i' | /I/<br>e.g., lid, pin, sit, dip, lip, dig, etc. | /aI/<br>e.g., rice, dice, nice, etc. |

[1]Received Pronunciation (often abbreviated as RP)
[2]International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5. | Sound of the vowel 'o' | /ɔ/<br>e.g., cot, pot, rod, pod, cop, top, etc. | /u:/<br>e.g., zoom, loom, room, broom, etc.<br>/aʊ/<br>e.g., down, brown, town, etc. |
| 6. | Sound of the vowel 'u' | /ʌ/<br>e.g./ sun, bun, nut, jug, cup, gun, mug, etc. | /ə / (weak)<br>e.g., could, would, should, etc.<br>/ʊ/ (strong)<br>e.g., could, would, should, etc. |
| 7. | Vowel Song<br>(Appendix B) | Short 'a', e.g., 'pan'<br>Long 'a', e.g., 'cake'<br>Short 'e', e.g., 'pen'<br>Long 'e', e.g., 'he'<br>Short 'i', e.g., 'hit'<br>Long 'i', e.g., 'ice'<br>Short 'o', e.g., 'pot'<br>Long 'o', e.g., 'no'<br>Short 'u', e.g., 'bun'<br>Long 'u', e.g., 'you' | p**a**n: /p**æ**n/<br>c**a**ke: /ke**I**k/<br>p**e**n: /p**e**n/<br>h**e**: /h**i**:/<br>h**i**t: /h**I**t/<br>**i**ce: /**aI**s/<br>p**o**t: /pɔt/<br>n**o**: /nəʊ/<br>n**u**n: /n**Λ**n/<br>yo**u**: /**ju**/ (weak)<br>/**ju**:/ (strong) |

## Causes of Confusion

Such confusing information is the root cause of generalisations, misunderstandings and wrong embedding of information. From Table 1, it can be deduced that the students get confused right from the beginning, which leads to wrong embedding of vowel sounds.

According to the textbook, there are five vowel sounds in English, i.e., a, e, i, o and u. This very understanding of vowels is faulty and weakens the foundation of the learners. The young learners retain this understanding lifelong and use indefinite articles on the basis of their linguistic intuition rather than logic based on their understanding of sounds. The students tend to equate letters with sounds as is the case in their Language One or L1 (assuming it is Hindi), in which there is one-to-one correspondence of letters and sounds. The learners and teachers, assuming that the same rule applies to English as well, choose the above five letters from the 26 letters of English alphabet and treat the remaining 21 as consonants. This is the root cause behind the misunderstanding about sounds and letters in English.

No two languages are identical and the myth about language relativity should be busted among teachers (Huiling, 2013). We may try drawing

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parallels in languages originating from the same land. But assuming that two languages originating from two distinct lands must be identical is unimaginable. The English alphabet has 26 letters and 44 sounds — 20 vowels and 24 consonants (Crystal, 2007).

The consonant sounds have a one-to-one correspondence (to some extent) with the letters (Appendix C). So, it is in the learners' L1. But when it comes to vowel sounds, there is a lot of variation in terms of Hindi and English. Whereas, Hindi is a syllable-based language, English is a stress–time language. In Hindi, there is one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds, but it is not the case in English. The letter 'a' may have the sounds /aː/, /ə/, /æ/, /eI/, etc. Similarly, the letter 'e' may have the sounds /e/, /Iə/, /iː/, etc. The letter 'i' may represent the sounds /I/, /aI/, /iː/, /e/, etc. In the same way, the letter 'o' may represent the sounds /ɔ/, /uː/, /ʌ/, /uː/, /ʊ/, etc., while the letter 'u' may represent the sounds /ʌ/, /ə/, /ʊ/, /uː/, etc.

To add to the confusion, there are no diphthongs in learners' L1, whereas, in English, there are eight diphthongs, each of which is a fusion of two vowel sounds. When there are multiple sounds that each of the so-called vowels represent as per the textbook, there is bound to be a lot of confusion in the learners' minds, which will persist and gradually get embedded in their thought process.

**Vowel Song**

A is my name.
Two sounds I give
Short 'a' in pan.
Long 'a' in cake.

E is my name.
Two sounds I have
Short 'e' in pen
Long 'e' in he!

Iis my name.
Two sounds I know
Short 'i' in hit.
Long 'i' in ice.

O is my name
Two sounds I give
Short 'o' in pot
Long 'o' in no!

U is my name.
Two sounds I make.
Short 'u' in nun
Long 'u' in you.

As a result of this, the pronunciation of words by second language learners is mostly incorrect. Table 1 shows examples of words given in the vowel chapters related to particular sounds, along with the representative words. The letter 'a' represents the sound /æ/. But there are few examples of words with the sound /eI/, assuming it to be the long sound of 'a' as given in the Vowel Song (Appendix B).

Similarly, sounds that are given to represent the letter 'e' in the book are /e/ and /Iə/ and /iː/, assuming the first one to be the short sound and the third to be the longest one. The textbook is silent about the second sound, a diphthong.

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Likewise, the letter 'i' produces two sounds, i.e., /I/ (short sound) and /aI/ (long sound). For 'o', the examples given represent three different sounds, i.e., / ɔ /, /u:/ and /aʊ/ but the 'Vowel Song' talks about / ɔ / as short sound and /əʊ/ as long sound. It is silent about the sound /u:/. According to the song, the last letter 'u' has /ʌ/ as its short and /u:/ as long sound. However, the irony is that in the chapter, the examples that are given to represent the sound 'u' apart from the representative sound /ʌ/ also have words with the sounds /ə/ and /ʊ/. Such examples and the Vowel Song confuse the students because of the different sounds they produce.

The next point of confusion is because of words like 'could', 'would', 'should' and 'you' in Chapter 6 to represent the short sound /ʊ/. But the problem is that these words have a strong /ʊ/ and a weak sound /ə/. These modal auxiliaries when used independently take the strong sound. But when used as auxiliaries, they take the weak sound. For example, the strong form of 'could' (/kʊd/) is used for emphasis (e.g., he could be wrong), contrast (e.g., I don't know whether she could or couldn't succeed), or at the final position (e.g., the Prime Minister tried to check the rising prices as well as he could). In the same manner, the strong form of 'should' ( /ʊd / ) is used for emphatic pronunciation (e.g., you should have sought permission), contrast (e.g., who are you to tell me what I should or shouldn't do?), or in the final position (e.g., both of you should). The strong form of 'would' (/wʊd/) is also used for emphasis (e.g., they definitely would), contrast (e.g., no one knows whether they would or they wouldn't) and in the final position (e.g., she knows that he would). Likewise, the pronoun 'you' is pronounced /ju:/ (strong form) when we talk in terms of contrast (e.g., will you or he pay the fine?) or while emphasising (e.g., it was you who compelled us to take this decision) (Jones, 2003). Such kind of seemingly simple but otherwise subtle aspects of pronunciation should not be given as examples because they baffle the students. As a result, they always generalise the rules while using vowel sounds.

## Suggestions

Some of the suggestions that may help improve textbook writing at the primary stage are as follows.

- There should be no rush to include a lot of topics in a textbook at the primary stage. Each topic to be taken needs to be dealt with in detail, rather than being touched upon in a passing way. All vowel sounds (both pure vowels and diphthongs) in the book, *Step Up with English Primer*, should have been taken up in one go. Rivers (1967) says, "The material for these early lessons should not be artificially constructed to include only certain sounds and not others. The material should consist of

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utterances selected because they are natural and useable."

- In fact, teaching vowel sounds at the HKG stage is challenging both for the teacher to teach and the learners to comprehend. So, the lessons should start with teaching of consonant sounds, with one chapter devoted to each sound, giving all possible variants in which that particular sound could be represented in spellings. This could, then, be followed by vowel sounds.
- The book should ideally begin with stating the difference in the sound system in the learners' L1 and English. This will enable the learners to become more receptive to what is being taught in terms of sounds in the other language and would also help them avoid drawing out parallels and/or generalisations. It will also give the right direction to the teacher even if one's initial understanding of sounds is faulty. These sounds can, then, be integrated with vocabulary and grammar to give a more contextual exposure to the learners. Fernandez (2011) talks about the effectiveness of communicative ways in the context of "grammar of the target language". This is more applicable in the context of acquiring the correct pronunciation.
- Before publishing, the book should be edited by an ELT expert or linguist to check embedding of wrong information at the early stages of learning.
- According to Kerr (1947), books at the primary level "...vary widely in their construction and in the editorial philosophy behind them, and that they are written for a variety of purposes." But the obvious philosophy behind publishing books like *Step Up with English Primer* is earning profits rather than providing quality information. Therefore, books at this level should be strictly monitored by the respective academic boards so that no substandard stuff is published by merely compiling incorrect information. Kerr (ibid) adds: "The best and most profitable use of...books results only if their use is planned carefully, they are selected wisely, and their materials are intelligently prepared and presented."
- As the teaching of sounds is a 'technical' topic, learning them through textbooks at such an early stage may be quite dull and boring for most young learners. So, the learning of such topics should be made more enjoyable by supplementing textual lessons with activities, games and audio–visual aids, which provide repetition. In this regard, Rivers (1967) says, "The younger the child, the more s/he enjoys sheer mimicry, and more frequently s/he may be engaged in activities, which are repetitive."

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- For early and lasting gains in learning sounds, a language laboratory (if available) can also be integrated with textual learning of sounds. In schools, where there are no language labs, phone recorders and mobile apps can be used by the teacher to provide practice in pronunciation to the students. The use of these measures can ensure correct pronunciation, articulation through repetition of words, phrases and sentences, and make the learners confident.

## Conclusion

It can be said that not much research or monitoring is done while taking up topics to be taught. Moreover, there is a rush to include a bit of everything rather than taking up one topic at a time and explaining it in depth. There is no denying the fact that things have to be kept simple at the primary stage and the level of complexity must be raised gradually. But the irony is that each class and each book followed in English is different in different public schools. There is no consistency and continuity. Each book at each level is trying to load a lot of content, without considering if the learners will be able to comprehend that much. Also, little attention is paid to check whether the teachers are competent enough to teach technical topics like pronunciation to the young learners.

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# 2

# Issues of Inclusive Education in Manipur

Wangkheirakpam Bidyabati*
Lairellakpam Seilendra Singh**

**Abstract**

*Inclusive education is a comparatively new concept. The educational practice entails integration of Children With Special Needs (CWSN) in regular classrooms. The philosophy rests on the idea that every individual, regardless of one's socioeconomic and religious backrounds, and physical and mental abilities has the right to be provided education along with everybody else. It is, therefore, about building a society with equal opportunities and social cohesion. The study aims to find out issues challenging inclusive education, as regards to disabled students, in schools located in Manipur's Imphal East and West districts. A survey was conducted by administering a self-made questionnaire in schools, where CWSN are enrolled. It was found that there are many issues that adversely affect the inclusion of CWSN in regular schools. The findings revealed that none of the schools have trained teachers and resource persons, or prepare Individualised Education Plans for CWSN. The results also revealed low assessment and high dropout rate among CWSN.*

## Introduction

One of the major problems that our country is facing today is the increasing number of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) being excluded from meaningful partnership in socioeconomic, political and cultural life. 'Inclusive education' can be seen as a step to build an 'inclusive society' with equal opportunities and social cohesion for everyone, including CWSN. Increasing public awareness and advanced legislations in most parts of the world have made way for incorporating provisions as regards to the education of CWSN. It is a comparatively new concept

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that has gained momentum since the late–twentieth century. Inclusive education is an educational practice, wherein, the CWSN are integrated into regular classrooms. In inclusive education, all students, regardless of their physical and mental challenges, and socioeconomic, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, are welcomed by neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate regular classes and encouraged to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of school life. The philosophy of inclusion ensures accessible quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. The students participate in the education programme in a 'common learning environment' aiming to eliminate barriers that may lead to exclusion. 'Common learning environment' refers to an educational setup, where students from different backgrounds and with diverse abilities learn together. It includes classrooms, libraries, cafeterias, playgrounds and toilets.

Inclusive education, therefore, is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop skills they need to flourish. It allows students from all backgrounds to learn and grow in the company of each other in order to ensure the benefit of all. Some of the characteristics that inclusive education meets are as follows.

- It enables each student to participate in the learning process that is designed for all and shared with peers in a chosen educational setup.
- It provides an environment to promote a sense of belongingness among students and ensure student progress towards personal, social, emotional and academic goals.
- It rejects the use of special schools or classrooms, popular among large multi service providers, to separate CWSN from those without any disability.

## Rationale of the Study

CWSN are often overlooked in policy making, limiting their access to education and ability to participate in social, economic and political life. These children are among the most likely to be out of school. They face persistent barriers to education, stemming from discrimination, stigma and routine failure of decision makers to incorporate disability in school services. Such children are often denied a chance to participate in community and decision making activities affecting them. Like everybody else, they, too, have ambitions and dreams, for which they need quality education to develop their skills and realise their full potential. The integration of such children in a regular educational setup has become a concern for educators, governments and society, at large.

Several initiatives have been undertaken to address the diverse

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needs of such children. The focus of the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 is to reach out to CWSN, who are out of school, and developing a strategy that would ensure that every such child receives unhindered educational support. However, there are various factors that affect inclusive education, such as questionable attitude of people towards CWSN (in general), lack of infrastructure and resources, etc.

## Objectives of the Study

The study aims to find out issues adversely affecting inclusive education in the schools located in Imphal East and West districts of Manipur, where CWSN are enrolled.

## Methodology

### Description of the study area

According to the Zonal Education Office records 2017, there are 677 CWSN schools in Imphal East and West districts. The study was conducted in 40 CWSN facilitated schools of the districts, of which 10 were found of admitting disabled children. Imphal East and West are the most populous areas of the State. The maximum number of CWSN was enrolled in neighbourhood and nearby schools in these districts.

### Sampling procedure and data collection

Both primary and secondary sources were used in the study and qualitative data were collected by administering a self-made questionnaire through conventional survey method. The sample was selected out of the 40 CWSN facilitated from schools located in Imphal East and West districts. Out of the 40 schools surveyed, only 10 were found of admitting CWSN in regular classrooms, where only 26 such children studied.

## Limitation of the Study

The study covers only Imphal East and West districts of Manipur. It excludes the remaining districts due to limitation in resources.

## Findings

The 10 schools in Imphal East and West districts that enroll CWSN are Bashikhong High School (Imphal East), Irilbung High School (Imphal East), Kyamgei Heibong Makhong High School (Imphal East), Panthoibi High School, Bashikhong (Imphal East), Lairenjam Primary School (Imphal West), Mekola Junior High School (Imphal West), Khurai Sajor Leikai High School (Imphal East), Lairenjam Government Junior High School (Imphal West), Ningombam Junior High School (Imphal West) and Keirao Social Primary School (Imphal East).

It was found that only 26 CWSN (14 boys and 12 girls) were enrolled in these 10 schools. These children have various disabilities. Of the 14 boys, eight were mentally retarded, one was visually impaired, two had hearing impairment, one physically

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handicapped and two had multiple disabilities. Of the 12 girls, nine were mentally retarded, two were physically handicapped and only one had multiple disabilities.

It was further found that on the days of school, all CWSN were present. All schools provide simple assistive devices like wheelchair, hearing aids and walking stick to CWSN with the help of the respective Zonal Education Offices. The study further revealed that most CWSN learned and performed better when exposed to general education system. Hence, children perform better academically when in inclusive settings.

Moreover, inclusion provides an opportunity to CWSN and children without any disability to mingle with each other and build relationships and develop social skills. Besides, an inclusive classroom setup inculcates human values and compassion in children without any disability and makes them accept CWSN as part of the society. However, the study found out many issues that adversely affected the inclusion of CWSN in mainstream classrooms. Some of the major issues are as follows.

- Lack of access to CWSN in mainstream education
- Lack of trained teachers and resource persons
- Lack of Individualised Education Plans
- Lack of appropriate curriculum and teaching–learning material
- Lack of infrastructure

**Lack of access to mainstream education**

At present, only few CWSN have access to education in regular schools. The study found that many CWSN dropped out of school. It may be because many schools did not show willingness to cater to the 'needs' of such children. Besides, parents of many such children were not aware of government provisions as regards to their education. Apart from these, lack of encouraging attitude and sensitivity on part of teachers, classmates, parents and community make these children experience discrimination. Hence, they feel discouraged and inferior to others. They drop out of schools as they feel uncomfortable and unwelcome.

**Lack of trained teachers and resource persons**

The study found that many teachers lack the competence and desire to modify teaching methodology as per the needs of CWSN. Teachers teaching children without disability are engaged in dealing with CWSN. It was found that not a single teacher was trained in teaching special students. Besides, no resource person was employed to cater to CWSN in the schools. As a result, it was difficult for teachers and other students to understand the needs of CWSN and keep them motivated.

**Lack of Individualised Education Plans**

The main reason behind the lack of Individualised Education Plans was

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the large class size. Normally, 30 to 50 students study in a class, which makes paying attention to each child, i.e., paying individualised attention, difficult. The teachers found it all the more difficult while catering to CWSN. This led to treating CWSN at par with those without disabilities. No special care was given to such children in the schools.

### Lack of appropriate curriculum and teaching–learning material

The curriculum being followed in the schools lack flexibility and do not offer an environment where CWSN can showcase and polish their abilities. The teaching–learning material was also not appropriate for CWSN. No special teaching–learning material like Braille was found to be used in the schools. Hence, the present teaching–learning environment hardly provides any scope for the education and all-round development of CWSN.

### Lack of infrastructure

All surveyed schools had a ramp. But they did not have adequate and appropriate infrastructure for CWSN. Till the time the survey was conducted, the schools did not take any initiative to ensure appropriate infrastructure for CWSN enrolled there.

## Conclusion

Many efforts are being made to include children with disabilities in mainstream education. In order to achieve the goal of inclusive education, the first step would be to devise and implement action plans to incorporate CWSN in regular schools.

As a regular classroom consists of students from diverse backgrounds, it is time that teachers realise the importance of accepting each student as unique.

Inclusive education is a way to educate all children, irrespective of their abilities. Moreover, it helps students studying with CWSN become aware of their needs and develops compassion in them. The study further found that lack of access to CWSN in regular schools, trained teachers, resource persons, individualised education plans, appropriate curriculum, teaching–learning material and appropriate infrastructure act as barriers in achieving the goal of inclusive education. Therefore, governments, educators, policy makers and society at large need to take effective steps to improve the condition of CWSN and achieve the goal of inclusive education.

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# 3

# Engaging with Disability for a Common Right

Quazi Ferdoushi Islam*

**Abstract**

*Inclusion is the process of addressing and responding to diverse needs of all learners by encouraging and increasing their participation in the learning process. This entails reaching out to the learners and removing all barriers that could limit their participation in the learning process, and hence, progress and achievement. There are several social, physical, institutional and attitudinal barriers to inclusive education. 'Marginalisation in education' is a disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities. Inclusive education aims to ensure 'education for all'. It means that all children — no matter where they come from and the physical challenges they face — can learn together. Non-discrimination and equality are key human rights that apply to the Right to Education, a Fundamental Right enshrined in the Indian Constitution as well. This paper tries to understand inclusion from the perspective of disability.*

## Introduction

Education is a basic human right. It serves as a catalyst for social mobility and poverty alleviation, thereby, leading to economic growth. Hence, economic growth is directly proportional to quality education. Ensuring that all citizens get quality education must be the topmost priority of all nations, after health. Most countries endorse the principle of equal opportunity in education. This implies that inequalities based on wealth, gender, ethnicity, language and region need to be eliminated.

'Inclusion' is viewed as an approach to education and society, concerned with increasing the participation of all, thereby, reducing all forms of discrimination and exclusion. Education for the disabled has become a matter of entitlement — a fundamental human right —

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rather than a privilege or charity (Alur, 2012). Social, economic and political inclusion of persons with disabilities is now a part of the international human rights movement, which emerged and developed throughout the twentieth century (Rioux, 2001). This human rights framework sets the stage for countries to support social well-being for all their citizens (Alur, et al., 2000; Rioux, 2001). Social well-being measures may be spearheaded with planning and implementation strategies for vulnerable groups, including Children With Special Needs (CWSN) and those belonging to disadvantaged or marginalised sections of the society.

Policy is seen as a course of action endorsed by government, authorities or State (Colebatch, 1998). The purpose of policies is to lay the groundwork for making them into laws (Dye, 1984). In policy making, a wide range of people with vested interests are involved, from differing concerns and varying relationships with each other (Pasteur, 2001). Policy formulation follows a certain set of patterns or activities, involving problem identification, formulation, legitimisation and evaluation. Issue identification is a crucial activity before decision making takes place (Alur, 2012). Decision making eventually leads to policy framing on issues. However, some issues may be against the interests of those in power (Walt, 1994).

Some sections of the society are so lacking in power that they cannot even mobilise and articulate their demands (Luke, 1974). This is, especially, true of the disabled group in India. Children with disabilities are a minority often found in many marginalised groups that are catered to, such as girls, Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste, and Other Backward Castes. However, with changes in approach and implementation, the situation is slowly improving.

After the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, an area in elementary schooling that has come into focus is 'inclusive education', which requires immediate attention of all stakeholders, i.e., administrators, educational institutions and teachers to name a few. Special schools are recommended for CWSN, requiring increased special education needs. They need the care and attention of not only a general education teacher but also a special educator.

Thus, CWSN would be welcomed and embraced in regular classroom setups. This will not only boost their confidence but also encourage them to participate in academic and non-academic activities. But one of the main causes of worry is the limitations of 'trained' special educators and resource persons. This constraint will adversely affect the dynamics of an inclusive setup.

## Disability Models

Various 'disability' models have been propounded down the ages. It traces the narrative from the earliest 'moral' or 'fate' model (treating disability

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as destiny) down to the 'medical' approach (which rests on providing medical care and rehabilitation to the disabled). Then, there is a 'social' model as well that advocates the removal of environmental barriers and promotes inclusion of the disabled in society. Finally, it is the 'interactional' model that balances the 'medical' and 'social' models.

## Initiatives for Inclusion

Various policy initiatives on inclusive education spell out mainstreaming children with disabilities, apart from providing them with special education. At the implementation level, 'inclusive education' comes under the ambit of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), whereas, 'special schools' come under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. This implies that all mainstream schools, whether government-aided, private or otherwise come under the Department of School Education and Literacy, MHRD. According to the RTE Act 2009, all regular mainstream schools are inclusive, where all children, including CWSN and those from other disadvantaged groups of the society, study together. This process is a natural outcome of policy decisions at the Central level. But what is ironical is that special schools (where CWSN with moderate or above special needs and care study) receive attention only from the welfare perspective from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

For the past two-and-a-half decades, trends in educational provisions for CWSN have focused on their education in the same setup as their peers without special needs. The country has witnessed phenomenal expansion of educational opportunities but CWSN have not progressed proportionately.

However, the concept of inclusion is not new. The Education Commission (1964–66) in its report had stated the need for an integrated education programme. The government initiative in the area of inclusive education can be traced to the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, which recommended integrating the "handicapped with the general community" at all levels "as equal partners" and preparing them for normal growth, thereby, enabling them to face the challenges in life with courage and confidence.

It is essential to recognise that people with impairments face many barriers, such as discrimination, inaccessible environment, inadequate and ineffective policy and service support (Barton, 2012). The questions found embedded in inclusive discourses are — what underlies inclusion? Why is it imperative to have policies advocating the inclusion of children and adults with disabilities?

Against the backdrop of the RTE Act 2009, which calls for free and compulsory education of all children aged 6–14 years, several questions are pertinent that call for introspection. Some of these are as follows.

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- Can we have an education system that would cater to diversity at least at the elementary level, i.e., covering children in the age group of 6–14 years?
- How best can the issue of implementing inclusion be addressed?

## Inclusion in Curriculum and Teacher Training

The National Focus Group Position Paper on Education of CWSN, which served as input for the National Curriculum Framework (NCF)–2005, states the ethical context that needs to be considered while framing policies on inclusion. The focus area needs to be on a 'common system' that would bring 'all' on a common platform rather than having different setups for different groups. Similarly, in the context of teacher training and inclusion, the prime focus needs to be on in corporating attitudinal change among teachers and teacher–educators. This must be followed by initiatives that delve in facilitating professional development of teachers and teacher–educators with knowledge and skills to handle inclusive classrooms. To have meaningful participation of CWSN in mainstream life, policies in all aspects, i.e., social, educational and economic, need to be implemented in letter and spirit.

## Conclusion

Thus, inclusion can only take place if there is a conscious effort by all stakeholders to put inclusive values in practice not only in the school environment but society at large. Inclusive culture at the micro, school, educational institution or organisational level has to be mirrored in the macro, community and societal level.

An education system must, therefore, include all students and support them to learn, irrespective of their condition and challenges. This means ensuring that teaching and curriculum, school buildings and infrastructure, classrooms, play areas, transportation facilities, drinking water and toilet facilities meet the needs of all children.

Hence, policy implementation needs to be supported with changes in existing services. For inclusive practice to develop on a sustainable macro level, systemic failure and understanding of policy need to be addressed (Alur, 2012).

There should be advocacy building for CWSN and children belonging to marginalised sections of the society. The authorities concerned must see to it that the needs and demands of CWSN are met *in toto*. The government must enjoin upon itself to act regarding the meaningful inclusion of the challenged.

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# 4

# Early Mathematics Learning Assessment

Satya Bhushan*

**Abstract**

*Mathematics, as a discipline, is abstract. Its importance in education and life is axiomatic. Therefore, mathematical concepts need to be nurtured from an early age. Activities related to mathematics, in the initial years of a child's education, would play a key role in laying the foundations of the subject. It has been amply demonstrated through researches that children's competency level at the beginning of formal schooling is important for their career and life. Literacy and numeracy skills underpin workforce participation, productivity and economy, and hence, impact social and health outcomes. Building mathematical skills is essential for a first grader's learning process as it determines one's academic success. The assessment of children in years before schooling and the first year of school has been, traditionally, informal. Further, assessment of children's mathematical skills at this level is uncommon compared to social, emotional and physical assessment. However, there are contexts, where reliable, valid and standardised data from assessment in mathematics are required. This paper reviews the assessment processes and techniques originally developed for early mathematics.*

## Introduction

World leaders and educationists emphasise the significance of education in the early grades, teachers are yet to be provided with adequate information or training on assessment at early grades. Thus, reasonably common, clear and actionable learning metrics, particularly, in the early grades, continue to elude this sector. This is more so in developing countries, where the goal of getting all children enrolled in schools and ensuring that they complete their primary education is the priority. The search for improved metrics and measurement of learning

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increased only during the post–1990s all over the world.

Mathematical skills are essential for adults — employed or unemployed — to function successfully in everyday life and profession. The importance of mathematical skills continues to increase as societies and economies move towards more technologically advanced activities.

Therefore, it is important that learners gain fundamental understanding of basic numeracy skills at school. The lack of it puts them at a risk of not being able to participate fully in later in social life. In the twenty-first century, literacy and numeracy skills underpin workforce participation, productivity and economy of the country, at large. Research studies indicate that people with advanced language, literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to be employed and participate in community life. Such individuals are, hence, more informed, which means they are likely to experience better health and have positive social outcomes. They are also more inclined to engage in further training. Further, improved literacy and numeracy skills have a generational flow effect with researches indicating that parents transfer these skills to their children. These skills are transferred at a stage when a child starts building a foundation that would be necessary for learning in years to come. Without this base, it is possible but difficult to help children catch up to where they need to be (Fuson, 2004).

Several researchers have studied the extent to which children's achievements around the time of starting schooling can predict their achievements in reading or mathematics several years later (Jordan, Kaplan, Ramineni and Locuniak, 2009). From such studies, it appears that the extent of a child's knowledge and learning around the time of starting school or in the first year of school is a strong indicator of one's levels of achievement in the next few years. Such studies underline that learning of basic literacy and mathematics in preschool and first year of school is important. Thus, early mathematics skills are found to be the strongest predictor of later success in mathematics and reading (Duncan, et al., 2007).

## Trends in Early Number Instruction

Since the mid–1990s, there have been significant developments in approaches to instruction in the concept of number and early arithmetic. These include better ways to assess children's early 'number knowledge' and teaching of topics at advanced levels. Several studies in the 1990s provided a basis for profound change to the focus and scope of assessment and instruction in number and early arithmetic (Wright, 1996). These studies highlighted key factors, such as diverse backgrounds of school entrants and their knowledge of early arithmetic. Also, the notion that pre–number topics constitute

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essential prerequisites for learning early number was increasingly under challenge (Hiebert, Carpenter and Moser, 1982).

With formal schooling, children begin to develop a new understanding of numbers, the association of numbers with sets of objects, meaning of symbols like '='and that 8 is 'more' than 5. They begin to develop the use of a mental number line and association of symbols, such as 8 and 5 on the number line (Carpenter, Franke, and Levi, 2003). These are essential precursors to deepen the mathematical knowledge. Children also begin to develop a better understanding of conservation of numbers with the establishment of one–to–one correspondence between two sets of items and their representing numbers, in what Gelman and Gallistel (1986) refer to as the 'how to count' principles of counting. These principles consist of each object or item within a group of objects or array of items associated with only one number name, and the understanding that the final number of objects or items in a grouping is representative of the overall group.

## Early Assessment and Intervention — Implications

Direct assessment of early numeracy skills is important in case of young children, given their strong association with later mathematical achievement. Assessment of early mathematics skills must include measures of numerical symbol knowledge, such as number identification based on numerals and arrays, and counting, emphasising cardinality and ordinality (Merkley and Ansari, 2016). Given the findings of developmental continuity in preschool non-symbolic arithmetic and later symbolic arithmetic, manipulation of non-symbolic numbers should also be part of early mathematical assessment. Non-symbolic number skills and representations refer to ways of representing numbers without using symbols, and typically, involve numerical manipulations or transformations on objects, as well as, comparisons of the magnitude of sets of objects. For example, young children can perform simple addition and subtraction with non-symbolic numerical representations, e.g., with actual objects or pictures of objects. Such early numeracy skills are assessed separately in research based studies but are not currently available as separate normative based tests. However, there are some standardised measures of mathematics like Test of Early Mathematics Ability – Third Edition that are suitable for preschool children. One advantage of the Test of Early Mathematics Ability – Third Edition is that it was created on the basis of theory and empirical studies of mathematical development. It contains items that tap early numeracy skills that correspond with the sequence in which such skills are typically acquired. It is suitable for assessing numeracy very early — from 36 months and it explicitly measures the early numeracy skills shown to be important for

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later mathematics, such as counting (ordinal and cardinal knowledge), number identification, non-symbolic arithmetic, and understanding of rudimentary mathematical terms, such as 'more' (Ginsburg and Baroody, 2003).

It seems relevant to assess early mathematical skills of children at the beginning of formal mathematical learning (in other words, mathematical school readiness). This allows one to identify children with low mathematical skills at the beginning of Class I and employ appropriate educational support measures, such as paying individual attention and giving selected worksheets to them. These support measures will provide an ideal basis for later mathematical learning and help eliminate numerical shortcomings. However, in order to identify children in difficulty, teachers need validated and standardised tools. Many share that they have to rely on their own 'home-made' tools or intuition, which is not ideal and makes them feel uncomfortable. Data showing that teachers' judgments are perceptually biased and that they face difficulty in judging their students' cognitive potential confirm the actual problem of the situation (Fischbach, et. al., 2013).

However, with continued practice, there is a growth in familiarity with numbers and their values, building the learners' confidence. This can include advancing to new strategies, such as counting from the larger addend (min strategy) when they are shown two numbers representing two groups of objects that are being added together (Siegler and Shrager, 1984). An example of an earlier 'sum strategy' or the 'counting-all method' (Fuson, 2004) is when a child is asked to solve '5 + 4'. The child counts and shows five fingers on one hand representing '5' and counts and shows four fingers on the other hand representing '4', and then, counts all the fingers — 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. In time, the child may progress to just put one's fingers up, already knowing that one hand represents '5' and then count '6, 7, 8, 9' to add '4' to '5'. Therefore, as the child progresses with one's counting skills and is asked to solve a problem like '5 + 4', one may count applying the min strategy by counting from the larger addend (5) to get the answer.

With practice, the children begin to store information. Initially, they may retrieve the answer to a mathematical problem but may lack confidence. They may retrieve the answer and then verify it by using a counting strategy (Siegler and Schrager, 1984). With practice, they gain confidence and process information faster in solving mathematical problems. They may also build confidence in the use of fact retrieval for solving simpler mathematical problems, such as retrieving knowledge for numbers of equal value, such as '2 + 2 = 4' (Ashcraft, 1982; Hamann and Ashcraft, 1986; Siegler and Shrager, 1984). But that there is a level of 'automatisation' of the knowledge that '2 + 2 = 4' is preceded

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by a conceptual stage that requires counting. At the same time, becoming efficient at mathematics requires automatisation of the subsequent stage, rather than constant recursion to the earlier stages. For more difficult mathematical problems, this "extended practice" provides the skills and proficiency required for rapid and accurate processing, freeing up cognitive resources so that children are able to pay attention to more elements of the task at once (Pellegrino and Goldman, 1987). Therefore, children, who demonstrate difficulty with single-digit numbers like '5 + 6', will find advanced mathematics more challenging (Gersten, Jordan and Flojo, 2005). In other words, recursion to more primitive strategies, though it does show an understanding of the concept, might impede further conceptual understanding and progression if operational automaticity is not achieved.

As children continue to develop their understanding and become more proficient with skills, such as single-digit addition and subtraction, they move to double-digit addition and subtraction problems and learn place value. They also begin to apply more advanced strategies with the use of tens and ones. An example of this is the calculation of '48 + 31', which requires breaking down each number into its specific tens and ones like 40 + 30 = 70 and 8 + 1 = 9. Therefore, the answer is 79 (Clements, 2004). With continued practice and integration of these skills into simple word problems, children are able to work with greater computations and develop problem solving competence (Fuson, 2003). The understanding of computation and integration of methods, and practice with both, leads to "computational fluency" (Fuson, 2003). Yet, to get to this point, the children must know how to count. They must understand how to simultaneously count, keep a track of objects, continue with this progression and develop automaticity as the foundation of success with basic number operations like addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

## Formative Assessment helps Targeted Teaching

In order to implement targeted teaching, teachers need accurate information about what students know and what they are ready to learn. They can acquire this information is through the use of formative assessment, which has shown significant effect on learning across the spectrum.

Formative assessment may employ a number of methods to monitor student learning, and identify concepts and skills that they may find difficult to grasp. It may also include mathematical problems set at a slightly challenging level in order to help them reach their potential. In other words, it is a method of assessment for learning (Black and Dylan, 1998). Some of the key elements of formative assessment include the following.

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- Identification of goals, outcomes and criteria for achievement
- Based on the teacher's feedback, a student realises the level of one's current knowledge and becomes actively involved in future directions of one's learning.
- Teachers responding to feedback by modifying teaching strategies (Karpinski and D'Agostino, 2013).

## Conclusion

A detailed knowledge of children's early abilities allows optimal adaptation of learning and instruction to their individual needs. It is, therefore, critical to accurately and efficiently assess a school entrant's abilities in the core domains of schooling, such as mathematics. Quality professional learning improves teaching quality. High-quality teaching is the greatest influence on students' engagement and outcomes in school (Hattie and Yates, 2014). Focus on teachers' professional learning improves the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. Thus, it is important for schools and educational jurisdictions to find ways to significantly advance teachers' pedagogical knowledge in the area.

To ensure that children effectively develop a wide range of competencies that form the foundations of early mathematics, it is necessary to adequately measure their progress in all aspects of early mathematics. Teachers can, generally, distinguish high performing learners just by observing. However, they would require strong assessment tools to make finer differentiation, particularly, at the individual skill or concept level. Efficient and reliable assessment tools can serve a twofold purpose. Firstly, they can be used to identify children who need additional instruction. Secondly, they can be used to identify the specific aspect(s) of mathematical knowledge, in which a student needs further instruction.

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# 5

## The Unheard Voices behind the Telephone

Vandana Kerur*

The ringing of a cell phone or landline draws immediate attention as it connects one with people across vast distances. Many would remember the name of the inventor of the telephone, i.e., Alexander Graham Bell. But what many may not know is that this great inventor worked tirelessly for the deaf.

The influence behind this lifelong dogged effort came from his immediate family members — the emotional motivation grew out of love for his mother and his wife (both of whom were deaf), the cognitive connect was developed and encouraged by the men in the family — for Bell's father and grandfather were experts on the mechanics of voice and elocution. His brother (who died at an early age due to tuberculosis) was also interested in the production of sounds.

Bell's mother Eliza Grace Symonds became auditory impaired due to the after-effects of a severe illness during her childhood. When Bell was young, he was taught by his mother.

*Alexander Graham Bell*

He was deeply affected by his mother's gradual deafness (she started losing her hearing ability when he was around 12 years old). She had to rely on one ear trumpet (a brass musical instrument with one narrow end and one wide end). Before the modern hearing aid was invented, people with auditory impairment would hold this trumpet to the ear and lean towards the speaker in order to hear better. Despite losing her ability to hear, she

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was able to play the piano and was quite good at it. Her creativity also found expression in the painting of miniatures.

Bell, in his own way, tried to maintain communication with his mother. He developed a technique of speaking in clear, modulated tones close to her forehead so that she could feel the vibrations of his voice. As a result, she would hear him with reasonable clarity. He also learned a manual finger language so that he could sit by her side and tap out silently the conversations swirling around the family parlour. This helped her feel involved in family interactions.

From his mother, Bell inherited musical talent, and a keen ear for subtleties of sound and nuances of tone. He took music lessons and began to play the piano at an early age. Indeed, for some time, he intended to become a musician.

His father and grandfather were distinguished speech therapists. His father's devotion to the scientific study of speech had a powerful impact on young Alexander.

The machine that is being referred to here was the one that Bell, along with his brother, tried to create at the age of 16 years. With great ingenuity, they used the voice box of a dead sheep and tried to build a talking robot with a windpipe. When they blew air through the windpipe, the mouth could produce few recognisable words.

As his preoccupation with sounds grew, it led Bell to study 'acoustics'. He became a voice teacher and worked with his father, who developed 'visible speech', a written system of symbols that provided instructions to the deaf on how to utter sounds.

Bell opened a school for the deaf in Boston, USA, in 1872. He believed that his greatest pleasure and mission in life was to teach the deaf. During those days, the deaf and near-deaf people would communicate with others using signs. These signs were hardly thought of as 'sign language'. It was Bell, who continued his father's work and started a crusade to create awareness about intellectual possibilities of deaf children and teaching them to speak and read lips rather than being limited to sign language. His influence, aided by the success of his application of visible speech to teaching the deaf to talk, spread rapidly. On 24 January 1874, he addressed the first convention of Articulation Teachers of the Deaf and Dumb and continued participating in other similar events.

In 1873, he became a professor of vocal physiology at the Boston University. One of his students was his would-be wife Mabel Hubbard, who had completely and permanently lost her hearing ability to a bout of scarlet fever when she was just five years old. The disease had also damaged her inner ear's sensors, which greatly affected her sense of balance as well — to the extent that it was difficult for her to walk in the dark or an unlit house. Soon, the two were engaged to marry.

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Due to his interest in acoustics, Bell started experimenting with the transmission of sounds through wires. He intended inventing a hearing device for the deaf. Mabel insisted that he should put up his device for display at the annual US Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Bell did not want to go there as his students' examinations were round-the-corner. He insisted that his first duty was towards his students. Mabel, on the other hand, was adamant. She secretly bought his train ticket to Philadelphia, packed his bag and called the unsuspecting Bell to the railway station. There, she handed him over his bag and told him that he was going to Philadelphia. When Bell started arguing, Mabel turned away and started walking, becoming literally deaf to his protests.

The judges awarded Bell's device with a 'Gold Medal' in the category of 'Electrical Equipment'. Bell was also awarded a 'Gold' for the concept of 'Visible Speech', which he displayed at the exposition. This brought him instant international fame. Ultimately, the device led to the invention of the 'telephone', which revolutionised communication. Unfortunately, it also embroiled him in a number of lawsuits, with many claiming the idea as their own. It was only in 1878 that Bell could once again pursue his research on speech and hearing.

Royalties from his telegraph and telephone patents allowed him to pursue this mission and make other contributions and discoveries.

*Helen Keller*

In 1880, the French government awarded him with the Volta Prize of 50,000 Francs, which he used to help set up the Volta Laboratory to carry out research and invention, and simultaneously, work for the deaf. Bell also founded and financed the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf in 1890.

Even after being recognised as the inventor of the telephone, Bell did not allow it to eclipse his lifelong work to help the hearing impaired. He considered his invention an intrusion on his real work as a scientist and refused to have a telephone in his study.

Bell was instrumental in bringing together Helen Keller, a blind and mute child, and Anne Sullivan, a graduate

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who later became her teacher and lifelong mentor. Helen's father Captain Arthur Keller was referred to Bell for help in the treatment of his daughter. Captain Keller travelled from Alabama to meet Bell and seek help for his six-year old daughter, who had become blind and mute at the age of 19 months, possibly, from scarlet fever. It was Bell who directed them to consult Sullivan as there was no school for the blind and deaf near them.

Sullivan, with great patience and insight, helped Keller overcome her frustrated attempts at learning, teaching her to 'speak' through finger movements and read and write in Braille. After a difficult start, Sullivan was able to win Keller's trust and respect as she traced the word 'water' on her hand, and then, ran cold water over it. Keller retraced the word on Sullivan's hand, and then, eagerly went on to learn 30 more words that day. Writing to Bell shortly, Sullivan described the breakthrough as a "miracle".

Bell spread the word and corresponded extensively with Sullivan.

Moreover, Bell published an account of the events in various journals long before Keller a popular name.

In her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, Keller fondly remembers the time she met her "benefactor" Alexander Graham Bell in 1886 as a six-year old. She recalls how Bell had lovingly placed her on his lap when she was attracted by the vibrations of his pocket watch at once. She was intrigued to know the source of the vibration. Bell took it out, and made his pocket watch chime. Although Keller could not hear the chime, she sensed that it was a different sort of vibration. Keller would later write that she felt he understood her and that she "loved him at once".

Keller was grateful to Bell for broadening her horizon, and Bell appreciated her for focussing the nation's attention towards the education of the deaf. She dedicated her autobiography to Bell, whom she addressed as her "benefactor", for opening the "door through which I should pass from darkness into light," and the two remained lifelong friends, and gradually, developed a

**Excerpts from Bell's letter to Anne Sullivan**

Dear Miss Sullivan,
Allow me to thank you for the privilege of reading your account of how you taught Helen Keller, which you have prepared...Your paper is full of interest to teachers of the deaf, and it contains many valuable and important suggestions.

The great problem in the education of the deaf is the teaching of idiomatic language. I am sure that instructors of the deaf will support me in urging you to tell us all you can.

Teachers of the deaf find great difficulty in selecting suitable books for their pupils; and I am sure they would thank you especially for the names of those books that have given Helen pleasure, and have proved most profitable in her instruction.

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parent–child relationship. This bond lasted till Bell's death in 1922.

Bell's name remained in the popular lexicon even after his death. To honour the inventor's contributions to acoustical science, the standard unit for the intensity of sound waves was named 'bel' in the 1920s. Decibel, one–tenth of a bel, is the most commonly used metric for measuring the magnitude of noise.

Bell died at his summer home in Nova Scotia on 2 August 1922. Two days later, telephone services in the USA and Canada were suspended for 'one minute' at the precise moment when Bell was lowered into his grave. An army of 60,000 telephone operators stood silently in attention and did not connect any call as the continent's 13 million telephones went quiet.

In these days of 'inclusive education', where education is a Fundamental Right of all children, the undying tenacity that Bell and Sullivan showed towards Keller's education despite her physical challenges underlines the crucial role a teacher can play at the primary stage of a child. The story of Bell and Keller turned inclusive education into a national issue in the USA. Ever since, Keller's growth has been inspiring many parents and children in a similar situation.

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# 6

# Linguistic Roots — Mother Tongues of Indian Children in South Africa

Debjani Naskar*

**Abstract**

*'Diaspora' refers to historic mass dispersions of people with common roots, including 'transnational community' (people with a shared identity going beyond their national boundaries). Indians belonging to different communities form a sizeable segment in South Africa. Linguistic diversity has always been a defining feature of South Africa as the transnational flow of people is accompanied by a corresponding flow of languages. In fact, it is popularly known as the 'Rainbow Nation'. This paper tries to analyse the issue of increasing levels of multilingualism and multiculturalism as a consequence of ongoing globalisation. It looks at the major challenges that the diasporic community living in South Africa faces. Specifically, the paper tries to examine a change in the country's linguistic tapestry with the arrival of Indian diaspora, especially, policies of school education and their impact on the mother tongues of Indians living there, particularly, children.*

## Introduction

South Africa is amongst those British colonies, where a large number of Indians went as migrant labourers much before India's Independence in the year 1947. The Indian population in South Africa comprises a heterogeneous community.

The Dutch traders or settlers brought the first batch of Indians to South Africa as slaves in the seventeenth century (Worden, 2016). Dutch vessels plying to and fro India brought Indians and sold them as slaves here to do domestic chores and other petty works for Dutch settlers. These slaves were mainly from Bengal, Odisha and Bihar in the pre–Independence period. Also, 271 people arrived here from places near the Coromandel Coast like

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Nagapatlam, Trancquebar, Pulicat and Masulipatnam. Around 378 people came to the country as slaves from places near the Malabar Coast like the erstwhile regions of Goa, Bombay (now, Mumbai) and Surat in Gujarat (Bradlow, 1978)

A major clump of Indian contractual or indentured workforce arrived in South Africa in 1860–1911. These migrants were in the age group of 18–30 years (Bhana and Bhoola, 1990). They tended to sugarcane and *sisal* plantations of British settlers in the country.

The next batch that arrived in South Africa post–1880 was popularly referred to as 'Passenger Indians' as these people paid their fares as passengers to board South Africa-bound steamships. They were largely from erstwhile Gujarat, and included traders and skilled professionals like carpenters, artisans, tailors, etc.

## Significance of Native Languages for Indians

Ever since the arrival of Indians in South Africa, they were grouped under a broad homogenous category called 'Indian Identity'. In the era of globalisation, transnational communities often feel their identities to be under threat, especially, in a multicultural society. Therefore, they feel the need to preserve and conserve their cultural and linguistic identity.

The race laws of South Africa impacted all aspects of life of the migrant Indian population. Therefore, the Indian community united against these brutal laws and formed various political organisations to voice their angst and concerns, the most distinctive being the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) set up by Mahatma Gandhi in 1894 and the Transvaal and Cape Indian Congresses in the early twentieth century. Later, the Group Areas Act was promulgated on 7 July 1950. This Act empowered the Governor General to declare certain geographical areas for exclusive occupation of specific racial groups. Thus, the Indian ghetto was the result of the Group Areas Act 1950. This strengthened the Indian community. Irrespective of caste, class, religion and region, Indians have been living together in areas earmarked by the government in South Africa (Singh, 2016). Hence, in their own earmarked regions, people belonging to different races and communities are allowed to build places of worship like temples and mosques. Vernacular schools were also set up to keep their literature, culture and ethnic identities alive.

## School Education

Ever since their arrival in South Africa, Indian immigrants led a life of rejection and restriction. But the Cape Town Agreement of 1927 turned out to be a major turning point for the provision of better education facilities for students belonging to Indian communities. After the Cape Town Agreement, more primary schools were opened for Indian children.

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The Cape Town Agreement stressed the importance of English as the medium of instruction in higher and professional studies. However, the South African Indian Congress met at Kimberley to discuss a proposal to incorporate relevant Indian languages in the education system for community living in South Africa. There was considerable disagreement among the members on the issue. Inclusion of Indian languages in the curriculum by the Congress at the Cape Town Agreement would have been significant but the responsibility of promotion of Indian languages rested with the Indian cultural organisations.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Indians continued speaking their vernacular languages. In the 1950s, learning English became a priority for many in order to attain economic advancement. But children, who learned English at primary schools, did not, generally, use the language to converse with family members at home or friends in their Indian neighbourhoods. It was from the early 1960s that children started speaking in English at home and in the neighbourhood.

Indian languages were not even offered as school subjects in South Africa in the early 1960s. It was during this period that children attending primary schools had only passive knowledge of their mother tongues, i.e., vernacular languages.

Indian languages were, finally, introduced in mainstream curriculum as optional language subjects in the year 1984 under the House of Delegates. However, the minimum requirement of 20 students per language in each grade was 'unrealistic'. Some schools, with a majority in Indian students, offered classes in vernacular languages.

## Influence of the Dominant Western Culture

Until the 1950s, some of the prominent vernacular Indian languages in South Africa were Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. Language was a strong medium for conserving and preserving the Indian cultures. However, the Apartheid period in South Africa discouraged vernacular languages and English became the primary language. Moreover, post–1990s, the curriculum in government schools of South Africa was influenced by the western culture, history, literature, etc. These had an adverse impact on the Indian cultures, customs and traditions. They also alienated Indians from their own cultures and traditions.

## Reviving Indian Languages

Several Indian organisations like the Hindi Shiksha Sangh, Tamil Federation, Gujarati Parishad, Andhra Maha Sabha (Telugu) and Bazme Adab (Urdu) made it their mission to promote vernacular languages in the country and revive the Indian cultures, tradition, arts and literature. Classes were, usually, held on part-time basis in schools, temples or community halls and were complementary to the day curriculum of English schools.

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Free vernacular classes for adults were organised by Indian regional associations. Vernacular schools in the vicinity of Indian community areas were conducted from 3 pm to 5 pm, where the pupils were taught about sentence structure. They were also imparted basic lessons in religion and culture.

Meanwhile, different groups of the Indian community also joined the movement and took a number of initiatives for preserving, promoting and redefining their Indian identity (Bhana and Bhoola, 2011).

### Contributions of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh

Most Hindi speaking immigrants came from the Northern belt of India from States like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, etc. Therefore, promotion of Hindi language in South Africa was chiefly the responsibility of North Indian community organisations. Thus, determined efforts and initiatives were taken by various organisations to promote Hindi language and preserve the culture and traditions of the area.

In 1912, the Hindu Maha Sabha was formed to promote Hindi language. In 1925, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha came into being to promote Indian art and culture, and also vernacular languages. In 1948, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha collaborated with the Sanatan Dharma Sabha of South Africa to facilitate the working of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh (HSS). A conference was organised, in which 35 Hindi *Patshalas* participated. Since then, HSS is the umbrella organisation, coordinating the teaching of Hindi and guiding institutions engaged in the promotion of Hindi as a language — both written and oral. The organisation also works to promote the rich Indian culture and traditions, especially, North Indian music, dance, drama, arts and literature.

### Contributions of the South African Tamil Federation

There were three South Indian groups that arrived in Natal, South Africa.

- The first group comprised labourers, who came from economically weaker sections of society and could speak only Tamil. They were not literate.
- The second group included people willing to work in hotels, offices and homes of 'White' masters as servants and caretakers. They knew little English and had the knowledge of Tamil — spoken and written.
- The third group consisted of free passengers, who knew basic English and Tamil — spoken and written.

Deprived of education, the first two groups decided to educate their children with the help of learned persons in the community. These *vattiyars* (teachers) commanded respect. They were the ones, who sowed the seeds of preserving and nurturing Tamil language and culture in children living in South Africa.

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The South African Tamil Federation founded a Tamil school, which played a significant role in promoting and preserving the Tamil language, culture and religion by conducting programmes as regards to teaching the language, and promotion of Tamil culture among children and youth, hailing from Tamil Nadu, living in South Africa.

### Contributions of the Andhra Maha Sabha

People from the Andhra region of India came to South Africa as 'indentured labourers'. Their language was Telugu. However, they were considered same as Tamilians, and were, commonly, addressed as 'Madrasis' because of their common port of embarkation, i.e., Madras (Prabhakaran, 1992).

They realised that Telugu literacy was essential to preserve their culture and tradition in this foreign land. This led to the formation of Telugu *Patshalas* in Natal. It was on 14 May 1931 that the Andhra Maha Sabha was founded in South Africa with the objective to preserve and promote Telugu language and Andhra culture. The organisation aimed to cater to the social, cultural, spiritual and educational needs of the Telugu-speaking population living in the country by promoting its vernacular literature, arts, music, dance, etc. It also aimed to establish libraries and resource centres for its members and general public.

### Contributions of the Gujarati Hindu Sanskruti Kendra

Gujaratis, mainly belonging to the merchant class, from different parts of the State like Kutch, Kathiawad and Surat, to name a few, arrived in South Africa in the nineteenth century as 'Passenger Indians'.

Kathiawadis, a sub-group of the Gujarati community, who were smaller in number but economically strong. The Kathiawad Hindu Seva Samaj was founded in the year 1943. It was merged with the Surat Hindu Association and Saptah Mandir in 1993 to form the Gujarati Sanskruti Kendra (Hansen, 2005). This organisation, primarily, serves the religious, linguistic and cultural needs of Gujarati Hindu community living in South Africa.

## Conclusion

All these efforts indicate the strong bond that Indians living in South Africa have with their mother tongues. The diaspora — comprising a mixed population of illiterate labourers, semi-skilled workers with basic literacy skills, merchants and traders, who knew a little English apart from their respective mother tongues — realised that their identity was closely related to their languages, which needed to be preserved and nurtured, especially, in an alien land. Much before they were permitted to start their own schools, they made attempts to preserve their respective languages by singing songs and rhymes dug out of childhood

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memories. They also taught alphabet to their children in their native languages and introduced them to the vernacular literature and arts, apart from speaking their mother tongues at home, in religious ceremonies and functions. Besides, they encouraged their children not to disassociate themselves from their respective mother tongues and culture.

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# *Chavadi Vachan* — The Social Audit of Reading

Vikas Garad*

*Chavadi Vachan*, a social audit initiative of learning, was implemented in the State of Maharashtra as part of the Quality Enhancement Campaign by the Maharashtra Prathmik Shikshan Parishad (MPSP), Mumbai, in the year 2011. The programme, which aimed at ensuring Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE), was carried out in government and local body schools across all mediums of instruction.

'Social audit' refers to a form of citizen participation that focuses on government performance and accountability. As part of the initiative, children are asked to read aloud passages or excerpts from a vernacular newspaper before villagers and not just in the school assembly. This is termed *Chavadi Vachan*. Academicians, teachers and other stakeholders, then, ask questions to them in order to check their reading comprehension skills. The students are asked questions before the villagers, the results of which are declared on the spot. It is like showcasing the learners' progress in the vernacular language and mathematics in front of the whole community. The students who perform well in *Chavadi Vachan* are awarded prizes.

The head teacher along with other teachers conducts *Chavadi Vachan* practice sessions in their respective schools. The programme is, usually, conducted for three hours from 8–11 am as per the convenience of the stakeholders, preferably, twice a month. In few cases, the programme is organised only once a month considering the availability of the concerned stakeholders.

These programmes are conducted in natural, joyful and informal atmosphere The *Chavadi Vachan* programme helps a child gradually move from simple texts to advanced ones. Hence, the format of the programme is such that it offers the learners an opportunity to showcase their talents and skills in a phased manner. It also provides an opportunity to the teachers to polish their teaching–learning skills. Since it is a part of CCE, it enables the

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teachers to receive regular feedback of the learners' progress and plan their teaching–learning strategies accordingly. The programme also enables parents to get immediate feedback about the progress of their wards.

The material used for *Chavadi Vachan* are textbooks, self–learning cards, library books, newspapers, magazines and educational aids. The reports are presented in School Management Committee (SMC) meetings. The SMC members also discuss the progress of each student in its meetings in order to design an action plan to further improve their performance.

The programme stresses putting in continuous and comprehensive efforts, conducting monitoring of the students at regular intervals, and encouraging active participation of the learners and stakeholders at all levels — right from the headmaster to villagers — to achieve universalisation of elementary education. It can be achieved only by enhancing the skills of the learners with coordinated interactions among the different stakeholders, such as headmasters, teachers, cluster heads, members at the *Panchayat* level, representatives of the people, academicians, social workers, members of parent–teacher associations and mother–parent associations, SMC members, villagers, etc. All stakeholders from local authorities and monitoring system attend the *Chavadi Vachan* programme. The stakeholders are informed about the programme three days prior to it.

There is also a provision to utilise the school grants made available under the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) for the purpose.

It needs to be noted here that according to the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, the responsibility of imparting quality education to the learners in the age group of 6–14 years lies with the State government and local bodies. Hence, the entire administrative and monitoring system in the State participate to make the *Chavadi Vachan* programme a success and meet the aim of learning eenhancement.

Along with *Chavadi Vachan,* another initiative undertaken in the State of Maharashtra is that of creating a 'reading corner' called *Vachan Kopara* in every classroom and 'reading string' called *Vachan Dori*. Age-appropriate reading material is kept in the reading corner to develop reading habit among the learners. Some magazines are also hung on the reading string, within the reach of the learners in order to inculcate reading habit in them.

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# Culturally Proficient Instruction — A Guide for People who Teach

Amruth G. Kumar*
Dinesh G.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Title:** | *Culturally Proficient Instruction—A Guide for People who Teach* |
| **Authors:** | Kikanza J. Nuri-Robins, Delores B. Lindsey, Randall B. Lindsey and Raymond D. Terrell |
| **Publisher:** | Corwin — A Sage Company |
| **Year of Publication:** | 2012 |
| **No. of Pages:** | 185 |
| **Price:** | ₹2,700 |

Classrooms are spaces, where cultural differences are downplayed in order to develop a homogenous society. Every attempt of homogenisation through measures like curriculum development, pedagogy, evaluation, etc., needs to be examined through a cultural perspective. In order to respect the diverse classroom culture, one needs to draw teaching–learning resources from students representing diverse cultural backgrounds. This gives rise to the concept of 'cultural proficiency' in educational institutions. Though not a recent concept, culturally proficient teaching prepares students for a diverse environment.

The book, *Culturally Proficient Instruction — A Guide for People who Teach*, by Kikanza J. Nuri-Robins, Delores B. Lindsey, Randall B. Lindsey and Raymond D. Terrell serves as a manual of culturally proficient instructions for teachers and educational institutions. The authors suggest democratic engagement in schools as an important tool for empowering cultural proficiency. The book is divided into three parts and comprises 12 chapters. After each concept, there is a to–do activity for readers. Exercises, encouraging reflection, are also given at the end of each chapter.

The main aim of multiculturalism is to accept and promote cultural diversity. India is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. According to *Census 2011*, India is a country with more than 19,000

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languages and dialects spoken as the mother tongue. It is also hailed as a land of 'unity in diversity'. Though the book is written in the context of the USA, it is relevant to the multicultural society of India as well.

The first part of the book titled 'An Introduction to Cultural Proficiency' consists of three chapters. The first chapter explains 'cultural proficiency' and why one needs to use culturally proficient instructions in classrooms and educational institutions.

The second chapter titled 'The Case for Cultural Proficiency' introduces the concept of cultural proficiency by presenting a case study of Maple View, a city in the USA, where people from diverse backgrounds and cultures live and study. It also highlights the initiatives undertaken by the Maple View education department to tackle a diverse learning community in classrooms. Besides, the authors underline the educational changes that have taken place in the USA over the years. But, at the same time, they decry how instructors are still following traditional instructional models of teaching.

Chapter three emphasises the need for cultural proficiency in the USA and how it can be incorporated into the education system. It discusses instructors' activities as they use culturally proficient instructions.

Part two of the book titled, 'The Tools of Cultural Proficiency', consists of three chapters. Chapter four titled 'The Guiding Principles' presents the tools that instructors and educational institutions may employ for ensuring effective teaching–learning process and encouraging effective classroom activities. The authors also give an insight into the 10 guiding principles that can help understand classroom interactions and serve as guidelines in order to engage with colleagues, students and communities. Activities related to each guiding principle are given for the readers, which would help them understand the guiding principles.

Chapter five gives an insight into 'Barriers to Cultural Proficiency' for instructors and educational institutions. In the context of the USA, the authors point out that the country houses a diverse population consisting of immigrants, minorities, native Americans and African Americans. Such racial barriers fit in the Indian context as well. Barriers like those related to content and assessment have been included in the learner activity section.

The last chapter in the second part titled 'The Cultural Proficiency Continuum' describes six points on continuum—cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, cultural competence and cultural proficiency.

Part three of the book titled 'The essential elements' consists of six chapters. It discusses the five essential elements of cultural proficiency, i.e., assessing culture,

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valuing diversity, having the capacity for cultural self-assessment, being conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact and having institutionalised culture knowledge. These elements set a standard for teaching and learning, thereby, making it easier for the instructors or educational institutions to drift from cultural destructiveness towards cultural proficiency.

Chapter seven titled 'Assessing Culture' elaborates how to assess the culture of an individual and educational institution.

Chapter eight titled 'Valuing Diversity' stresses the need to respect multiculturalism in classroom and organisation premises, thereby, enabling the instructors and educational institutions to create a conducive work environment.

Chapter nine titled 'Managing the Dynamics of Difference' gives an insight into conflicts, sources of conflicts and strategies for managing conflicts.

The chapter titled 'Adopting Diversity' focuses on how to adopt instructions for classrooms with diversity.

Further, the book highlights that 'institutionalising cultural knowledge' is the final essential element to become a culturally proficient instructor.

The last chapter titled 'Your Action Plan' is for instructors to reflect on all five essential elements as discussed in the previous chapters.

Each chapter of the book helps understand how to become a culturally proficient instructor. As rightly mentioned in the title of the book, *'A Guide for People who Teach'*, it guides instructors and organisations to include different cultures in their daily educational practices. The book helps instructors and organisations teach learners in a multicultural environment.

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# A University dedicated to Children

Harshad P. Shah*

The Children's University, founded under the Children's University Act 2009, in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, is affiliated with the University Grants Commission (UGC). As the name suggests, 'child' is at the centre of all courses and programmes being offered at the University.

The institute, which is the world's first such university, conducts researches, education and training programmes for parents, teachers and students, thereby, aiming to create an environment that would facilitate the all-round development of children.

The University propounds that every child matters. It covers child and adolescence development—beginning from foetus till the attainment of 18 years of age. It works under four dimensions — education, research, training and extension. It advocates that children need to be brought up in such a way that it enables their all-round development — physical, mental, psychological, cognitive and spiritual, ultimately, leading to self-realisation.

The University through a scientific activity related to *Garbhadhana Samskar* aims to educate pregnant women on foetal health and child development. The State houses many such centres for the purpose. The first such centre to come up was the 'Tapovan Centre'.

The University often conducts seminars on subjects like couple counselling and parent education.

It has also started a centre for toddler education under the aegis

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of 'Shishu Paramarshan Kendra'. At this centre, parents get guidance and counselling lessons regarding innovative child rearing practices. They are also acquainted with various activities for the development of children in the age group of 0–3 years in a practical manner.

Another centre of importance is the 'Vidya Niketan'. The University is committed to update the knowledge of teachers and, therefore, organises training programmes for them through this centre.

Moreover, the institute is committed to develop an innovative curriculum with impetus on devising new methods of imparting school education rooted in the diverse culture of India. It has developed books, such as *Shaishavnu Smit* and *Parivarni Pathshala* to provide guidance to parents and guardians in matters of child rearing and development.

For young children, the University has brought out books like *Bhulakano Khajano*, *Varta.com* and *Vartano Rasthal*. These books contain interesting value-based stories. Besides, it has prepared three CDs, comprising 43 patriotic, prayer and children's songs. These are available on the Children's University website.

*Figure 1: Children's University at Gandhinagar in Gujarat.*

Apart from these, a monthly magazine titled *Balvisva* is also being published by the University. It carries information, articles, puzzles, rhymes and stories useful for parents, teachers and children. The issues of the magazine are available on the University website. As of now, more than 350 stories have been uploaded on the website.

It also publishes a quarterly journal titled *Horizons of Holistic Education*, which stresses carrying out innovative researches in the field of child development and education.

Besides these, the University offers many courses in higher education like postgraduation in psychology, social work, English, food and nutrition, etc. The institute also awards M.Phil and PhD degrees to students carrying out research works and presenting dissertations in the field of childhood development and education. It also offers some part–time courses during the weekend, such as masters in education, and postgraduate–diploma in school counseling, pre-natal care and education. Two certificate courses of six–month duration in vocal music and drawing are also being offered by the University.

Apart from these programmes and initiatives, the University is planning to start 'Parivar Mitra',

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which will serve as a counselling centre for family. Along with that, it will also launch 'Bal Mitra', a counseling centre for children. Moreover, workshops for developing soft skills in children are also being conducted on a regular basis.

The programmes and initiatives being conducted by the University are useful to parents, teachers and teacher–educators catering to children at the primary stage of schooling, enabling it to fulfill its aim of creating a *Bhavya–Divya Bharat*.

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# The Mirage of Assumptions

Varada M. Nikalje*

I was one of the resource persons at a recent workshop for teachers of English. One of the sessions (not mine) included an audio–video presentation on 'Critical Reflection on Teaching', to be followed by a discussion. I had viewed the presentation thrice (when it was shown to other batches of participants) and could not help being a little inattentive to it. To keep my mind from wandering, I tried to gauge the responses to the presentation from members in the audience. The sound quality in the presentation was not clear, and in a few minutes, I could sense their thoughts wandering and scurrying around, finally, coalescing into a general impression — critical reflection is necessary and one is always glad to listen to the latest theories in language education. But at the end of the day, how does it relate to me, my work and students? Is there space for theory and reflection in classroom situation?

It is being increasingly felt in academia that caught between impatience, ignorance and shallowness, public space for reflection is shrinking. Teacher–trainers and most education researches have contributed to the syndrome by presenting theoretical enquiry in its most shallow and least informative form.

Yet, in a profession as challenging as teaching, self-reflection is a must. Some teachers would say they reflect as they teach, while some are reluctant to work on lesson plans, and yet another set blames the system and is content to leave it at that. The sad part is that all these experiences are transient and quickly forgotten. They are recalled only when a similar incident occurs either to oneself or a colleague. Educational experiences are rarely discussed. Yet, in the real business of educational activity, i.e., teaching children to learn, it is impossible to go far without asking questions of what we are doing, why we need to do it, who will benefit from it, and how and why some things are 'obvious' to us while some are not. Such theoretical concerns haunt us and demand our attention, enquiry and insight.

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Here, I am reminded of an orchestra playing western classical music. If you have watched the serial *Mr. Bean*, you may recall an episode, in which the lead character, Mr. Bean, takes up the music conductor's baton. Holding the baton in his right hand, he raises both the hands in a flourish — and the music starts. Stunned, he stops and so does the music. Delighted, he makes the same gesture, and the music begins again. Slowly, he twirls his fingers, and a single instrument starts playing.

To someone like me, who does not have much exposure to western music, it would be easy to believe that the music conductor has one of the easiest jobs in the world. There he stands, waving his arms, and the orchestra plays mesmerising music, with sudden bursts of sound that are seemingly spontaneous, but result of long practice. Hidden from the audience are the conductor's abilities to read and interpret all parts at once, the play of several instruments, recognise the hidden potential of sudden silence, organise and coordinate the disparate parts, and most of all, communicate with all orchestra members as one.

To students, a teacher is a revered figure with a strong presence in classroom, generally, talking and explaining, handing out papers, giving assignments, in fact, apparently not doing much. Invisible in performance are many kinds of knowledge, unseen plans and backstage moves that allow a teacher to purposely move a group of students from one set of understanding and skills to another, over the span of a year.

The point I am trying to make here is that people have assumptions about learning, education, language and a host of other issues. These assumptions often remain tacit and are sometimes ingrained so deep that they remain unexamined. For instance, 'mother tongue' is a familiar concept. It refers to the language one speaks at home — that is how a layman would put it. However, the concept of mother tongue has changed over the years. In these days of globalisation and floating population, the meaning of mother tongue is very different from what it was three generations ago. Indeed, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF)–2005 prefers to use the term 'home language' to refer to the language(s) spoken at home, with a larger kinship group, neighbourhood, etc. The NCF–2005 goes on to say that "care must be taken to honour and respect the child's home language(s)/mother tongue(s)…which are closely tied to the thoughts and identity of the child. In fact, they are so closely bound with one's identity that to deny or wipe out a child's mother tongue is to interfere with the sense of self".

Not long ago, the pedagogical assumption in language learning was that the mother tongue 'interferes' with the learning of the second language. Hence, the stress on curbing the use of mother tongue in

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English medium schools, 'English only' signboards and the fine that students had to pay for using a non–English word in the school premises. Multilingualism now has belated pedagogical recognition. It is a known fact that a child has innate language faculty and mother tongue acquisition does not impede the learning of other languages. Teachers' attitude towards learners' mother tongue(s) — as 'interference' or 'resource' — will impact the teaching–learning process.

Another assumption is that girls are denied education by their families who are 'orthodox' and believe that they do not really need to be educated. It is sad but true that for many girls in India, schooling is over by Class III. But even in families, where parents are ready to send their girls to school, other problems crop up.

*The Hindu* newspaper recently carried a story about two sisters from rural Maharashtra named Swati and Anita. Both face an identical dilemma. While the school up to Class VIII was in their village, the high school was located some distance away. Going to school was not such a problem. But after dismissal, they had to wait for hours before they could catch a bus back home. The newspaper records their woes: "If for some reason the bus was cancelled, which happened quite frequently, they would have to walk back to the village in the dark, something their parents would not contemplate. Hence, the only option was to drop out of school. In contrast, the brother of the girls faced no such problem — he would hitch a ride on a passing truck and make his way back. This was not an option open for the girls." The article further states that the girls were as bright as their brother and that theirs' was not a remote village.

Another assumption that people mostly have about school dropouts is that it is because of poverty and backwardness. People, generally believe that pressure of making the ends meet on children and parents belonging to marginalised socioeconomic backgrounds is responsible for the high dropout rate in the country. This belief gains support from the fact that child labour is widespread in India.

According to the Education For all (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2010, UNESCO, India is ranked at 105 among 128 countries, and continues to figure in the group of countries with low educational development index. According to the Global Monitoring Report, while the enrolment ratio in primary education has improved over the years to 94 per cent in 2007, the survival rate is appalling. About 94 per cent net enrolment ratio will have little meaning when contrasted against the high dropout rate.

Therefore, out of every 100 children who enroll in Class I, 37 stop coming to school sometime in the first year or do not show up at all in the second year. This means that 61 per cent of the dropout children belong to the youngest age group attending school.

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Moreover, the Annual Status of Education Report 2014 points out a survey of learning outcomes of primary school children in rural India. It reports a declining trend in learning outcomes. For instance, only 25 per cent of rural children in Class III can read a Class III text fluently. Of all children enrolled in Class V, about half cannot read Class II textbooks. This has serious implications. If children cannot read, it affects their involvement in classroom activities, so much so, that it seems dull and meaningless. Such children begin to have irregular attendance, and finally, drop out.

This raises a pertinent question, "Why would a parent send a child to Class I but withdraw before Class II?" Thus, it is a myth that poverty is responsible for the high dropout rate. It is true that infrastructure in most schools leaves much to be desired. With funds and planning, infrastructure can be built. However, as pointed out by educationists, such as Rabindra Nath Tagore, more worrisome is the pedagogical atmosphere, which is mechanical and routinised. A child aged six years, irrespective of one's existential conditions, is curious about the world, and wants to understand and manipulate (touch and feel) different objects. But in a typical school, one would have to learn the alphabet and shape of letters. The child has to practice writing them over and over again. To the child, this appears meaningless, for it is totally de-linked from curiosity.

Education is not just about the number of children who get enrolled in a school. It is about what they actually do in the school. When children, finally, access the school, it should be able to 'hold' them, i.e., hold their interest and make them want to come to school daily.

There was a stirring in the room. The presentation got over and the sound of chairs scraping against the floor could be heard clearly as the participants got up. "I assume there will be tea," joked one of them. Hearing the welcome clinking of tea cups, I smiled. This was an assumption that was certainly no mirage.

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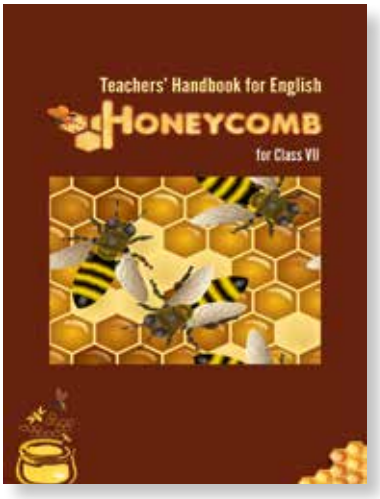


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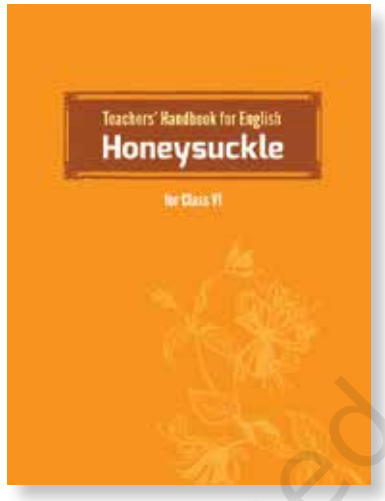


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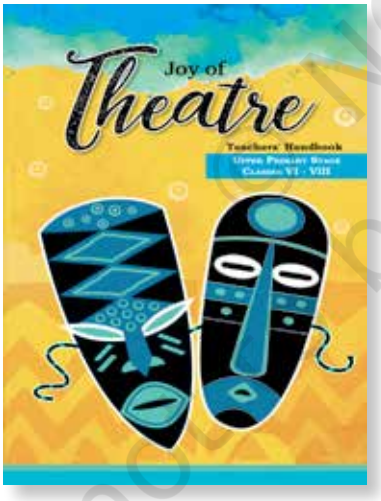


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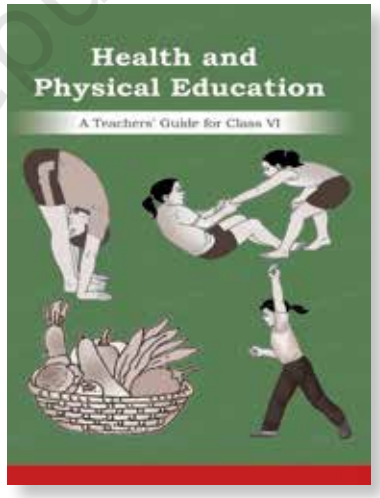


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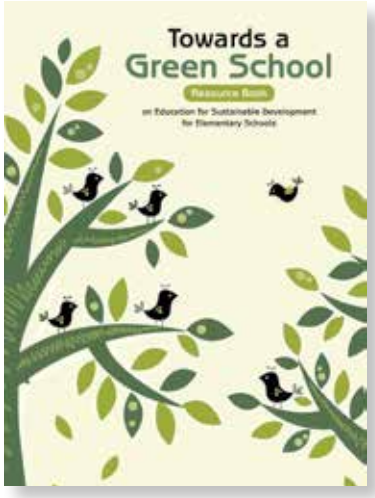


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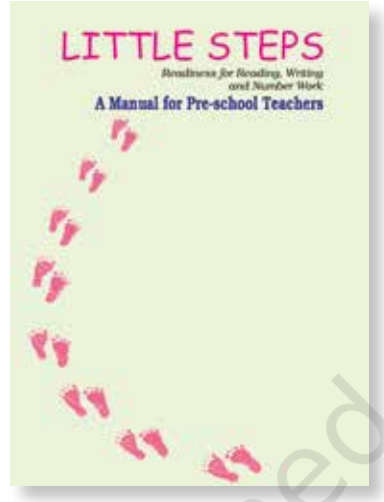


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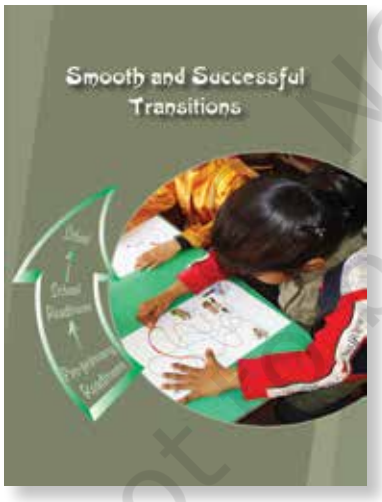


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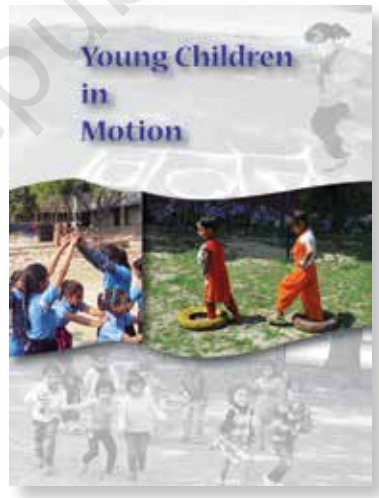


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