

Reports

Report of a Three-Day Workshop on the Orientation of a Course on Early Literacy Pedagogy for Teacher Educators

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A three-day orientation course was facilitated by Azim Premji Foundation at the Institute of Advanced Study in Education (IASE) Jabalpur as an introduction to a course on Early Literacy Pedagogy starting from November 2015. A total of 41 participants attended the orientation (3 IASE professors, 17 participants from District Resource Groups and 1 DRS, 10 B. Ed. students, and 10 DIET lecturers and Principals. It was conducted from 7 to 9 September 2015. The objective of the orientation was to build an understanding of literacy as a semiotic system by looking at the following aspects of early literacy:

- How do children experience and understand the meanings of symbols and signs early in life,
- How the literacy experience involves both cognitive and affective meaning-making
- The history of literacy teaching practices, including adult literacy and the many meanings of literacy.

This was done through simulations, thought experiments, and discussions, with each one taking the participants closer to the meaning of literacy.

The orientation comprised six sessions. The first two sessions gave experiences of signs, symbols, pictures and music.

In the first session, the participants focused on how we give meaning to signs and symbols. They watched an advertisement that showed parts of a car. They interpreted the key

communication from the advertisement to mean precision, relations, efficiency and related it to the process of education. This experience helped them understand that meaning-making happens through our prior knowledge, our sense experience and the faculty to interpret symbols. The participants were also given pictures and asked to construct a story. The stories were all different and lent meaning to the pictures and through an interesting discussion justified the various interpretations of the details. This experience established that we observe, interpret and give meaning to our experience. The participants were then shown some signs and symbols commonly used in our daily life. They used them to create sentences. The joining of the signs and symbols to create sentences resulted in an understanding of the process of reading. Reading is an integrated process of sense experience, meaning-making and interpretation. We understand signs and symbols in the world only if they connect with our interests, motivation and domain knowledge.

In the second and the third sessions, the participants explored the process of reading with a deeper exploration of the cognitive and affective processes involved in reading by listening to a *jugalbandi*, watching it and then reading about it. They applied the strategies of prediction, interpretation, questioning, visualization and discussion while all the time connecting with their prior experience as they went through the process of listening, then watching and finally reading on the same theme. An experience of thinking of the process of constructing an igloo through a reading led to the understanding that it is difficult to read if one does not have prior experience, and impossible to do anything with what we read (in this case constructing an igloo) if one does not have a multisensory way of meaning-making experience. This led to an articulation by the

participants of the cognitive processes involved in meaning making.

In the fourth session, the participants dealt with the idea that reading is not a unitary process in the sense that how one reads depends on what one reads. Reading different kinds of texts requires different kinds of strategies or processes. Moreover they relate differently to our faculty of meaning-making: The text, its genre, context, prior knowledge, domain knowledge, interest and purpose, all play a part in meaning-making.

In the fifth session, the participants concentrated on the process of writing. They explored the present understanding of writing in classrooms as copy writing, or as the writing of dictation. The participants then went through an experience of writing and copy writing on the one hand and of creative writing on the other. The viewing of a video clip—*Gaon Chodab Nahi*, led to the emotional, and cognitive angle of understanding and responding to an issue and resulted in a session on expressive writing. They were then questioned as to which method they liked best and what according to them were the characteristics of both the methods. This brought about the understanding of writing as a process, rather than a product.

In the final session, the participants explored the sociocultural and critical context of literacy. Through “Sawal Karo”, a poem by Rag Telang, they explored the meaning of literacy for children in different contexts. The contexts of rural, urban disadvantaged and migrant children are very different from that of urban children from literacy rich homes. The discussion centred around the thought that children’s experiences should be made part of the curriculum; their literacy experiences should be non-discriminatory. The discussion then went on to the many meanings of literacy, whether functional literacy was adequate in the context of learning to read extended to reading to learn.

The course ended with a discussion on “Bhartiya Schoolon mein Saksharta Shiksha”, an article by Shobha Sinha.

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