



School Readiness

Vrinda Datta

The enrollment in primary schools has dramatically increased to 96% (ASER 2013) in the context of right to education. But still the issues of retention, repetition, drop out and learning levels remain greatest challenges in the field of education in India. Therefore child's entry, adjustment and success in school needs to be understood and in this context transition to school becomes a significant event. Transition is used to refer to period of time before and after the child moves from either home or early childhood program (UNICEF, 2012). As acknowledged in literature, for the transition to be smooth, children need to be ready for schools and schools ready for children (UNICEF, 2012). Thus transition and school readiness are linked concepts. In the early literature, school readiness emphasized only on cognitive and academic skills. While now, one looks at school readiness as a more holistic concept. It does not occur suddenly but school readiness can be considered as an outcome of child's life up to now (Janus, Hughes Duku, 2010). Along with this for the school ready child to function, there has to be ready school that will support child's learning and development. Taking these factors into consideration, UNICEF created a model of school readiness where ready families, ready schools and ready children are three important dimensions that interact to create school readiness. Further, it also talks of transition periods where schools, families and communities play an important role.

Ready Parents

In the early years care and stimulation is primarily provided by parents and caregivers. Parent's involvement and understanding of the various needs and development of children will help them provide right nutrition, stimulation, health care and a caring home environment. Such parents also then look for child care programs that will support their efforts in child care. Families in different

socioeconomic strata will create different opportunities for development. But parental awareness and involvement will help in maximizing use of family resources and also make use of early childhood interventions. Such parents will also be able to show a keen interest in child's adjustment and progress in schools. For this to happen, early childhood programs play a significant role. Parent participation, parent involvement and parent education will help parents become partners in the education and development of children.

Children ready for school

It is well proven now that the first five years is a window of opportunity to help children reach their optimal development potential. Therefore globally there has been an acknowledgement that early childhood interventions and programs have become essential input for children's development. Further the holistic development approach makes it imperative that children's health, nutrition, and development get equal focus as their synergy is what takes children towards optimal development. In providing inputs for development, the holistic development focus will be to prepare the child to not only be physically ready but also be socially and emotionally competent. As the child reaches pre-school years the specific inputs for cognitive and language skills are important for getting children ready for school. In the process of development the child is also learning and exhibiting behaviours and skills that he uses in the process of learning and interaction. Thus early childhood interventions and programs play a very significant role in getting children ready for school. But for them to be effective they have to be of quality and context specific. Understanding children's socio-cultural context and giving age and culture appropriate activities and materials, will ensure that the program is reaching all children. In India programs are run by Government, NGOs,

Private individuals and organization. As there are no regulatory mechanisms, each one runs programs as per their understanding and abilities to provide a program. However this leads to such variations in quality that the benefits of the programs for children also are vastly different. This effectively means that children come differently prepared for “school readiness” and this will have to be acknowledged by schools and schools then have to get ready for children.

Ready schools

Having an environment for all children to learn is the most important factor in ready schools. Today under right to education it may be that primary schools are available and accessible to most children. But for schools to help children succeed in their smooth transition to primary schools requires that they recognize and adapt to local needs by using context specific books and materials and curriculum at a pace suitable for children’s abilities. The ready schools need to focus on three main phases 1) pre-transition 2) transition and 3) integration in school. For the pre-transition phase, link with early childhood programs becomes essential. Schools should be aware of the kinds of programs that children in the community are attending, with what experience and learning they are entering schools and so also their socio-cultural context. This helps teachers know how varied the group is in terms of early childhood experiences and what pedagogy she should use to reach out to these children with varied “readiness”. So communication between early childhood workers and school teacher and parents becomes important to help children feel accepted and enthusiastic to participate in the learning process. In the transition phase which is just after the child has entered school, there are lot

of adjustments and challenges the child goes through and the ready school will be aware of this and perhaps will plan very different activities and interaction which will create comfort and familiarity to the school environment, its routines and expectations The ready school will therefore have teachers who will be sensitive to this period of transition and create a transition curriculum with support of the school. It is this teacher who will be able to then judge when children have adjusted and how to now reveal the required curriculum and expectations from children. Such processes help build children’s confidence and help them take on new learning tasks with less apprehension. Thus pre-transition, transition and integration in school are all important parts of ready schools.

Conclusion

School readiness happens when parents, children and school participate in the process. While each ones role is important, creating the enabling environment can happen when programs and policies are supportive. Access to high quality early childhood programs is essential for getting children ready for schools. There is no denying that school readiness requires better linkages between early childhood programs and primary schools. And finally if we recognize school readiness as an important process for school adjustment and school education, then we must empower teachers with knowledge and skills to be sensitive and child oriented teachers.



References

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Vrinda is Professor at the Center for Human Ecology, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and is also the President of the Association for Early Childhood Education and Development (AECED) which is a national network of institutions and individuals working for the young child. Prof. Datta has a Ph.D. in Human Development and has been a keen researcher in the field of early childhood. She has worked on issues of quality in early childhood programs, teacher training, and impact of early childhood programs on children’s development. She has many publications to her credit. In 2005, Prof. Datta was selected as a Global Leader from India by the World forum Foundation. She is also the recipient of Senior Fulbright Research Fellowship to USA in 2007. She can be contacted at vrinda@tiss.edu or vdatta05@hotmail.com