

# inspirED 2020

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# National Education Policy and Early Childhood Education: Connecting Intent to Implementation



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## Summary

This paper introduces to you the importance of early childhood education and the barriers to achieving it from the context of opportunities available to children from urban/semi-urban low-income communities in India. Here, we present to you a snapshot of the current realities drawn from our experience as individuals who work to design sustainable solutions to address quality early childhood education for these children. We take a multipronged lens as we look at all the actors involved in enabling quality early experiences and explore the role of the school, teachers and parents in Early Childhood Education [ECE]. We will present to you some examples of what has worked in solution design and how some of these ideas can have a far-reaching impact in facilitating the goals set for ECE in the National Education Policy, 2020. We encourage the reader to connect with the parts that are most relevant to you and wear a critical [but optimistic] lens in considering the recommendations made by the NEP for ECE.

# The What and Why of Early Childhood Education [ECE]

Early Childhood Care and Education has the potential to be the greatest and most powerful equalizer – National Education Policy, 2020<sup>[1]</sup>

I met Aliya in early 2016. She was standing alone outside a school building in a community close to my home in Bangalore. She looked exhausted as she stood there with a heavy bag on her shoulders waiting for her mother to come and pick her up.

Aliya's mother came rushing in at 3:10 and the first thing she did was check if Aliya had finished the food in her lunch box and quickly hurried her off to drop her at her tuition class where Aliya would spend the rest of the afternoon completing her homework. Aliya's mother had to get back to work by 3:30. She worked as a domestic helper in 4 houses. Her husband was an auto driver. He would pick up Aliya from tuition at 6pm every day and bring her home. Aliya was one of 3 siblings. Her parents were very proud to be able to send her to an English medium school in the community. They had heard all the neighbours say that this school made sure that children study and were disciplined. Almost all children could recite many English rhymes and even say the tables up to 6 by the time they finished UKG. They believe that the school will give Aliya the education that they did not receive and hence give her a better chance at life.

Aliya however, paints a very different story when one asks her how she finds school. She is tired all the time. She finds class confusing and does not like going to school. She wants to play with her friends 'but there is no time', she says. She does not like homework because she has to write so much and her hands hurt.

School is stressful for this 5-year-old girl. She enters class at 8:30 am and has 6 periods a day where she learns English, Math, EVS, General Knowledge, Kannada and more. She spends a minimum of 2 hours writing /reciting rhymes and tables every day. She was worried about her unit test paper which is coming up in a week. Aliya's teachers were conducting revision that week and were upset that she could not recall and recite a story correctly since the same story would be asked in the test.

Aliya is one among 139 + million children under age of 6 in India. As educators, we must reflect on the ecosystem that creates an environment devoid of play, joy and a love for learning for our children.

Only in recent years has early childhood education emerged as a niche place within education for us to recognize the unique needs of children from birth until the age of 8 [Early Childhood].

For children growing up in poverty, their early years are particularly important as they are much less likely than their more affluent peers to benefit from experiences that support positive development. This can impact how they progress throughout their education and lead to significantly poorer life chances in adulthood.

**The early learning outcomes of primary focus are:**

- **Communication, speech and language development**
- **Pre-literacy and literacy**
- **Pre-numeracy and numeracy**

**Foundational to these outcomes are children's social and emotional development and physical health and development.**

Building on these foundations is central to improving primary early learning outcomes and together represent the key dimensions of children's readiness for school. These foundational outcomes are particularly important, as children who struggle in these areas are more likely to experience multiple challenges, including poorer educational performance (attendance, attainment, dropping out), behaviour, mental health and wellbeing.

According to the Centre on the Developing Child of Harvard University, over 90% of a child's brain development occurs prior to the age of 5 [2]. This statistic amazed many people and parents in particular to be very careful in raising their children in the early years. In another article about Early Childhood Development, Harvard University advised that:

- 1. Getting things right the first time is easier and more effective than trying to fix them later.**
- 2. Early childhood matters because experiences early in life can have a lasting impact on later learning, behaviour, and health.**
- 3. Highly specialized interventions are needed as early as possible for children experiencing toxic stress.**
- 4. Early life experiences actually get under the skin and into the body, with lifelong effects on adult physical and mental health.**

It is, therefore of the utmost importance that every child has access to quality early childhood care and education (ECCE). It is evident from the ASER, 2019 [3] data and the IECEI study [4] published in 2019 that India has a long way to go in achieving quality early childhood education for all children.

There are two major realities we must acknowledge when we look at pre-school going children from disadvantaged communities in India today.

- More than 40% of them do not have the foundation cognitive, literacy and numeracy skills necessary to enter grade 1
- We have a large proportion of children entering formal schooling early and hence do not even have the opportunity to engage in a pre-school education [4/10 children entering class 1 are below age 6.

The ASER [3] also confirms the parent bias for private schools even when choosing a preschool for their children and we have found this to be very true in urban and semi urban areas where we work.

In the last 4 years at Key Education Foundation, we have worked closely with 50+ affordable private schools to strengthen the quality of early education that is offered in their pre-primary classrooms. We have worked to develop and implement a play based, holistic curriculum for 3-6-year-old children that keeps in mind the context, is low-cost and easy to implement given the limited skill sets and resources available. **All high impact early childhood programs have one thing in common – a collective effort by all actors involved in a child’s life.** It is impossible to view pre-school education as a function of the school alone as these little learners are just beginning their transition into formal learning environments. The best early experiences enable children to learn seamlessly between the school and home environments. Our School Readiness Program has been centered on this principle of enabling collective action by focusing on 3 key stakeholders who are responsible for ensuring quality early experiences – **The School, Teacher and Parent.**



In this section, we will explore the role of each key stakeholder and solutions available to ensure they are empowered and invested in ensuring quality early experiences. We will also understand the key recommendations of the NEP with respect to each key stakeholder and possible implications of the available solutions in accelerating national efforts towards achieving quality ECE for all children by 2030.

# School, Curriculum and The Child

The NCERT [National Council of Educational Research and Training], preschool curriculum from 2013 [5], recommends that children be provided adequate opportunities for stimulating experiences. The overarching aims are to build foundations for all round development and life-long learning instead of just 'preparing' the child for school. In addition to this, The National Curriculum places the student at the heart of the teaching and learning process and focuses on designing the curriculum in such a way that a teacher is able to translate a curriculum into classroom practices that have a meaningful impact.

At KEF, we developed a curriculum that is rooted in the NCERT principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) that are suitable for the child's age, stage and context. The implementation is focused on the context of the community to promote children's holistic development. While the NCERT recommendations serve as a great framework for curriculum design, we have found the need to unpack this document to define some key principles that help us define outcomes, plans and resources at the implementation level.

## **Key questions to consider:**

*What should Aliya know by the age of 5?*

*How should Aliya be learning at school?*

*What can the school do to make learning enjoyable for Aliya?*

*Should Aliya be writing tests at the age of 5?*

## **Key Principles to define the WHAT, WHY and HOW of Developmentally Appropriate Practices [DAP] in the pre-primary classroom:**

1. **Holistic Development:** We define 5 primary areas of development and ensure that classroom experiences are equally balanced between them.



2. **Play Play Play:** Ensure that all learning activities are designed to engage the child in play. It is ideal to find a balance where children get an opportunity for unstructured play using enriching materials and with each other as well as guided play with an adult. However, in small sized classrooms with a teacher-student ratio as high as 1:30, we have found that learning through guided play works better. <sup>[6]</sup>
3. **Clearly articulated outcomes:** While national frameworks so far do not explicitly articulate age wise milestones for every domain of development, it is essential to have defined expected outcomes over an extended period of time for each year to ensure effective planning of classroom activities. <sup>[7]</sup>
4. **Teaching and learning materials:** Early learning environments must be a welcoming environment that fosters curiosity. It is a must to ensure availability of high-quality play material [open and close ended learning toys] as well as enriching age-appropriate reading material. Play materials, early reading resources as well as methods of play must be rooted in context and relevant to a child's prior experiences and stage of development. This is non-negotiable.
5. **Flexibility:** All children do not learn at the same pace, especially in ECE. While our curricula are split into 3 pre-primary grades for ease of implementation/school logistics, it is essential to ensure that objectives of learning cut across grades and provide space for recap and ensure children are not rushed to finish the concepts and take tests. Assessments are instead, designed to be informal, ongoing and based on observations of the child in their natural learning environment.
6. **Talk:** in any and all languages - Teachers are encouraged to allow multiple languages in the classroom to be used for expression while gradually exposing the child to school language. Conversation is key to early development and is to be encouraged between teacher-child, among peers and with self, multiple times in a day. <sup>[8]</sup>
7. **Routines:** Daily routines are essential for early development and children find comfort in them. Curriculum design in the early years must include a routine that allows for multiple domains of development, including room for literacy and numeracy work while ensuring multiple play and rest breaks.

*\*Note that the above is not an exhaustive list of curriculum principles but forms the principle framework of all activities and classroom practices at Key Education Foundation*

## Developmentally Appropriate Practices [DAP] v/s Market Demand

All educators are well aware that the ask from schools and parents can often be far from the principles mentioned above. The journey at Key Education Foundation has been bittersweet as we watch children thrive when they learn through play and at the same time invest immense efforts in convincing schools, teachers and parents of the need for play based learning that is stress free and child centric in its true sense.

Decades of systemic practices that have been exam centric also percolate into the preschool classrooms where teachers teach to the test and schools push for heavy backpacks filled with workbooks. Parents are only too happy to comply as they take pride in watching their children fill page after page.

We believe that a systemic effort to regulate early childhood education at the level of what children learn and how they need to learn it, is key to addressing this challenge sustainably.

We will also have to break the imaginary boundary between pre-school and formal education and ensure a continuum of learning between grades 1 and 2 and the early years. Only then can we stop the pressure of grade 1 performance from trickling down into the lower years.

Dr. Venita Kaul, Professor Emerita Education, Ambedkar University Delhi, states in reference to the early years continuum that ***“if grades 1 and 2 are not doing something that is allowing smooth transition, it is natural we can’t do what children need to do in ages 3-6 years because the expectations of grade 1 does not align with early learning development standards”***.<sup>[3]</sup>

### Does NEP for ECE hold the answers?

The NEP-ECE definitely makes a start in terms of addressing some of the key issues mentioned above. The first step is in ensuring inclusion of ages 6-8 in the foundational stage, thereby making the early years a continuum until age 8.

The devil, as always, lies in the details.

We eagerly await the NCPF-ECE, promised as an extensive framework for implementation of foundational early learning. We hope that this document takes into account key recommendations from studies like the IECEI report and the ASER ECE to ensure an implementable model for children between the ages 3-8.

In the next five years, alongside quality framework and regulations, we believe that a comprehensive repository of public goods\* that unpack curriculum for early childhood at the level of the classroom and child will be essential in realizing the vision for implementation.

*\*End to end resources ranging from early reading material, play based solutions, audio visuals, lesson plans and more to help the end user who is the teacher and the parent visualize their role in early learning and carry it out in a joyful and stress-free manner.*

## The Preschool Teacher

The National Education Policy, 2020 is very encouraging in terms of its dialogue on the importance of play-based learning in the foundational years. Now Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is considered as vital and significant if India is to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (4.2). To achieve this goal, it is not only necessary to expand the facilities of ECCE, but also improve the quality of ECCE which is largely dependent upon the quality of care-givers, workers and teachers engaged. <sup>[9]</sup>

The NEP, on one hand, recommends learning in the early years to be flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based, and on the other hand, there is a lack of well-trained ECCE professionals who are expected to deliver this model. A number of initiatives have been taken by the Government of India for bringing quality in the form of policies, plans, constitutional amendments, acts, development of quality standards and curriculum framework, schemes and flagship programs like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS); District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). In this endeavour, India has compromised with the non-negotiable quality standards for ECCE, leading to the emergence of expected and unexpected issues and challenges, including a number of private Teacher Education Institutes entering to fill the gaps <sup>[10]</sup>. Before understanding the requirements for teacher professional development, we need to address the current realities of the educators working in ECCE today.

### **Key questions to consider:**

*Who is Aliya's teacher?*

*Is the teacher trained on what Aliya must learn and how to facilitate learning?*

*What motivates the teacher to teach in preschool?*

## Current realities

ECE under its current form is beset with multiple problems. Education component in most state run Anganwadis is pushed to the back burner as multiple other functions take up a large proportion of the Anganwadi teachers' time. The pre-primary teachers in private schools are hired based on minimum or no qualifications. Educationists have pointed out that pre-primary teachers are on the lowest rung of the teaching hierarchy, usually being paid a minimum wage and under-valued by the schools and community at large. In a system where ECCE teachers aspire to be promoted to higher grades, their commitment to teaching in the foundational years is usually short lived. During our work with budget private schools over the last year, we have seen an attrition rate of at least 30% among preschool teachers each year.

The curriculum at Key Education Foundation is complemented with a teacher capacity building program of 40+ hours for the early educators, which is delivered through the year as workshops, supported by intensive one-on-one coaching. The training model addresses the gaps in teacher knowledge, skills and mindsets in the domains of child development and how children learn. This program ensures that new teachers entering the pre-primary classrooms are inducted into the training cycle immediately. Over a period of one year, teachers work on their skills by delivering daily play-based / inquiry-based lesson plans, attending periodic workshops and receiving coaching on their classroom practices through monthly observation and feedback. By the end of the academic year 2019-20, 80% of classrooms across the 50 schools were observed to be following age-appropriate classroom practices and having delivered effective learning through play.

Here we will attempt to define some of our key learnings from the impact of our solutions and their potential implications for impact in line with the recommendations made by the NEP, 2020 for teacher professional development.

## **1. Even teachers need mentors**

The KEF teacher training content is a mix of research-based pedagogy and best practices observed in schools. The content gets reinforced through in-person workshops, intensive coaching and personalized support plans, optional interest-based sessions and audio-visual resources. In the last academic year, 890 school visits were made across 50 KEF partner schools, and each teacher received 9 classroom observations and personalized coaching sessions. As a result, we arrived at a teacher skill set of 3.05 on a 4-point standardized rubric at the end of the academic year.

**This pleads in favour of mentorship programs and strong practicum training to be incorporated into teacher professional development courses for effective translation of play-based curriculum into classroom practices.**

The initial teacher training plan described by the NEP does not specify personalized support plans for skill building of ECCE teachers, be it in Anganwadis or private pre-schools. In the longer term, the State governments will be planning mentoring mechanisms for ECCE teacher professional development, based on the suggestions from National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE), which will be formulated by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) by the end of 2021.

***We believe that a comprehensive set of tried and tested observation tools, rubrics that are relevant to context and capacity building for a strong tier of teacher educators will be a key level for the government to drive the NCTE recommendations and could be developed through effective PPP models with civil society organizations at the state level.***

## **2. Ownership and flexibility in learning**

As teacher capacity building evolved at KEF in content, quality and mode of engagement, the common thread that was visible across our pilots showed that ***teachers, when given ownership of their own learning with flexibility to choose the domains of learning, are far more motivated and likely to apply their learning and translate them into classroom practices.*** When provided with opportunities to attend workshops with limited seats, the slots filled up within minutes of opening sign up. Since then, teachers have actively participated in forums to share their thoughts and opinions on education. Contrary to popular belief – ***teachers want to learn and grow for their own professional development.***

The National Education Policy has a few mentions of flexibility and ownership in teacher education.

“A modular approach to continuous teacher development will be adopted to ensure that every teacher has the flexibility to optimize their own development. These opportunities will be then made accessible through multiple modes, including in-person workshops, distance learning programs and online modules, so that a teacher can choose what is most useful for their own professional development. The training topics will cover foundation literacy and numeracy, assessment, teaching styles and integration of arts, sports and storytelling.

Platforms will also be made available for teachers to share ideas and best practices.”

[1]

### **3. Technology can be a teachers' ally in continuous learning**

As mentioned above, flexibility in teacher development is to be ensured by making online modules accessible to teachers, including ECCE teachers from Anganwadis and private schools.

In the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic, NCTE has already started work to provide freely accessible quality Open Educational Resources for all stakeholders. The committee has approached different institutions to share their online open educational resources on teacher education for linking on the portal of NCTE.

A national repository of high-quality resources on foundational literacy and numeracy is to be made available via the National Teacher's Portal (NTP), i.e., Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA).

Towards providing opportunities for teachers to own learning and leveraging technology, our training team has launched online capacity building modules, to test the effectiveness and response to training content delivered in an easy to access format. It was observed that most teachers [86% of our sample] coming from urban/semi-urban low-income communities have access to smartphones that allow basic data packs.

We have had very [encouraging results](#) so far in launching a 25-hour comprehensive online course on early childhood education.

## ONLINE TEACHER TRAINING FEATURES



Teachers have **freedom to choose** their topic of interest



**Interactive modules** to keep the learners engaged



Content is presented through **pictures, short readings and demo videos**



Easy to use modules that are hosted on Google forms, a **familiar interface**



Teachers can **self correct** through feedback loops in the modules



The program modules are **accessible on any device**



Modules have been optimised for **low data consumption**



Teachers get a **online certificate** on completion of training

Key features of the online training platform hosted by Key Education Foundation

Technology platforms not only give teachers the flexibility to access modules, choose them and update their skills but it also plays a key role in making them feel relevant and boosts their self-worth when they are able to engage with these modules and complete them independently.

It has presented us with the opportunity to also hold solutions accountable for impact as it is much easier to check for mastery at the level of each module and intuitively guide teachers for future capacity building.

## Ideas v/s action: Asking what's possible in teacher development

While there is evidence of success in building the capacity of educators in delivering a play-based curriculum to 3-6-year-old children, there have also been challenges that, on a large scale, would require well planned processes to be put in place, and quality resources to be made available.

Points to consider as we re-imagine teacher professional development for the early educator:

- Teacher education courses, training programs and workshops, on their own, do not prepare the teacher in practical skills. **Practical experiences embedded into these programs** is a much-missed integration into teacher education which is to be made a part of all B.Ed. programs, going forward. The effectiveness of these will heavily depend on the processes put in place to ensure practice.
- Currently the NCTE is taking active steps to create a repository **of Open Educational Resources (OER)** accessible online, including material on Early Childhood Care and Education. But the **content presented is more suitable for teacher educators**, rather than early educators whom the resource is also meant for given the high expectations of prior skill sets it assumes from the learners.
- NCERT has initiated a **collaboration with DIKSHA**, at this point there is no comprehensive, guided, high quality, ECE specific content available in the public domain.
- In India, there are many private and government initiatives offering certificate and diploma courses concerning ECE, which include Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), and several other State Specific Open Universities (SSOU). Studies have shown a direct correlation between teacher qualification (measured as total years of formal education) and the quality of care in ECCE setting, and both these directly leading to better learning outcomes for the child. In India, as of today, any training or no training is considered suitable for ECCE. The NCTE's guiding set of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) which is to be developed by 2022 will cover the role, expectations and competencies required for teachers teaching at different levels. There is hope that these guidelines will ensure teachers entering ECCE have a minimum set of qualifications that enable quality outcomes for children in the early years, be it in an Anganwadi, a private

- **Incentives and appraisals** are key to professional development in any field. ECCE teachers being considered the lowest in the teaching hierarchy has created a system where professional development within ECE is discouraged. Teachers aspire to be promoted to higher grades in order to get higher pay. **The quality of education in foundational years is going to be adversely affected if teachers are not paid at par with others in the school.** The NEP guidelines under Teacher Career Management and Progression asks for a robust merit-based tenure, promotion and salary structure to be developed that will incentivize excellent and committed teachers. The approach by schools will be towards ensuring that teachers grow in their career within a single school stage, in this case, the foundational stage, and that a teacher will not be moved to a higher stage unless there is a match in qualification. This is to establish that no stage is more important than another. This and the standards brought in by NCTE in 2022 need to go hand in hand to make sure teacher professional development within a stage leads to appraisals that make ECCE an aspirational career choice.

In conclusion, the NEP poses a great set of guidelines that, if implemented conscientiously, can help India reach the Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education by 2030.

## The Parent

Whenever we think of education, the images that come to mind are that of schools, teachers teaching in classrooms and children sitting in the classroom, trying to process all the words and images around them. Irrespective of the grade, the image of the children hardly changes - except maybe their size and the text that we imagine that is surrounding them. However, the person that is conspicuous by their absence is the parent.

In most schools, the parents are broadly looked at from 2 lenses - the parent of the child in school, and parent of the yet to be enrolled child. While the general demeanour towards both of them may differ, one thing remains common - which is how these entities are positioned - school as the provider of education, the child as the one receiving it, and the parent as one financing it. And in that position, the parent is often left without a voice, even though the whole system impacts the parent directly.

***Key questions to consider:***

*What roles should Aliya's parents be playing in her foundational learning?*

*Can Aliya's school and family work together to ensure quality ECE?*

*What if Aliya's parents were able to identify the indicators of quality in ECE?*

We have, historically and justifiably, placed education on a pedestal. Which may be why we often forget that in the early years parenting and education are not that distinct from each other and closely resemble care. It is commonly acknowledged that children's academic prospects are in many ways dependent on the parental income, occupation and level of education. The same factors that determine their socio-economic status. Research has shown that these disparities continue to last till adulthood, and impact their health and cognition, which in turn affects their level of education and hence their own socio-economic status. It has also been demonstrated that the negative effects of childhood adversity are reversible with high quality pre-school education and parental involvement. Without positive interactions at home, quality preschool programs lose their effectiveness as children continue to be exposed to toxic stress. <sup>[11]</sup>

The NEP document has all the necessary principles at heart. Not just related to academic achievement of children, but also in terms of values like equity, inclusion, and the cognitive and social-emotional skills that we have come to identify as 21st century skills. Balancing this is the emphasis on local languages as medium of instruction, and content itself filled with local traditions, stories and songs etc. (Section 1, Paragraph 1.3) <sup>[1]</sup> which seek to retain and propagate the Indian culture and heritage. Parents are in the unique position of giving their children a headstart on these values and skills even before a child attains a school going age. When the same lessons get reinforced at Anganwadis and Government or private schools, it could have an immense impact on a growing child's development. While the NEP has done well in outlining the guiding principles for all educational institutions, it has failed to make parents a part of the system by missing the opportunity to bring in structures or strategies to get parents more invested and more involved in their children's education.

To make early childhood education truly child-centric, it is imperative to acknowledge and train parents to be equal partners as teachers. Which means that both teachers and parents should be able to learn from each other. Parents should have opportunities and mechanisms to learn the age appropriate objectives to teach their children along with topics like nutrition, behaviour management, child safety and developmental milestones which will enable parents to be a positive influence and safe adults for all children. At the same time, teachers must be able to learn about the child's background, interests and abilities and also receive feedback on how children are processing the lessons from the parents, so that teachers are able to give each child the care and attention they need instead of following a one-size-fits-all approach in conducting lessons.

These ideas, backed by research, are also resonated in early childhood educators' aspirations for their children. We conducted a #Whatif campaign with the preschool teachers that we work with. And multiple teachers shared ideas to the effect of greater cooperation between teachers and parents, with some teachers even commenting - **"What if parents could come and teach in school periodically?"**

The current NCERT Preschool Curriculum also articulates the need for partnering with parents and the community acknowledging their roles in the development of a

There are some simple processes and structures that can be recommended for schools to put in place by each school. These structures could have been proposed under the School Accreditation section, and could form a part of a larger framework to rank Government and Private educational institutions. Some recommendations are given below -

1. A separate, **functional SDMC for each stage** (Foundational, Preparatory, Middle and Higher) - Having a separate SDMC for these stages will ensure focus on relevant stages by all participants, and one stage will not get preferred over other. Parents, Teachers and other school staff will have a common platform to discuss ideas, suggestions and regulatory updates that impact their children. A respectfully conducted SDMC meeting can be a great opportunity to plan academic and non-academic activities for children, and seek support from all parties involved.
2. **Parent Workshops** - Parent Engagement workshops can be instrumental in bringing about mindset shifts in parents of young children. They appreciate getting new information and don't feel patronized by the school when they receive any parenting or other child development related advice. Moreover, it gives them a chance to ask questions about their children they might have otherwise ignored. Parents also understand the approaches behind pedagogy and curriculum better, and don't object to developmentally appropriate practices. Conversely, teachers also benefit from hearing parents' perspectives as it can help them in understanding the children better.
3. **Parent - Teacher Meetings** - This is a structure that already exists in schools. It, however, needs to be strengthened so that PTM conversations can be a 2-way dialog on child development. While parents and teachers need to know how a child behaves and acts when they are not under their care. Also, if parents and teachers do not align on certain values, a conversation can help bridge the gap in their expectations from each other, and focus on the best interest of the child.
4. **Parents as Volunteers** - Schools can conduct certain activities at a class level, in which parents can be asked to volunteer. It can be to provide logistical or material support or to conduct activities with the class.
5. **Parents as Participants in School Functions** - Parents can be encouraged to participate along with their children in cultural functions, school exhibitions or

## CONCLUSION: NEP for ECE - Hits and Misses?

As we begin thinking about how we can actualize, apply and utilize the words of the NEP in practice, we acknowledge that Early Childhood Education in India has begun a forward journey in terms of teaching learning practices and innovation in the past decade. However, much more thought needs to go into the governance and overall quality of this sector.

Including ages 3-6 as a part of the RTE and the foundational learning stage up to the age of 8 is a welcome move that early educators have been advocating for decades. Having said that, there are still multiple inconsistencies in how this will come into effect given the tall claims to ensure multi-level, play based learning that is holistic while at the same time the policy also states a national level assessment that will be conducted to check for foundational literacy and numeracy goals at the grade 3 level. Historically, the Indian education system and even families have been embedded in a culture of 'teaching to the test' and it seems quite far-fetched that schools and parents alike will not fall into the same trap by oversimplifying the holistic nature of early experiences in a race to achieve measurable foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes. It is far easier and highly probable for states to end up adopting 90-day quick fixes for school readiness in the name of universal early education goals.

This falls back on the age-old issue of curriculum development working backwards from primary stages instead of it building upwards from strong foundational learning in the early years. As our country falls behind an audacious mission to achieve foundational literacy and numeracy we must be very careful not to discount early experiences that are inherently based on deep human interactions between children and safe adults in their life to define ECE in terms of time bound learning outcomes.

**Early childhood education has to be viewed not just as a part of a national strategy to prepare children for primary classrooms but as an integral part of the Indian education system.**

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