

**Training for Child Care and Education
Workers in India***
**Formation des travailleurs chargés de la
garde des enfants en Inde**
**Entrenamiento de los trabajadores en India
en el cuidado de los niños**

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Abstract

The history of Early Childhood Education in India dates from the 1890s, though growth remained restricted till Independence. In 1953, the Government first began to play a larger role, promoting, through voluntary effort, kindergartens in rural areas. The first major training programme was the *Bal Sevika* (Child care worker) Training scheme in 1961 by the Indian Council of Child Welfare.

The second big breakthrough came with the Integrated Child Development Services in 1974, the world's largest to attempt to provide a package of services to the most vulnerable children. The attached four-month job training, intended to develop paraprofessionals with multiple roles, supported by untrained 'helpers' is hence somewhat diluted in content.

In addition several other limited kinds of training in Early Childhood Education are available.

Training programmes have had to face several recurrent constraints related to issues of both quantity and quality — availability at different levels; relevance of content and appropriateness of methodology; motivation; certification; and the development of a trainer cadre.

Recently, innovative training programmes, three of which are mentioned, are attempting to meet these challenges in new ways.

Résumé

L'histoire de l'Éducation Préscolaire en Inde date des années 1890 bien que la croissance resta très restreinte jusqu'à l'indépendance. En 1953, le gouvernement commença à jouer un rôle plus vaste, en promouvant, au travers d'efforts bénévoles, des jardins d'enfants dans les zones rurales. Le premier programme de formation important fut le *Bal Sevika* (gardes d'enfants) projet de formation en 1961 par le Conseil Indien du Child Welfare.

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La seconde grande percée vint avec les Services Intégrés de Développement pour l'Enfant (ICDS) en 1974, le plus vaste au monde à tenter de procurer un bagage de services aux enfants les plus vulnérables. La formation de 4 mois sur le tas qui s'y rattache, destinée à développer des paraprofessionnels aux multiples rôles, aidés par des 'assistants' non formés est quelque peu diluée dans son contenu.

En plus, plusieurs autres formations limitées en Education préscolaire sont disponibles. Les programmes de formation ont eu à faire face à des contraintes périodiques ayant rapport aux résultats à la fois sur la quantité et sur la qualité — la disponibilité à différents niveaux, la pertinence et la justesse de la méthodologie, la motivation, l'authenticité et le développement d'un cadre de formateurs.

Récemment des programmes de formation innovateurs, (trois d'entre eux sont mentionnés) tentent de rencontrer ces défis sur de nouvelles voies.

Resumen

La historia temprana de la educación en India del la niñez data desde los años de 1890, sin embargo el crecimiento es restringido desde su Independencia. En 1953, el Gobierno empezó primero a tener una gran participación, promoviendo, por un esfuerzo voluntario, el jardín de niños en áreas rurales. El primer programa de entrenamiento mayor fué el Bal Sevika (trabajador para el cuidado del niño). El esquema de entrenamiento en 1961 por el Mediador Indio para el Bienestar del Niño.

El segundo adelanto vino con por Servicios Integrados para el desarrollo del niño en 1974, el atento mas grande del mundo para proveer un paquete de servicios para los niños mas vulnerables. Los cuatro meses próximos de entrenamiento en el trabajo, se intentó el desarrollo para profesionales con papeles multiples, soportado por 'ayudantes' sin entrenamiento y en cierta forma en su contenido diluido.

Ademas hay varios otros tipos de entrenamiento limitados disponibles en la educación temprana de los niños.

Programas de entrenamiento han tenido que afrontar varias limitaciones que se repiten relativas a problemas tanto de cantidad que de calidad — disponibilidad de niveles diferentes; pertinencia de contenido y apropiación de metodología; motivación; certificación; y desarrollo de un entrenamiento de equipo.

Recientemente programas inovativos de entrenamiento, tres los cuales son mencionados estan tratando de enfrentar estos desafios en formas nuevas.

Introduction

By its very size and position as one of the two giants of the developing world, India deserves attention for its record in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education. It may not be apparent that in spite of its well-known and enduring economic problems, India has, in comparison to most other developing countries outside the erstwhile Socialist world, substantial achievements to its credit in this area. This is in no small measure linked to India's continued occupation, in the last half-century, of the middle ground between unrestricted free-market economy and Socialism of the old-fashioned Iron-Curtain variety. That peculiar blend of Fabian Socialism, Gandhianism and liberal capitalism which came to be known as 'Nehruvian Socialism' is the climate in which all educational development took place, (or failed to do so), in the years since Independence. But looking back, what is striking is how little

movement there has been away from the colonial heritage in educational content and practice. In examining the history and current status of training for Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) in India, it is useful to keep this perspective in view.

The beginnings

The history of ECCE in India dates back to the 1890s, when the first kindergarten was started in the country. Later on, during the decades before Independence, some pioneers — like Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modak — struggled to establish a number of educational institutions for young children and training centres for teachers. Badheka worked extensively in Dakshinamurthi in the Gujarat region, while Modak launched the *Nutan Bal Shikshan Sangh* (New Child Education Society) in Bombay during the 1920s. Also, Maria Montessori's work in India during the World War II stimulated not only the growth of child education at centres based upon her philosophical principles but also the establishment of training centres. Despite these initiatives, programmes of care and education for young children remained scattered, concentrated in urban settings, restricted to certain regions in the country, and confined to those who could afford such services.

It was not until the creation of the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953 that the national government started playing a bigger role. The Board sponsored voluntary agencies that would set up *balwadis* (child gardens) for the children of the less privileged. The objective of the programme was to shift the focus towards rural areas and the poor and to emphasise the integrated development of the child rather than preschool education alone.

The first breakthrough: Bal Sevika Training

By this time, there were a number of training institutions concentrating on what would now be described as Early Childhood Education, sometimes called pre-primary or pre-Basic education at that time. But the rapid growth of the Balwadis revealed the need for well-trained workers who could foster the growth and the integrated development of the child (in programmes emphasising both care and education) and at the same time be willing to work and live in the villages. In an inspired moment, the term *Bal Sevika* (one who serves the child) was coined, and the Bal Sevika Training (BST) programme was launched by the Indian Council for Child Welfare in 1961. Since then, the programme has been implemented in numerous training centres throughout the country under the sponsorship of the Council, and several thousand *Bal Sevikas* have been trained and are working around the country.

The main objective of the BST Programme is to educate a worker capable of responding to the various needs of children from birth to 16 years of age. In practice, however, the greatest emphasis has been on the 0-6 age group. The basic guidelines of the programme are health and nutrition, preschool education, and community organisation. Over the years both the content and the methodology of the programme have been revised in response to changing circumstances. For instance, since the 1970s, the discipline of child *development* has gradually begun to be given more emphasis, in contrast to the earlier emphasis on child *psychology* alone. During the earlier years, the course was mainly theoretical and the practical section was restricted to some field visits for observation and demonstration and to a few activities such as

cooking nutritious foods and preparing educational aids. At the present time, greater emphasis is placed on practical aspects, including field placements and opportunities to acquire skills by practice rather than by observation.

Although the BST programme is a valuable initiative, the sheer size of the country and the complexity, diversity, and magnitude of its problems tended to dwarf its achievements. In fact, during the early 1970s it was estimated that there were only 20,000 *balwadis* in the entire country, and they were faced with two kinds of problems. First, most of the *balwadis* were still located in urban or semi-urban areas or tended to service the more affluent sectors within the rural communities; it was apparent that the poor and the isolated sectors of the population had hardly been reached. Second, the *balwadis* provided a diluted programme of child development, with an emphasis on formal education and literacy skills. In contrast, a growing concern for the introduction of nutrition and health issues in the curriculum dominated the thinking of planners throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. The time was ripe for the next breakthrough.

The second breakthrough: Integrated Child Development Services

In 1975, the national government launched the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), which has become the world's largest attempt to provide a package of services to the most vulnerable sectors of the population. The initiative started with 33 modest projects reaching about 150,000 young children. Today, it has expanded to nearly 3,000 projects for over 13 million children aged 0-6 and 3 million pregnant and lactating women, working through about 250,000 centres that employ more than 500,000 paraprofessional workers. The programmes concentrate on urban slums, tribal areas and the more remote and backward rural regions of the country.

The ICDS package consists of six basic services:

- Supplementary nutrition
- Immunisation
- Health check-ups
- Referral services
- Preschool education for children aged 3 to 6
- Health and nutrition education for women

Though there is no mandate for day-care, ICDS comes another step closer to a holistic programme of care/education.

The focal point for the delivery of these services is the *anganwadi* (courtyard garden), a term borrowed from the simple child care centre, developed by the late Anutai Wagh, which could be run in the courtyard of any village home. The *anganwadi* worker, the key worker and first paraprofessional in the child care service, is usually a local woman. She is considered a community worker earning a small honorarium for the services she renders to the community.

The *anganwadi* workers' training is planned as a 'job training' and consists of a three month course conducted at the training centres — many of which had originally been BST centres. At first, the *anganwadi* workers' training was a condensed version of the BST course, intended not only to be completed in a shorter time but also to

train women with lower educational qualifications. The content of the course was heavily oriented towards health and nutrition problems and paid cursory attention to the skills needed to promote cognitive, social, and emotional development of children. As in the case of the BST training, the early overwhelming emphasis on the theory has gradually been reduced and more attention is now being given to the acquisition of practical skills and experience.

Since the *anganwadi* workers' duties include home visits and parent education, their need for communication and interactive skills is recognised. However, there is little time left during the formal training period to develop these skills or to learn them by observing role models. Besides, the *anganwadi* workers' must devote an enormous amount of time to learning record-keeping and administrative procedures which takes up much of the training time. Therefore, it is not surprising if the *anganwadi* worker does not fully acquire the necessary skills to perform her varied tasks.

Categories of workers

If the *bal sevika* can be described as the first-level professional, and the *anganwadi* worker as the paraprofessional, another term should be found to describe the role of the ubiquitous 'helper' — who can perhaps be called the para-para-professional. Within the context of a hierarchical society, the helper is present at every child care centre in India and often performs all the menial tasks and the daily chores. She fetches the children from and to their homes, cleans the centre, fetches fuel and water when needed, prepares the meals and washes the utensils, helps children wash themselves and puts them to sleep, comforts the little ones and cleans up after them, maintains relations with the mother, and frequently dispenses traditional lore and wisdom. The helper, who is usually an older woman or a widow, is generally illiterate or lacks formal education and hence, may be unable to keep written records. However, she can be found managing the entire centre in the absence of the *anganwadi* worker or *bal sevika*.

Yet the helper — the pillar of the system — has remained underpaid, underestimated, and neglected as far as training is concerned. Occasionally she is given a one or two-day orientation, but few serious attempts have been made to involve her in the centre's activities and make the best of her knowledge and skills, or to develop strategies for training those with little education. Motivating, training, and involving the para-para-professionals, who form the bedrock of the system, remains one of the greatest unmet challenges ahead.

In addition to these two major tracks, there are several other kinds of training, though most of these alternatives have limited range and availability. These include courses for preprimary and nursery training, vocational training at high school and diploma courses, and some initiatives that integrate training for both preprimary and primary education.

Constraints and Opportunities

Throughout India's involvement in the field of ECCE, several recurrent constraints continue to challenge both the structure and the content of training schemes. Issues related to the quantity, levels, content, quality, motivation, certification, and sufficiency of the trainer cadre are briefly touched upon in the following paragraphs.

Quantity. The question of quantity regarding first-level professionals or paraprofessionals is not so much one of *numbers* as it is of *range* and *availability*. Paradoxically, graduates of training institutions in urban settings often remain unemployed or work for appalling low wages. Although there are other, rural employment sources, the graduates are often unwilling to live and work in rural areas. On the other hand, owing to the low levels of female education in rural and tribal areas, it is often difficult to find rural girls or women with high school education who can be trained as *anganwadi* workers or *bal sevikas*.

Levels: In absolute terms, there is a tremendous shortage of training courses at graduate and postgraduate levels for supervisors, trainers, heads of schools, and other supervisory officials. The ICDS offers its own 'job-oriented' courses for middle-level supervisors, and while a number of universities now offer postgraduate courses in Child Development, there are hardly any graduate courses or undergraduate diplomas in Early Childhood Education. The absence of training opportunities for workers at the very bottom of the ladder has already been noted. Thus, there is a peculiar lopsidedness and shortsightedness in the entire training structure, which is bulging in the middle but weak at both extremes.

Content: The content of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) training usually pays lip service to the notion of the child's 'integrated development'. However, in practical terms it tends to focus almost exclusively on either health or nutrition. A third area of concern is a type of formal preschool education heavily inclined towards group activities, with little emphasis on play, developmental tasks, spontaneity and individuality. Cultural differences and the social situation of children in poverty also tend to be ignored or overlooked in favour of a monolithic abstract model dealing with a 'theoretical' child.

Quality: One measure of quality is the extent to and means by which the objectives of the training programme are fulfilled. A participatory approach, with a flexible decentralised curriculum that is adapted to the cultural background, needs, and abilities of the trainees and that uses innovative training and communication strategies may be considered characteristic of thoughtful pedagogical planning. Yet such a participatory approach is rarely found in mainstream training programmes, which tend to rely on rigid centralised curricula, an authoritarian relationship between the trainer and the trainee, and dependence on traditional 'chalk and talk' methods of teaching. Teaching strategies are more knowledge-oriented than process-oriented and encourage memorisation and obedience rather than problem-solving and creativity.

Here it must be noted that both at the level of classroom practice and of training, ECCE draws heavily on, and is expected to follow, the more prestigious primary and secondary levels of education. If ECCE classrooms look like pale imitations of primary classrooms of a formal type, it is any wonder that ECCE training curricula and methods are modelled on those prevalent at the higher levels? These have often

A. Innovations in ECCE training in India		
<i>Name</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Innovative aspect</i>
Mobile Creches (Delhi and Bombay)	i. In-service ii. Experiential approach with internship model	Skill-based and field oriented pedagogy
Vanasthali Rural Development Centre (Maharashtra)	i. Pre-service ii. Condensed conventional course with emphasis on practical activities	Mobile field training centres
Mahila Samakhya (Gujarat)	i. Pre and in-service ii. Intensive exposure to experiential training strategies	Process-oriented participatory approach
B: Innovations in training at other levels		
<i>Name of Programme</i>	<i>Nature of trainees</i>	<i>Type of training</i>
Shiksha Karmi (Rajasthan)	Village primary education worker	i. Short intensive training in teaching methods ii. Continuous in-service monitoring and guidance
Child-to-child	Primary school children	i. Mixture of classroom and out-of class activities ii. Practicals and project work iii. Close monitoring
Radio programmes on child care (Tamil Nadu)	Rural mothers	i. Group listening to radio followed by group discussion ii. Organising feedback and monitoring

been the only available reference points for comparison and evaluation. In this context, it is encouraging to find that there is more flexibility, experimentation, emphasis on practice and innovation in training at the ECCE level than at the primary or secondary levels, possibly as a result of the powerful populist pressures of the last two decades attempting to take ECCE to the masses. Training at the higher levels still tends to be based on more rigid and highly formalised approaches dating back to the colonial period, while ECCE as a relatively 'new' discipline, is breaking free faster.

Motivation: Most of the training programmes, concentrating on the cognitive and psychomotor dimensions of human development, focus on the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Few programmes attempt to address the affective aspect of development. Yet, change in attitude, or the internalisation of different attitudes, is one of the key elements in training, especially under difficult circumstances of poverty and survival that may lead to apathy, lack of interest, and lack of motivation on the part of the workers.

Certification: Although a number of training courses in ECCE are available now, an overall system of certification has yet to be developed. The lack of such a system has led to restrictions in job mobility for ECCE workers, depriving them of social recognition and opportunities for career advancement. Eighteen years after its inception, the ICDS training continues to be regarded as 'job training', and *anganwadi* workers are not eligible for any other kind of job. *Bal Sevikas*, however experienced and skilful, cannot teach in primary schools, whereas primary teachers, who often lack the necessary qualification, are sometimes obliged to work with younger children. Neither helpers, paraprofessionals, nor teachers can aspire to higher-level jobs or improve their qualifications. The resulting educational and job stagnation they suffer has an adverse effect on the quality of their work and on their professional status.

A trainer cadre: The key to a sound training system in ECCE is the development of a qualified cadre of trainers. The set of factors discussed above has worked to hinder such a development. Low pay, low status, job insecurity, and poor working conditions have rendered the trainers' job both unattractive and unprestigious. At the same time, lack of certification and poor training for trainers have resulted in a shortage of good trainers. Often trainers are selected on the basis of their academic qualifications in disciplines such as education, psychology, sociology, or medicine (more recently, it has been qualifications in child development, nutrition, and public health). But all too often, trainers lack the experience of working with children and communities and do not possess the necessary skills to guide trainees. At the same time, supervisors — who may have practical skills and experience to offer — are rarely involved in training except as occasional resource persons.

New Initiatives

In the context of what has been described so far, the emergence of innovative new training models is very significant. Though small-scale, almost minuscule in size, each of them tries to address issues of quality, relevance, practicality, motivation and renovation.

Chart A summaries the characteristics of three new initiatives in training ECCE. The three training initiatives are:

Mobile Creches — a day-care programme for low-income working women in urban areas;

Vanasthali Rural Development Centre-village balwadis run by the community; and

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat — a programme to promote women's development through education, skill-training, and community organisation.

While each initiative has unique characteristics, the three of them also show some common features that differentiate them from mainstream efforts. These are:

- Flexible structure and organisation that shifts away from one central fixed curriculum
- Innovative training strategies and pedagogy adapted to varying educational levels and cultural backgrounds
- Emphasis on practical, field-based experience
- Emphasis on partnership — rather than on hierarchical roles and a more inclusive approach to parents and community

Chart B offers a comparison with similar innovations in training being tried out at other levels. Also small in size, they follow similar approaches and have received high acclaim in educational circles.

Empirical studies on the impact of different classroom teaching strategies at the primary and ECCE level, have been made in several countries, but hardly exist here. In such a situation, one can hardly hope for comparative studies on the impact of different training strategies. Yet the example of the small-scale experiments taking place in many parts of the country as well as the slow groundswell of change in the mainstream offers immense hope for the future.

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