

Perspectives from the Guest Editor

Holistic Approach to Early Childhood Education & Foundational Learning

Prof. Venita Kaul

The Learning Crisis in India

Despite advancing to higher grades, children across public and private schools are not mastering the fundamentals of reading, writing, and mathematics in primary education, as indicated by surveys conducted by the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

In many instances, children can read fluently, but they exhibit low levels of comprehension, primarily due to insufficient proficiency in the medium of instruction. This deficiency often results in reliance on rote learning methods.

Children aged 5 years and above are not displaying the cognitive and language readiness necessary for effective learning in school.

Is our classroom methodology and curriculum adapting to the rapidly changing world?

- Using English as the medium of instruction poses challenges: Children resort to rote learning, focusing on information retention and assessments.
- Teachers predominantly adopt a didactic approach in the classroom.
- Traditional teaching methods prioritise memorisation of alphabets and numbers over fostering creativity, critical thinking, and conceptual understanding.
- Pedagogical practices continue to emphasise uniform and repetitive learning, lacking innovation. There's a need for a transition towards early learning curriculum and methodologies.
- The significance of parents' status,

involvement, and engagement in their child's education is not consistently recognised.

A curricular shift is required for a holistic approach:

- Valuing the child's autonomy, advocating for a mix of unrestricted and directed play-based teaching methods.
- Implementing a bilingual strategy.
- Prioritising age-appropriate activities, fostering competencies in all developmental areas, and emphasising health and nutrition.
- Concentrating on oral language progression, print awareness, and fostering reading interest. Ensuring a conceptual grasp of numeracy.
- Encouraging parental involvement as collaborative partners in their child's educational journey.

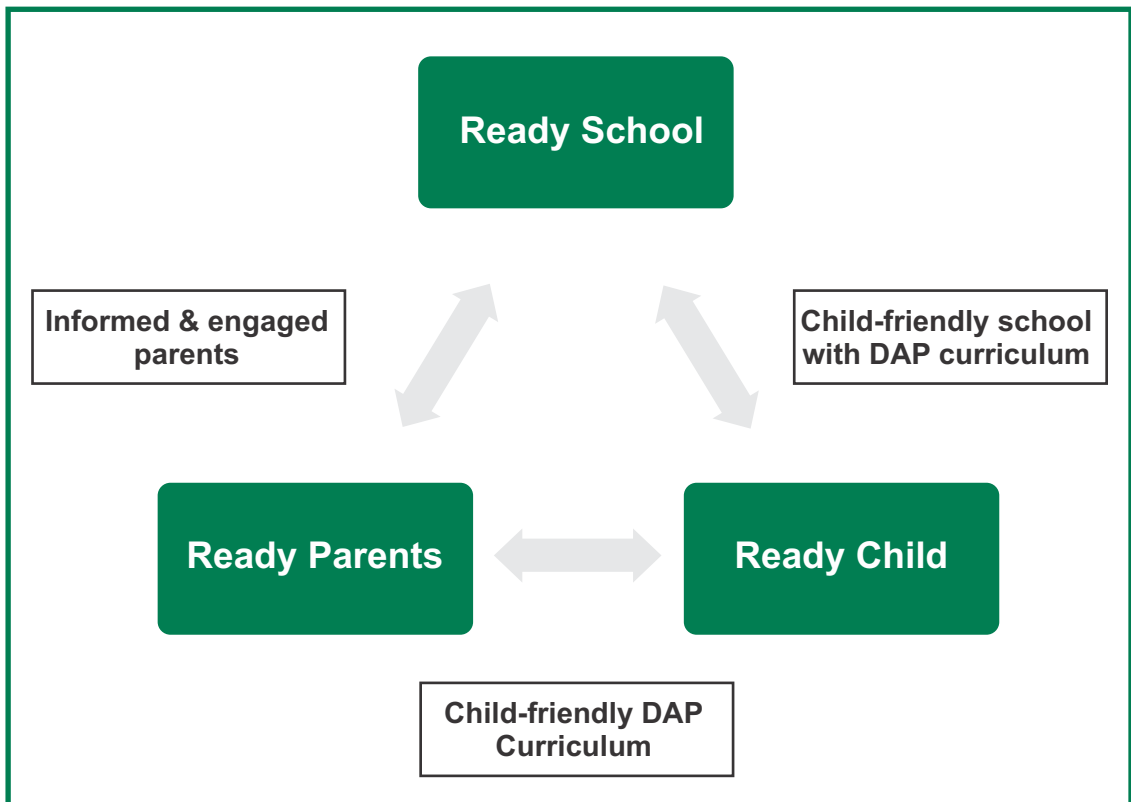
A holistic approach to early childhood education prioritises the comprehensive development of a child across multiple domains, recognising that each aspect of a child's growth is interconnected and equally important. This approach extends beyond traditional academic skills to encompass physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and creative dimensions of learning.

The learning environment must be designed to be safe, inclusive, and stimulating. It must include diverse materials that reflect various cultures and experiences, promoting an inclusive atmosphere. Classrooms must be adaptable, allowing for changes that cater to the needs of individual learners and various activities. Outdoor learning spaces must integrate nature into the educational experience, promoting environmental consciousness from a young age.

A holistic “readiness” triangle for promoting learning: not just the child

The holistic approach in early childhood education is about nurturing every aspect of a child's development, providing a balanced and rich learning experience that prepares them for academic success and personal growth. Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) recognise the value of diverse learning experiences in nurturing a well-rounded, competent, and resilient individual. This approach emphasises the need for educational

practices that are tailored to the developmental stages and individual needs of children. It integrates various teaching methods and activities that are responsive to children's age, experience, and ability, fostering an environment where each child can thrive. By valuing and incorporating a variety of learning experiences, DAP contributes significantly to the development of individuals who are capable, confident, and resilient in facing future challenges.



* Insights from key note address at ECDF Conference.

Prof. Venita Kaul

Founder Director of Centre for Early Childhood Education & Development (CECED)

Member, Board of Directors

Asia Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood Care & Education ARNEC