



IN Focus

THE EARLY YEARS IN EDUCATION

The early childhood years are so exciting. It is in these moments from birth to Grade 5 that major developmental work takes place. Culture, the individual's mind, the classroom layout, peers, situation, and experiences affect every aspect of these early developmental years.

As **21st century early childhood educators**, we recognise the value of keeping up with contemporary models of education and the value of seeking out alternatives when the mould doesn't fit our unique bunch of early learners. It is an exciting field that continues to develop and evolve and in some cases hearken back or sideways to discover lesser-known methods of working with young kids. We are all reinvigorated by the new **NEP & NCFES**, and ready to include Knowledge of India, SEL, SDG4, & Skills into our planning - knowing that these early years shape what kind of people kids are today & will become.

NCFES 2022 places a strong emphasis on foundational learning, especially in the early years of education. It is the **first ever integrated Curriculum Framework for children between ages 3-8 yrs in India**. It recognizes that children need to have a strong foundation in basic concepts like language, numeracy & social skills, to succeed in higher education and in life. Appropriate care & stimulation in a child's early years is critical to promote **sustained and healthy development across all dimensions**-physical, cognitive and socio-emotional. The NCFES provides an understanding of **what** education should look like in the new vision and **why, how** to be transacted, and **what role** parents, teachers, community members, and citizens of India need to play, as they too hold a large stake in Indian education. You can access **NCFES 2022** from this site : https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/NCF_for_Foundational_Stage_20_October_2022.pdf

WONDER WORDS

INFANT : A new born baby or very young child. In North American English - *infant* is only used for a baby, especially a very young one.

NEO-NATE : A baby that has recently been born, especially within the last four weeks.

TODDLER : A child who has only recently learnt to walk.

CHILD / YOUTH : A young person who is between infancy and adulthood.

MINOR : In all 28 states and 8 union territories in India, a minor is referred to as someone under the age of 18.

CHILDCARE : A formal or informal care arrangement for the very young ones, that can happen in a home or at a centre. It means caring for children while their parents / adult carers are at work, in training or engaged otherwise.

“Childhood means simplicity.
Look at the world with the child's eye - it is very beautiful!”
— Kailash Satyarthi

QED Talk

Early Years - the most **Vital Years!**

DR. SWATI POPAT VATS

Founder President of Early Childhood Association India;
President - Podar Education Network & Director of Podar Jumbo Kids;
National representative - World Forum Foundation;
Nursery Director - Little Wonders Nursery (UAE);
Awarded Fellowship of Honor from the New Zealand Tertiary College;
Parenting Expert at www.born-smart.com



■ You are a Ph D! What motivated you to remain in the area of Early Childhood Education?

The early years, now called the *foundational years*, are extremely important. This is the stage when the foundation of life and learning is laid and if this stage is ignored, or lacks quality then it will impact the youth of our country. I was always inspired with the quotation by Frederick Douglas (1855), “It’s easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” Our education system has always had a top down approach but it is the **bottom up approach** that **leads to the success of children in life and learning**. And thankfully this has been rectified in our new National Education Policy 2020. I have studied law, completed my M.A in Sociology and done my B.Ed. in English & History but my heart and head will always be in early childhood education because that is where the future starts in its present.

■ Tell us more about your own philosophy of early childhood education that you term “Kiducation”.

Education has always been about what schools want or what parents want, but I was inspired by global pioneers like *Gijubhai Badheka* and *Fredrich Froebel* who wrote extensively about the ‘child’ and what is required for its development. The *NAEYC (National Association for Education of Young Children, USA)* researched on the concept of developmentally appropriate curriculum and that is what **Kiducation** is all about - **education from the point of view of the child...not the school...not the parents**, but the **child at the center** of it all. When we keep the child at the center of all our decisions, then all our decisions will be *ethical* as we would reject those that negatively impact the child. So, whether it is a decision of introducing cursive handwriting for 4 year old’s or should children be interviewed for admissions, *if we think about the child and its development, we will take the correct decision* and not get carried away or influenced. **Kiducation** helps parents and teachers *think of the child and focus on its ‘now’* to strengthen its future.

■ What is your view on NEP 2020 embracing ECCE into formal schooling and extending KG pedagogical practices into Grade 2?

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has proposed *extending Kindergarten (KG) into Grade 2 as Foundational Stage*. This has several advantages, including:

- **Early childhood education is essential for child development.** The foundational years are a critical period for brain development, and early exposure to learning experiences can have a lasting impact on children’s academic achievement, social-emotional well-being, and overall success in life.
- **Extending KG into Grade 2 will provide children with more time to learn and grow.** This is especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may not have access to high-quality early childhood education programs.
- **A longer foundational period will allow teachers to implement a more holistic approach to education.** This means that children will have more opportunities to learn through play, exploration, and hands-on activities.
- **Extending KG into Grade 2 will help to reduce the transition shock that many children experience when they move from preschool to elementary school.** This is because children will have more time to adjust to the new environment and curriculum.
- **A longer foundational period will give children a stronger foundation for success in later grades.** This is because they will have had more time to develop the academic skills, social-emotional skills, and critical thinking skills that they need to succeed in school.

Overall, extending KG into Grade 2 as foundational years has the potential to improve child development, academic achievement, and social-emotional well-being. It is an important step towards ensuring that all children have access to a high-quality education. So here are some specific **examples** of how **extending KG into Grade 2 could benefit children**:



The goal of early childhood education should be to activate the child's own natural desire to learn.

- Maria Montessori

- Children would have **more time to learn foundational skills** such as reading, writing, and math.
- Children would have **more opportunities to develop social-emotional skills** such as self-regulation, cooperation, and empathy.
- Children would have **more time to explore their interests** and develop their **creativity**.
- Children would be **better prepared for the rigors of elementary school**.
- Children would be **more likely to succeed academically and socially** throughout their school years.

Of course, there are also some challenges that will need to be addressed in order to successfully implement this policy. For example, it will be **important to ensure that there are enough qualified teachers** to staff these additional classrooms. Additionally, schools will need to **develop new curricula and teaching methods** that are appropriate for children in these foundational years.

Overall, the potential benefits of extending KG into Grade 2 outweigh the challenges. This policy has the potential to make a significant positive impact on the lives of millions of children in India.

■ What in your opinion is the most important aspect of ECCE that Teachers should keep in mind?

The most important aspect of ECCE that teachers should keep in mind is the **holistic development of the child**. This means that teachers should focus on all aspects of a child's development, including their physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language development.

To achieve this, teachers should create a safe and supportive learning environment where children can **explore, learn, and grow at their own pace**. They should also provide children with opportunities to engage in play, which is essential for child development. Here are some specific things that ECCE teachers can do to keep the holistic development of the child in mind:

- **Provide a variety of learning experiences that address all areas of development.** This could include activities that promote physical development, such as gross motor skills and fine motor skills; activities that promote cognitive development, such as problem-solving and critical thinking; activities that promote social-emotional development, such as cooperation and empathy; and activities that promote language development, such as reading, writing, and speaking.
- **Create a safe and supportive learning environment.** This means providing children with a space where they feel comfortable taking risks and exploring their interests. It also means providing children with the support they need to succeed.
- **Encourage play.** Play is essential for child development because it allows children to learn through exploration and experimentation. Teachers can encourage play by providing children with a variety of toys and materials, and by creating opportunities for children to play together. By keeping the holistic development of the child in mind, ECCE teachers can help all children reach their full potential.

By keeping the holistic development of the child in mind, ECCE teachers can help all children reach their full potential. In addition to the above, ECCE teachers should also be aware of the following:

- **The importance of relationships.** Relationships with teachers and peers are essential for children's social-emotional development. Teachers should create a classroom environment where children feel safe and supported, and where they can develop positive relationships with others.



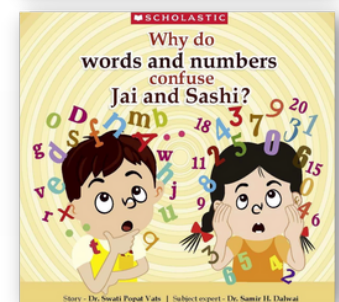
- **The importance of diversity.** ECCE classrooms should reflect the diversity of the world around us. Teachers should create an inclusive classroom environment where all children feel valued and respected.
- **The importance of play.** Play is the primary way that young children learn and develop. Teachers should provide children with ample opportunities for free play, as well as structured play activities.

By keeping these things in mind, ECCE teachers can provide children with the best possible start in life.

■ Please share about your books - 'Ms Pencil and her Team' & 'Numeracy'.

Parents and teachers want children to read, write and count, but they force children to do so in a very unplanned and developmentally inappropriate manner. There is a science behind the learning of literacy and numeracy skills, these activities are called readiness activities. The child's brain has to be readied for learning with foundational activities before making them do the letters and numbers. But that is not the case in our preschools. And that is why I wrote the book, *Ms. Pencil and her Team*, in which a pencil teaches parents and teachers what is the right way of teaching reading and writing to children...a developmentally appropriate way ...a **kiducated** way based on the science of learning.

My vision for the *Numeracy* book was also the same, I am writing that book with another educator **Fatema Agarkar**, and the book helps teachers and parents understand the flow of numeracy skills and how each skill needs to be introduced to children. Sadly, in most of our schools in India, we feel that writing numbers means children know numbers! Numeracy is not about rote counting and rote writing. Numeracy is about understanding that 5 can be 3+2 or 4+1 or 1+1+1+1, understanding concepts like subitizing, decomposition are important for children to be able to enjoy 'Math'. Our country's mission is now NIPUN BHARAT, with the aim that every child should be skilled in foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN). Both my books help teachers & parents understand how to achieve NIPUN BHARAT.



■ A word from you for Parents – to help them raise stress free, happy and curious children in this modern age.

Here are some tips for parents on how to raise stress-free, happy, and curious children in this modern age:

- **Provide a safe and supportive home environment.** This means creating a space where children feel loved, accepted, and valued. It also means setting clear boundaries and expectations, and providing consistent discipline.
- **Spend quality time with your children.** This means putting away your phones and other distractions and really listening to your children when they talk to you. It also means doing activities together that you both enjoy.
- **Encourage your kids to be active and play outdoors.** Physical activity is important for children's physical and mental health. It also helps to reduce stress and anxiety.
- **Limit screen time.** Too much screen time can lead to problems with sleep, attention, and behaviour. Encourage your children to spend more time reading, playing, and spending time with family and friends.
- **Teach your children healthy coping mechanisms.** Help your children to learn how to deal with stress and difficult emotions in a healthy way. This could include teaching them relaxation techniques, problem-solving skills, and how to ask for help when they need it.
- **Be a positive role model.** Children learn by watching the adults in their lives. Show them how to be happy, kind, curious people.

Additional tips for raising stress-free, happy, and curious children in the modern age:

- Help your children to **develop a strong sense of self-esteem.** This means praising them for their accomplishments and helping them to learn from their mistakes.
- Teach your children **resilience.** Help them to learn how to bounce back from setbacks and challenges.
- **Expose** your children **to different cultures and experiences.** This will help them to become more open-minded and curious about the world around them.
- **Talk** to your children **about their hopes and dreams.** Help them to set goals for themselves & to develop a plan to achieve them.

Parents can help their children to overcome the challenges and thrive in the modern age by providing them with a safe and supportive home environment, spending quality time with them, encouraging them to be active and play outdoors, limiting screen time, teaching them healthy coping mechanisms, and *being positive role models*.

■ Your final word...

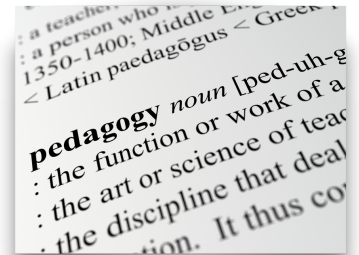
Finally, I wish to say - **To teach is to touch a life forever**...let us remember this and **make this our anthem.** ***

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES IN



In recent times, especially after NEP 2020 embraced the Early Years into its new school structure, there has been much discussion over what constitutes **effective pedagogy** in early childhood care and education (ECCE).

As we know, **Pedagogy** refers to the "how", or **process & practice of educating**; to quote - "that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive process between teacher and learner and to the learning environment" (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002). It focuses on the "how" of adult and child interaction, built upon a strong foundational understanding of *how children learn and develop* at this stage. So it goes beyond *what* is planned to be taught, to include *how* TL will happen, and what *remains* for a lifetime.



Some of the challenges in India are of maintaining a child-centred and developmentally appropriate approach while adapting practices to the increasingly diverse needs of inequitable access to education. Pedagogical approaches include child-centred and teacher-centred activities. The model of the *integrated* pedagogical approaches allows the components of playfulness in child-initiated and teacher-directed activities. The most popular approaches are:

1. PLAY BASED APPROACH

Play is regarded as an especially important aspect of learning at an early ages due to the plasticity of student's brain. When they are given playthings, they are able to develop motivation towards learning. In other words, their mind-sets get stimulated towards learning. The play-based approach involves **both** *child-initiated* as well as *teacher-centred* learning. The teacher encourages the student's learning and inquiry through interactions that have the main objective of *only augmenting their thinking and understanding*.



Play is regarded as a complicated activity with many aspects. Some of the characteristics of play being - *spontaneous, free-to-fail, enjoyable, challenging, intrinsically motivated, engaging, imaginative and social*. The key elements during play are JOY and CURIOSITY. The entire learning method revolves around *activity-based learning*, which encourages *expression* and *creative skills* among children. This makes it a complete package that enables overall development of the child by developing in them in terms of feelings, intellect as well as skills parameters. When students participate in play, the *teachers observe their performance* to find out *how* they are learning (McGolerick, 2013).

2. THEME BASED APPROACH

The *theme-based approach* is referred to the way of teaching and learning, whereby **many areas of the curriculum are connected together** and integrated within ONE SINGLE theme. *Thematic units* are lessons that integrate all subjects, like science, reading, language and mathematics, under one main theme for a balanced curriculum.

Thematic units enhance children's comprehension, as they learn best through interactive and integrated activities. It helps the little ones to make connections, to transfer knowledge and apply it. It also fosters comparison, categorizing and pattern finding - (building blocks of the scientific method).

Theme based approaches work well with group activities, research work, self and peer appraisal, hands-on crafts, interesting storybooks, essential conversations, and skill-building activities.

Play to Learn Preschool Thematic Units

September  My 5 Senses	October  Pumpkin Palooza
November  Nutrition	December  Winter Wonderland
January  Community Helpers	February  We ♥ Our Friends
March  Rainbows	April  Once Upon a Time...
May  Butterflies	June  Let's Camp Out

3. ACTIVITY BASED APPROACH

Activity-Based Learning (ABL) is a methodology where children learn at their *own pace* through various *supervised activities*. It is a fun approach to learning as it boosts the development of the brain in children by providing constant stimulus by *prompting them for responses*. It is a more engaging and interactive way of teaching children. It allows for monitoring factors such as speech, coordination, social skills, and motor skills, amongst other key factors.



Activity-based learning embraces 3 types of activities titled as 3Es, namely

- exploration
- experimentation, and
- expression

Activity-based learning can be categorized broadly into two types - the *student-centric approach* where the teaching is designed with the student as the major factor. This promotes self-learning. The second type is the *teacher-centric approach*, where the teacher is in the lead role, who leads the student through the entire process. This methodology has gained profound importance, so much so that toy companies are employing this approach in making activity-based educational toys. The popular ones in India being - *Butterfly Edufield Kits* and *MySkillShaala*.

4. PROJECT / INQUIRY BASED APPROACH

Inquiry / Project based learning revolves around *activating children's natural curiosity and desire to learn* by asking, or inquiring. With this kind of learning, children become *personally engaged in directing the path each lesson takes*.

Students take learning into their own hands, while teachers leverage age-appropriate *learning experiences to encourage students to ask more questions*. What do they see, smell, hear, taste, feel? Why is it the way it is? What else can we find out? From the children's point of view, they will get to use logic and reasoning to figure things out. They may form simple hypotheses and ask questions or try different ways to find out if their hypothesis is true or not. Teachers support the students and help move them beyond general curiosity into the realms of critical thinking & understanding. Instead of memorising facts & materials, children *learn by doing, exploring and experiencing*.



5. EMERGENT CURRICULUM

An *emergent curriculum* is a pedagogical approach that *adapts to the unique needs and interests of the students*, rather than adhering to a strict, pre-determined syllabus. *Teachers* leverage *age-appropriate learning experiences* to encourage

EXPLANATION	EXAMPLES
<p>Emergent curriculum is based on the principle that children learn most effectively when they are engaged in experiences that are meaningful and relatable to their own lives.</p> <p>In this method, the educator closely observes the students and creates a curriculum that evolves from their observations and responses to the students' inquiries and fascinations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emily brought a cricket in a glass jar to school. Her classmates were fascinated. So, the teacher then let the kids draw pictures of the cricket so they would notice the finer details of its body structure.• Timmy is obsessed with cheetahs because they run so fast. So, his teacher showed him how to use a stopwatch. Soon, all the students were timing how fast they can run.

students to ask more questions. What do they see, smell, hear, taste, feel? Why is it the way it is? What else can we find out? From the *children's point of view*, they will get to use *logic and reasoning* to figure things out. They may form simple hypotheses and ask questions or try different ways to find out if their hypothesis is true or not.

Teacher may find the ideas of **Elizabeth Jones** and **John Nimmo** in their textbook, *Emergent Curriculum* as the foundation for the curriculum courses that they propose to teach to early childhood education students.

Whatever the approach, when imparting knowledge to students in terms of lesson plans, topics, academic concepts or extra-curricular and creative activities, we need to make sure that we *implement the pedagogical approaches in an appropriate manner*. It is vital for us to *upgrade our knowledge* in terms of these approaches, so we are able to carry out our duties in a well-organized manner, and promote growth and development of the little ones in an effective manner. After all, *experiences of the early years will determine a student's interest as a learner in the future. ****

Introduction to Early Childhood Education : *Preschool Through Primary Grades (6th Edition)*

- by **Jo Ann Brewer**

This down-to-earth textbook by Jo Ann Brewer is a clear and comprehensive glance into the evolving realm of early childhood education. This is a must-have resource particularly with attention to the substantial material centered on language and literacy development. Expect to learn about a range of different teaching styles, classroom set up, and methodologies for reaching diverse learners. Brewer focuses on developmentally appropriate programming which leaves no child out. Commonly used as a text book, you will find yourself entering your career as an educator (or even as a special educator) with a stronghold on the foundations of ECCE. This is a book you will want to return to, again and again.



FOR PARENTS

Einstein Never Used Flashcards: *How Our Children Really Learn and Why They Need to Play More & Memorize Less*

- by **Kathy Hirsch-Pasek, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Diane Eyer**

This is a collection of activities that brings the parent or teacher back to *common sense*! The authors revive what we already know - *children learn best through play*. They take the guesswork out of teaching through play, and suggest 40 games to help you to get your own creative juices flowing. Not only is this a treasure trove of fun for kids, adults too find themselves having fun, piecing together and implementing, engaging, exciting rewarding, activities, that are developmentally apt for the little ones.

BIRTH TO GRADE 5 . . . Language Thrives!

Perhaps the most important foundation or base for the period **birth to Grade 5**, is **Language Development**! A language rich environment is one in which children are surrounded by talking, singing, and reading and they have ample opportunities throughout their day, across all activities, to *communicate with others, engage in back-and-forth conversation, sing, recite, play-act...*using language fearlessly and learning through mistakes and new vocabulary. A rich language environment is important to children's early learning, and can have strong effects on early language, vocabulary, reading, and math skills, as well as on children's ability to express - share - narrate as well as their social-emotional development. Here are some ways to make *language* work!

1. ENGAGE CHILDREN IN CONVERSATION - Teachers and families play a critical role in developing language-rich learning environments. Try these strategies to engage all children in rich conversations in English or in their home language (NCF calls them R1 & R2).

- Get down to the child's level.
- Tune in and listen to what the child says. If the child does not speak yet, tune into what they are doing or pointing to and use these moments to talk with them.
- Take turns talking. If the child doesn't have language yet, that may mean you are talking and the child is communicating in non-verbal ways, such as through gestures, looks, smiles, babbles, and word *approximations* (children's attempts at words).
- Talk about what the child is doing, what the child is looking at, or what the child is interested in.
- Ask questions that relate to the child's experiences or interests.
- Add words or questions to what the child says or does and model new language.
- Give the child enough time to respond. For children who do not have language yet, this may be a non-verbal response, like a gesture or a look.
- Stay tuned in to the child's facial and body expressions to make sure they are engaged.

2. PUSH FOR "THICK" CONVERSATIONS - Children benefit from "*thick*" conversations. Thick conversations are characterized by giving children *many chances* to speak and communicate, asking *open-ended questions*, encouraging them to *think and imagine*, and having many *back-and-forth exchanges*. Here are **four key strategies** to engage children in thick conversations in English or in their home language:

- *Encourage back-and-forth exchanges
- *Extend Kids' language
- *Invite kids to talk about what they are doing
- *Encourage HL Thinking

3. MAGIC OF QUESTIONS - Asking stimulating and developmentally appropriate questions can help boost the language environment. Below are strategies for extending conversations with questions:

- *Encourage kids to make predictions
- *Ask kids to provide explanation
- *Invite kids to connect learning to their own lives

4. EXPAND ON CHILDREN'S VOCABULARY - Expanding on children's language, *non-verbally*, in English or in their home language, is a meaningful way to extend conversations with children. Example - *Stretch a Sentence* by asking questions. (to read more about this technique please read *QEDpress issue April 2023* @ www.qedrak.com)

5. A STORY A DAY - Use novels, stories and engage children in dialogic reading, with opportunities to expand the vocabulary with synonyms, usage in spontaneous sentences, gestures to explain, character descriptions, new beginning-middle-ending, and **C-R-O-W-D questions**.



C-R-O-W-D stands for:

- **Completion questions** (ask children to fill in the blank)
- **Recall questions** (ask children if they remember something about the story)
- **Open-ended questions** (for more than one word answers)
- **WH- questions** (ask children who, what, where, when, how, why)
- **Distancing questions** (to help kids make connections between the story and their own personal experiences)

Try **enriching the language environment** of all young children - including children who do not speak yet, children with disabilities or delays, and children who are learning more than one language. Make parents PARTNERS in education and encourage them to try these strategies at home, in their home language. For children with disabilities or delays, communicate with their other service providers and keep each other informed about the strategies you are using to enhance their language environment. As rightly said, "Knowledge of languages is the doorway to wisdom." ***

The **November 2023** issue is on "**Mental Health - A Universal Human Right**", with a focus on **Schools**. Please send your contributions of classroom strategies / class humour / vocab word / a featured article / book titles, to - team@qedrak.com

RIB TICKLERS



What do elves learn at school?
The Elfabet!

What do you call an alligator that wears a vest?
An invest-igator!

"That boy just threw milk at me – How Dairy!"

What do you call a fairy that doesn't keep clean?
Stinkerbell!

What did the large flower say to the little flower?
Hi Bud!

What do cows do for fun? *They watch moo-vies!*

What sound does a nut make when it sneezes?
Cashew!!!

Why was 6 afraid of 7?
Because seven eight nine!

What do you call a sleeping dinosaur?
A Dino-snore!

What do you call a hen that cannot count?
A Mathema-chicken



RESOURCES AND
KNOWLEDGEWARE

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