Proceedings of the National Conference on Early Language & Literacy

December 14-15, 2017

Conference Centre, University of Delhi, Chhatra Marg, Delhi

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Concept Note

Modern societies and economies demand that individuals be proficient in language and literacy. Language underlies most human interactions in every sphere of action. Literacy, too, has become an increasingly important aspect of language use in modern societies and economies. Historically, in highly stratified Indian societies, very few individuals and communities have had access to the written word. Yet, a literate populace is central to the functioning of modern democracies. While government provisions have increasingly mandated education for all, including the most recent Right to Education Act which states that all children between the ages of 6-14 years have to go to school, the reality is that generations of societal and historical denial have left large swathes of the populace illiterate or, at best, semi-literate.

It is imperative that we begin and sustain a focused national conversation around issues that will enable more and more school-aged children to become fully literate. The conference on early language and literacy aimed to contribute to the emergent national conversation around these issues by building on previous conversations. It is also important to bring a focus on research-based understandings to the forefront of conversations that influence policy-making and practices on the ground.

The Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED, Ambedkar University Delhi) in collaboration with the Early Literacy Initiative (ELI, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad) held a national conference on early language and literacy (December 14-15, 2017, New Delhi), which focused on the presentation and discussion of research in Indian contexts.

BIO-NOTES

AJIT MOHANTY

AJIT MOHANTY on retirement as Professor, Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, JNU, (b. 1946, Ph.D. Alberta), became an ICSSR National Fellow. He was a Professor in different Universities for 28 years from 1983 till 2011. He has over 178 publications, including 7 books, on educational psycholinguistics and multilingual education focusing on language, education, poverty and disadvantage among linguistic minorities. Founder Director and now Chief Adviser, *National Multilingual Education Resource Consortium* at JNU, Mohanty was a Fulbright Visiting Professor (Columbia University), Fulbright Senior Scholar (University of Wisconsin) and Killam Scholar (University of Alberta) and recently, a Visiting Professor in the University of Western Ontario, Canada. He has been a visiting scholar in a number of national and international institutions including Universities of Geneva, Toronto, Alberta, Hamburg and Baroda. His book *Multilingual Education for Social Justice* (Mohanty, Panda, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas: editors), published by Orient Black Swan and Multilingual Matters, UK, also has a Turkish translation. A past President and Fellow of National Academy of Psychology, India and Fellow of the Association of Psychological Sciences, USA, Mohanty developed Multilingual Education Policy for Nepal (with Tove Skutnabb-Kangas) and also for Odisha. Ajit Mohanty is a writer and weekly columnist in Odia.

ANJALI NORONHA

ANJALI NORONHA has a post-graduation in Economics from the Delhi School of Economics and has been working on Early Childhood and Elementary Education for the last 35 years since 1982. Over these years, she has given shape to Curricular programs Early Childhood and in Elementary Education, in particular that of Languages and the Social Sciences in Madhya Pradesh, Ladakh, Assam, the National Curricula for India etc. She has contributed to the development of pre-service and in service teacher education curriculum and materials at the National and State levels, with National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), and the Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh Governments. She has been involved in educational research on teachers and marginalization of children and in Educational Policy Development at the State and National levels and has been a member of a number of State and National bodies in including the 10th and 12th Development Plan Working groups on Teacher Education and Elementary Education. Since 2005, she has been involved in developing programs for language learning and development of reading abilities with particular emphasis on multilinguality, through children's literature for the age-group 3 to 14. She is also working on Early Childhood in rural and urban areas.

APARAJITA BHARGARH CHAUDHARY

APARAJITA BHARGARH CHAUDHARY has a Master's in Child Development with specialization in Early Childhood Care and Education from Delhi University (2007). She is currently working as an Assistant Professor with the Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED), Ambedkar University Delhi. She has coordinated a longitudinal study on impact of early childhood education titled "India Early Childhood Education Impact Study". This longitudinal study is based on the premise that learning and development are continuous and cumulative processes and any approach to address quality and equity at the primary stage needs to begin first by helping children develop a sound foundation, prepare for school and then make a smooth transition to school.

ASHA SINGH

ASHA SINGH is a former Associate Professor in Human Development and Childhood Studies at Lady Irwin College, Delhi. Trained in the classical dance forms she has combined academic training with the arts. She uses the arts in training teachers to transact curricular content especially in the early years of learning. Dr. Singh has been engaged in giving direction to developing of content for Audio Visual content with a pan Indian focus. She is a visiting faculty for the National School Drama at Tripura to teach Childhood through the Arts. She works both with children and teachers.

GEETA VERMA

GEETA VERMA has over ten years of work experience in research and program implementation in the areas of elementary education and migration. Her interests and experience lies in designing programming and conducting research in the area of quality early childhood education, school education and adolescent girls empowerment. She completed her Ph.D from the Zakir Hussain Centre of Education Studies, JNU. She also worked with GoI and Jawaharlal Lal Nehru University as a researcher. She has contributed to ECCE policy formulation and has written articles and academic papers in the field of school education, gender, early childhood education and migration. In CARE India, she provides technical guidance to early grade reading and early childhood education programming.

KEERTI JAYARAM

KEERTI JAYARAM is currently the Director of the Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion or OELP. OELP aims to build strong foundations in Early Literacy and Learning (ELL) for young learners from diverse socio-cultural and linguistic contexts which include low literate communities in rural Rajasthan. The outreach of this work extends to a few other States of India. Keerti has represented OELP on the Advisory Body for Early Literacy of the MHRD and the Reading Cell at NCERT as well as on several other national bodies. She represented OELP at the UNESCO Asia Summit in Bangkok in 2016. She taught Pedagogy of Language courses on the B. El. Ed Programme in Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, from 2002 to 2006. Her professional experience includes intensive engagement through Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for children with special learning needs from the American International School in New Delhi from 1999 to 2005. During this period she also worked with non English speaking children from five nationalities to facilitate their acquisition of English through approaches embedded in the Multiple Intelligences perspectives. Keerti was selected as the British Council- Hornby Summer School Consultant in 2004.

She worked as Coordinator of the Ramjas Teacher's Centre for nine years. This was period when she was able to actively explore innovative classroom pedagogies such process writing; writers' workshops; literature circles; cooperative learning; circle time and learner centered approaches to Science, EVS and Maths along with innovative approaches to assessments within each of these domains. She has been actively involved in Environment Education as a founder member of the Schools Environment Network and helped to develop a resource pack for Environment Education called the Web of Life. She has had more than 30 years of experience in Elementary Education as a teacher; teacher educator; curriculum developer, researcher and parent, and has interacted actively with the academic world as well as with the multiple worlds of education practitioners. She has several publications to her credit.

MALVIKA RAI

MALVIKA RAI has worked extensively with schools, teacher education programmes, NCERT, non-governmental organizations and a publishing house in the last three decades. Her research interests range from children's literature to reading and writing in the primary years. She has been on committees for reviews of children's literature, textbook development with SCERT, Delhi and NCERT, Hindi textbooks (post-NCF), review of textbooks and course development of teacher education programmes. Her doctoral research explores the writing process in a primary grade in a government school.

MAXINE BERNTSEN

MAXINE BERNTSEN first came to India in 1966, and spent two years teaching at Vivek Vardhini College in Hyderabad, staying at the home of Dr. S.D. Satwalekar, principal of the college. While in Hyderabad she also started studying Telugu and Marathi. In 1963 she returned to the U.S. to do course work for a Ph.D. in linguistics, and in 1966 she returned to India to do the field work for her dissertation on sociolinguistic variation in the speech of Phaltan, a taluka town in Western Maharashtra. Along with completing her thesis, she also collaborated with Jai Nimbkar in developing a set of ten books to teach Marathi to adult non-Maharashtrians. From 1970 to 1999 she went to the U.S. every other year to teach Marathi to students from the Associated Colleges of the Midwest who were preparing to spend a year in Pune. In 1978 she renounced her American citizenship and became an Indian citizen. That same year she started working with out-of-school children, and in 1984 founded the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha (PSS). The PSS had three components: Apli Shala, a support programme for Dalit children; Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan a full-time Marathi medium school; and an Outreach Programme, which later became the Centre for Language, Literacy and Communication.When the TISS M.A. in Elementary Education programme was being set up, Maxine and Jane Sahi developed the course in First Language Pedagogy, which they taught from its inception until last year. In 2012 she was invited to join the new TISS campus at Hyderabad as a Professor Emerita. At present she is teaching one course in TISS, and heading an ELI project to adapt for Telugu the reading approach she had originally developed for Marathi.

She has received many awards for her work, the most recent being the Marathi Abhyasak Puraskar, an award from the Maharashtra government for her work in Marathi. A sketch of her life and work was also included in the volume, Daughters of Maharashtra. For her 80th birthday in 2015, Sujata Noronha and Jane Sahi brought out Threading Texts within Contexts – a selection of her poetry and her writings on language and education

MINATI PANDA

MINATI PANDA is a Professor at the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She completed her Ph. D in Social Psychology of Education from Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her areas of specialization include Culture, Cognition and Mathematics (with focus on Numeracy Practices in tribal communities in India and among the Immigrant Communities in UK), Social Theories of Learning including Cultural Historical Activity Theory, Curriculum and Pedagogy, Multilingual Education and Child Right Discourse, Social Identity Processes among Ethnic Minority Communities, Culture and Creative Processes and Tribal Education

MOUNESH NALKAMANI

MOUNESH NALKAMANI has completed his MA. and M. Ed. Degrees from Gulbarga University, Karnataka. He started his career as a volunteer teacher, and then worked as a Resource Person for teacher training, as a Block Coordinator and a Programme Associate in various organizations and government education department. Currently, he works at Kalike, in Yadgir, Karnataka. As a part of his work at Kalike, Mounesh worked as a Research Associate on the *Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL)* project from 2011-2016.

NEELA APTE

NEELA APTE has her MSW from Karnatak University, Dharwad, and her B. Ed. from Mumbai University. Neela has been working in the field of quality education since the last 20 years. She received 'Dr. Devdatta Dabholkar Fellowship' for studying and understanding the role of School Management Committees in improving the quality of education in government schools. She has published various articles on education, parenting and other social issues in Marathi periodicals. She has worked as Research Associate in the *Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL)* project from 2011-2017.

RAMCHANDAR KRISHNAMURTHY

RAMCHANDAR KRISHNAMURTHY is an Associate Director in the School of Liberal Studies, Azim Premji University. His current responsibilities include Teacher Education and Student Affairs. Ram has an academic background in computer science, accounting and school education. His teaching interests have been spread across quantitative reasoning, computer programming and perspectives in education. His research in the last few years have been in the area of literacy, in which he served as a co-principal investigator on the longitudinal project, *Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL).*

SAJITHA

SAJITHA S. has her Masters in Social Work (Tata Institute of Social Sciences) and her B.A. Economics (Mumbai University). She has been working with the longitudinal research project *Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL)* for the past four years. She contributed to understanding the teaching and learning of early reading and writing of Marathi (of Maharashtra) by conducting classroom observations, teacher interviews, and child interactions. Prior to that she worked with QUEST, a reputed organization of Maharashtra as Project Head of their flagship Project 'Balbhavan'. Sajitha has also worked with women in helping form their Self Help Groups and running it for one and half years at Samaj Pragati Sahayog, Madhya Pradesh.

S. GAYATHRI

S. GAYATHRI works as a Senior Technical Specialist in the Girls' Education Program in CARE India. She comes with a rich experience of working on issues around quality and equity in education for the most marginalized. She has been a teacher, researcher and pedagogue in the different roles that she has essayed. She is deeply involved in technically steering CARE India's specific project on Early Grade Reading, Special Training for out of school children, Teacher training and development, and Community collectivization and leadership initiatives. She has a dual Master degree in Mathematics and Education from The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda.

SAKTIBRATA SEN

SAKTIBRATA SEN has been working on Literacy in Indian scripts and languages for about fifteen years now and in many parts of our country. He is currently involved in some multilingual interventions in Literacy. He is now associated with Room To Read India as its Director of Programs.

SHAILAJA MENON

SHAILAJA MENON leads the Early Literacy Initiative at TISS-Hyderabad. Concurrently, she teaches at the School of Education, Azim Premji University. She has done her BA (Psychology) from Delhi University, M.Sc. (Child Development) from MS University, Baroda, and her Ph.D. in Literacy, Language and Culture from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Prior to her return to India, she has taught at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and at Jones International University.

Shailaja was the principal investigator and lead of the longitudinal project, *Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL)*, investigating the teaching and learning of early language and literacy in Maharashtra and Karnataka. She is a co-editor of the volume: *Childhoods in India: Traditions, Trends and Transformations* (Routledge, 2017); and an author of the *Position Paper on Early Language and Literacy in India* (Ambedkar University Delhi, 2016). Shailaja's publications have also appeared in international and Indian journals.

SHIVANI NAG

SHIVANI NAG is a faculty in School of Education Studies, Ambedkar University Delhi. She works in the area of cultural psychology and critical pedagogy. She is currently working on exploring the experiences of women in higher education in relation to how institutional norms impact their participation in communities of practice. She has done her M.Phil. and Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University and her research focuses on socio-cultural 'inclusion' of the marginalised in education. Her doctoral thesis examined the theories and practices of multilingual education in India to explore their role in enabling inclusion of children's socio-cultural context. She has worked with National Multilingual Education Resource Consortium (NMRC) as part of the project's documentation and research team.

SHOBHA SINHA

SHOBHA SINHA is an Associate Professor at the Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi. Dr. Sinha completed her PhD in language and literacy from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her areas of specialization are literacy in the school context, literacy development of children from marginalized groups and minimal literacy backgrounds, response to literature and emergent Literacy. She has taught courses in language and literacy, language pedagogy, language across the curriculum and research methods.

SNEHA SUBRAMANIAM

SNEHA SUBRAMANIAM is an education consultant who worked on the *Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL)* project as an academic writer. Prior to joining LiRIL, Sneha worked as a teacher educator in the Azim Premji Foundation where she taught courses on the English Language and the Foundations of Education. Sneha is interested in the sociology of literacy and is passionate about creating comprehensive, socio-critical curricula for young learners. Sneha has an M.A in Education from Azim Premji University, Bangalore and a B.A. in Literature and Journalism from Knox College, U.S.A.

SONIKA KAUSHIK

SONIKA KAUSHIK is a Senior Consultant at the Early Literacy Programme, National Council of Educational Research and Training. She teaches papers on early language and literacy as a guest faculty at "I Am A Teacher" (IAAT), Gurgaon. Her areas of interest include development of literacy in the early years, literature for young children and academic development of teachers of young children.Sonika started career as a primary school teacher in a village in Rajasthan and has taught in primary schools in Delhi for about seven years. She has taught papers on pedagogy of language and children's literature as a faculty at the Department of Elementary Education, Jesus and Mary College. She continues to be involved in pre-service teacher education programmes and in-service programmes for teachers. She has served on committees for textbook development (Delhi government, Hindi textbooks post-NCF), review of textbooks, review of children's literature and course development of teacher education programmes.

SUNISHA AHUJA

SUNISHA AHUJA has been the Programme Director at Mobile Crèches. She has served as a Senior Consultant to the Department of Elementary Education, Government of India to support the District Primary Education Programme. Ms. Ahuja has worked with CARE India as a Technical Specialist on Early Childhood Development. She was also the India Country Director with Room to Read (2003-2008 and 2010-12); fellow of the Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship (KBF) and the Aspen Global Leadership Network.

SUNITA SINGH

SUNITA SINGH is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED), Ambedkar University Delhi. Dr. Singh completed her Ph.D. from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (Language and Literacy), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and her MA and MPhil from Jawaharlal Nehru University in linguistics. Prior to joining CECED, she worked as an Associate Professor at Le Moyne College, Syracuse. She has worked extensively in schools, with teachers, families and in communities. Dr. Singh has published chapters in books and articles in several international peer reviewed journals. At CECED, Dr. Singh is a faculty mentor for various projects related to language and literacy and early childhood education and development. She also teaches in the School of Education Studies, AUD.

VENITA KAUL

VENITA KAUL is Professor Emeritus of Education Studies and Former Professor and Director of School of Education Studies and Founder Director of Center for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED), Ambedkar University Delhi. Currently, Prof. Kaul is the Chair of CECED's Advisory Committee. Prior to this assignment, Prof. Kaul's past assignments included positions of Senior Education Specialist in The World Bank and Professor and Head of Department of Preschool and Elementary Education at NCERT. She has led several Education projects within and outside India and been on several National and International Committees. Prof. Kaul has a PhD from I.I.T. Delhi in Psychology and has several national and international publications in Education to her credit.

VRINDA DATTA

VRINDA DATTA is the Director of the Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED), Ambedkar University Delhi. Prior to joining CECED, Prof. Datta worked at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. She was a Fulbright Senior Research Fellowship 2007-08, to Brandeis University, USA. Her areas of specialization include Daycare/Child care, Quality in early childhood programs, Child adoption and Teacher education.

PAYAL SAHU

Payal Sahu, Senior Programme Manager in CECED is Ph.D in Social Work and having explicit 15+ years of experience of working in social development sector in the fields like Health, Education, Gender, Project management etc. She has worked in Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and Ministry of Women & Child Development along with various other organizations/ NGOs on different projects, convergence aspects, research areas, and policy matters at State & Central Government levels. Her skills and strenghts are in Project Planning & Management, Operations, Finance & Budgeting, Training, Monitoring, administration and liasoning.

Contextual Understanding of Language and Literacy

Session 1: Inaugural Session

Chair - Venita Kaul, Former Director, CECED, SES, Professor Emerita, SES (AUD)

Forefront - (L to R) Dr. Maxine Berntsen, Prof. Venita Kaul
Background - (L to R) Dr. Sunita Singh, Prof. Shailaja Menon, Prof. Vrinda Datta

Welcome Speech

Vrinda Datta, Director, CECED, (AUD)

Prof. Vrinda Datta, in her welcome speech, thanked the audience for their presence. The audience comprised teachers, NGO practitioners, academics, researchers and funders. She introduced Prof. Venita Kaul and the keynote speaker, Prof. Maxine Berntsen. She talked about CECED and its work.

Presentation of the Early Language and Literacy Position Paper

Shailaja Menon, TISS Hyderabad and Azim Premji University
Sunita Singh, Ambedkar University Delhi

Prof. Shailaja Menon and Dr. Sunita Singh described key ideas of the Early Language and Literacy Position Paper (2016) in their presentation. This is the first such to be written in the Indian context with a specific focus on early literacy, which has largely been left out of curricular frameworks, education policies and other formal documents and discourses in our society. Early childhood (birth to 8 years) is a critical period of development and is significant for educational outcomes in the later years, especially in language and literacy. The position paper focuses on this age group and articulates the connectedness of the pre-primary age group of 3-6 years with the early years of schooling (6-8 years) in the areas of language and literacy. The objective of the paper is to build a shared understanding on the core aims and principles of early language and literacy development, and to articulate implications for different groups of stakeholders, such as teachers, teacher educators, curriculum developers, policy makers and parents and community members.

Prof. Menon discussed the need to rethink and expand contemporary definitions of literacy. Quoting from the paper, she said, "We take the stance that literacy is not an end in itself, but is a means to most other learning and social and economic empowerment. If the intent of education is to enable (people) to live to their fullest potential in modern-day societies, and to be able to participate as citizens of a democratic society, then literacy needs to be aligned with those goals and viewed as a broader and more complex construct—one that encompasses social, cultural, economic and political domains (p. 14)" Prof. Menon further noted that teachers, teacher educators and curriculum developers should understand that skill development in learning to read and write is a necessary step, but not the only aim of language and literacy education. Enabling students to use language and literacy skills and practices to participate meaningfully and in an empowered manner in society should be a central aim. Several aims of early language and literacy learning can be found in the position paper.

Dr. Singh emphasised the need to embrace practices that are informed by *principles* rather than *methods*. A principle-based approach involves commitment to a set of guiding principles from which a variety of different classroom practices could be derived in a contextually sensitive manner. She elaborated on the key principles of good language and literacy pedagogy that

should guide early language and literacy learning, which has been discussed in the position paper.

Dr. Singh elaborated on the implications that such an approach would have for stakeholders, such as policy makers, curriculum developers, teacher educators and teachers, and parents and community. For example, policy makers could develop policies that help maintain multilingualism, that have an emphasis on providing rich materials in the vernacular languages and in English, and that provide small class sizes with dedicated teachers. Curriculum developers could design the curriculum for pre-primary and primary school in a continuous manner. The curricula should be meaningful, so that children can connect to them. All government programmes should include a strong teacher education component related to early language and literacy. Demonstration sites should be established to help teachers and teacher educators gain a rich understanding of literacy and language development teaching and learning. There is an absolute necessity to recognise the role the community and parents have in literacy and language learning. Dr. Singh concluded the presentation by expressing the need for further discussing the implications for practice and ensuring that the gap between research and practice is bridged.

Keynote Address - Teaching and Learning Early Literacy: The Need for Conceptual Clarity

Maxine Berntsen, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad

Prof. Berntsen began her talk by noting that over the past 30 to 40 years, educators in India have begun to pay more attention to how children should be taught to read and write. She suggested that there was a need to have a clear conceptual understanding of the processes of teaching and learning to be literate, and to have sufficient debate and discussions about these processes.

To set the context, she briefly shared her own conceptual journey in understanding the theory and practice of literacy in India. Prof. Berntsen came to Hyderabad in 1961. Here, she started learning Telugu, and later Marathi. Two years later, she returned to the United States to pursue her Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania. She came back to India for field work for her dissertation on sociolinguistic variations in the Marathi spoken in Phaltan in 1966. This was a critical period as the textbook bureau was established in 1968 and the first edition of Bal Bharati for Grade 1 was

published around the time. She described the Bal Bharati books as "beautiful... the printing, paper, and art work.... But the most remarkable aspect was the writer's imagination, sensitivity and pedagogical acumen." She observed that the manner in which the book was organised was similar to the American basal readers of the time. The *moolakshars* were introduced through words, then the abbreviated vowel sign *(swarachinha)* for a long /a/ for instance was subsequently introduced before other abbreviated vowel signs. The textbook writers did not wait for all the *moolakshars* to be taught before the *swarachinhas* were introduced.

However, in the revised version of Bal Bharati readers (1978), the strategy was found to be reversed. All the *moolakshars* were taught before the *swarachinhas* were introduced. Each chapter was made up of sentences that were superficial in meaning. As she was teaching in a school then, this helped her gain first-hand insights into the difficulties that children faced while learning to read using this method. She observed that children were memorising sentences by rote. She realised the advantages of teaching symbol-sound correspondences in Marathi as she further interacted with the educator Jai Nimbkar.

Prof. Berntsen explained that in scripts used for many Indian languages, one letter corresponds to one sound and vice versa. This regular one-to-one correspondence can be fruitfully used in teaching these scripts to young children. However, this is not typically used in an advantageous manner in classrooms. Quoting from the LiRIL study (Menon et al., 2017), she noted that teachers in India have a tendency to focus more on teaching symbols than sounds, which is not helpful with learning sound-symbol correspondences. In addition, citing Sylvia Ashton-Warner's work in New Zealand, she noted that it is important to use the emotional charge of a word which helps the child link the word and the world. Citing Marie Clay's work, she pointed out that the more practice a child is given with reading and writing, the stronger the neural connections built in the brain.

Prof. Berntsen also shared a few examples of teaching from Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan (KNB), a school that she helped establish in Phaltan, Maharashtra. She played a video clip of a teacher, Datta, who was shown helping a child as he facilitated her reading of a sentence from the blackboard. She also shared the experience of a young school boy, who despite going to school, did not learn how to read and write until he joined KNB in Grade four.

The presenter left the audience with the thought, "May we commit ourselves to giving each child in our schools the tools to find what they seek."

Session 1: Chair's Remarks

Prof. Venita Kaul thanked Prof. Berntsen for an enriching and thought-provoking keynote address. She then highlighted some significant aspects of the position paper Prof. Menon and Dr. Singh presented earlier:

- Literacy should be viewed with a different lens. She shared experiences of interacting with teachers and observing how they defined literacy as a means to prepare the young for school, or for a subsequent class. She reiterated that it is important to define literacy as a means for empowerment. She spoke of the advantages of technologically innovative initiatives to further the scope of literacy and language learning.

- Devoid of language, literacy is meaningless. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the linkages between literacy and language.

- The most critical factor that enables children to learn anything is the willingness and inspiration to learn. How we engage children and the processes to motivate the child are questions worth deliberation.

Contextual Understanding of Language and Literacy

Session 2: Linguistic Contexts of Language and Literacy in India

Chair and Discussant - Anjali Noronha, Eklavya

(L to R) Mr. Saktibrata Sen, Dr. Shivani Nag, Prof. Ajit Mohanty, Ms. Anjali Noronha

Going Beyond the Oracy-Literacy Binary: Promoting Literacy Engagement among Tribal Mother Tongue Children

Ajit K. Mohanty, JNU

The presentation by Prof. Ajit Mohanty focussed on the issue of the apparent divide between oracy and literacy and the urgent need to address this to promote literacy among tribal children with a rich oral tradition, since many indigenous communities derive their identities through oral traditions in the absence of a print rich culture. According to Prof. Mohanty, literacy is not just a set of cognitive skills of reading and writing; it is a social practice and a political act. School literacy, involving neutral technology and a de-contextualised set of skills, is limited and too far removed from the social-literacy practices rooted in children's life experiences. Access to schooling and literacy technologies are socially stratified, privileging some at the expense of others. The oracy-literacy binary itself is a form of social construction that mobilises meanings in defence of domination and "invisibilizes" oracy as a legitimate mode of knowledge creation. Reiterating that just as some societies are literate, others are primarily orate societies, he added, some even argue that instead of talking about literature alone, we should also be talking about 'orature'[1] as a legitimate means of knowledge transfer as well.

A child's language is closely entwined with her identity. An absence of recognition of the child's language, culture and context results in the marginalisation of the child. This leads to cause what Prof. Mohanty refers to as "push-outs" - children dropping out of school when they do not see schooling and its practices acknowledge or connect to their world. The presenter explicated his argument by elaborating on an example of one such child, Khudram. Khudram, a young Halvi speaker, was forced to drop out of school as he experienced total alienation. Only with the timely intervention of a well-meaning, empathetic teacher who spoke his language, did he finally find his way back into the school. Prof. Mohanty emphasised that it is the responsibility of the State to ensure the inclusion of the child's language.

Prof. Mohanty called for oral cultures being viewed as legitimate spaces for knowledge building within multilingual societies. There is a need to rethink pedagogies, such that a transition is made possible from conventional, passive, hierarchical transmission pedagogies, to more progressive, active, collaborative transformative pedagogies that focus on equity and justice.

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[1] The term 'Orature' was first introduced as an idea to the audience by Prof. Mohanty, which was later borrowed by Ms. Noronha during her commentary, below.

One such pedagogy that Prof. Mohanty's research team has been involved with is the MLE-plus (Multilingual Education-Plus) model, which was used with tribal groups in Odisha. Unlike other models of multilingual education in India that aim to transition students from the home to the school language, MLE-Plus aims to maintain and strengthen home languages and cultures within the school space, while introducing students to other languages. Empowerment at the individual and community levels is a core concern, and it is guided by the concerns and principles described earlier. Some activities included in the programme were described:

a. Ethnographic survey to document cultural practices for development of innovative activities that are contextual and culturally rooted.

b. Reading and math activity corners in the classroom.

c. Synergistic 'read together' community program.

d. Creating books with community authorship.

e. Tracking children's achievements in meaningful ways.

f. Reinforcing collaboration through organised community participation in oracy/literacy-based activities.

Multilingual Education Models in India and Possibilities of Democratic Classrooms

Shivani Nag, School of Education Studies, Ambedkar University Delhi

D r. Shivani Nag presented a paper that engaged with the idea of democratic classrooms as conceptualised by various philosophers and sociologists of education (such as John Dewey, Michael Apple and James A. Bean). Cultural historical activity theory -- first proposed by Lev Vygotsky[2] (1978), and later developed by several others, including Michael Cole[3] (2000) and Yrjö Engestrom[4] (1999) -- served as the theoretical framework for the paper. Dr. Nag used this framework to examine the aims, practices and the resulting power structures of MLE programmes in contemporary Indian classrooms. Her central argument was that most contemporary MLE programmes were "transition-centred" – they used multilingual methods to quickly transition children from their mother tongue to the target school language. The mother tongue is not seen as having an intrinsic value of its own, and therefore, its maintenance and strengthening does not find a place or purpose within the classroom. This severely restricts the transformative potential of such programmes.

Dr. Nag highlighted the hegemonic practices that mark present day classrooms, even those that attempt multilinguality. There is a need to bring about just practices and democratic engagement in the classrooms through critical pedagogy. Within such an imagination of a democratic/critical classroom, one can hope to create experiences where democracy is not just about access to the physical space of the classroom, but also about the opportunity for active participation in its processes. The idea of active participation brings in the idea of democratic linguistic processes and practices, where the child's language is nurtured as an important cultural tool of empowerment and expression. Therefore, an imagination of a robust MLE programme requires that multiple languages be nurtured and strengthened to facilitate plurality and democracy. Such an imagination will allow children to naturally integrate their experiences, find expression, and use their imagination, as they have the autonomy to use their home language without fear of condemnation.

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[2] Vygotskỹ, L. S., & Cole, M. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
[3] Cole, M. (2000). *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press.
[4] Engeström, Y. et al. (Eds.). Perspectives on activity theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999a. cap. 1. p.19-37.

Implementing Literacy Programs in Multilingual India: Room to Read's Experiences from Sirohi

Saktibrata Sen, Room to Read, India

Mr. Saktibrata Sen, from Room to Read-India, presented the findings of an intervention study commissioned by the organisation in Sirohi district, Rajasthan. Prof. Minati Panda of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU-Delhi) undertook the study. The study was inspired by the organisation's quest to create the argument for multilingual education in an environment where the political and economic factors supported the contrary. The desire to uniformly introduce Hindi for national integration commanded a much stronger socio-political support in this state, while the organisation's own experiences on the ground suggested that multiple languages co-existed within the classroom, some of which were barely named or recognised.

Sirohi is a linguistically vibrant region, where Adivasi Garasia, Rajput Garasia and Marwari are the most widely spoken local languages in the area, with Adivasi Garasia (51%) being the most prevalent language at home. Prof. Panda's research helped establish that there were no strongly defined linguistic compartments that separated each of these languages from the others. Instead, the presenter found a "linguistic continuum" where one language seamlessly "flowed" into another. Children and teachers constantly code-switched[5] and "translanguaged[6]" within the classrooms, exploiting the range of languages at their disposal for expression and communication. Despite this, 70% of the respondents preferred Hindi as the language of instruction.

Sirohi is not an atypical Indian district; it showcases the multilingual situation in India. This suggests that such multi-layered linguistic continua exist elsewhere as well and need to be taken into consideration in planning

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[5] Code switching refers to the process where multilingual speakers move from one language to the other within the same communicative context.

[6] Translanguaging (Garcia, 2009) is the process whereby multilingual speakers utilize their languages as an integrated communication system. While theories of code switching assume the presence of two or more different languages that speakers move between, the theory of translanguaging assumes the presence of a single integrated linguistic system that is drawn upon purposefully by multilingual speakers. Garcia claims to have borrowed this term from Cen Williams (1994) who coined it to refer to a specific bilingual pedagogy.

García, O. (2009). Education, multilingualism and translanguaging in the 21st century. In A. Mohanty, M. Panda, R. Phillipson, & T. Skutnabb-Kangas (Eds.), Multilingual education for social justice: Globalising the local (pp. 128–145). New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

multilingual curriculum, pedagogy and teacher training efforts. It also calls for a different perspective into research on multilingualism and literacy in India.

As a result of this work, Room to Read has engaged in contextually appropriate interventions in the area. This includes the creation of a vocabulary list of 700 words from the major languages of the district, with a special focus on the most marginalised languages. The organisation also conducted teacher training sessions on the importance of local orality practices. Many storytelling sessions and discussions drawing upon local languages and culture have been conducted. Room to Read has also printed multilingual story books and story cards in the local languages to facilitate these processes. This research also helped inform a global framework on literacy that was later developed by Room to Read. The framework acknowledges "three pillars" of literacy – orality, orthographic expertise, and exposure to a variety of texts. The research emphasised the role of orality, which had been marginalised until then, making it a unique language-plus-literacy approach, instead of a literacy-alone approach.

This work emphasises the need to exploit a community's natural ways and means of communication in the classroom. Space needs to be given to oral discussions and translanguaging within classrooms. Careful observation of the languages used by children need to be made, with a focus on the broad and minute linguistic variations among these languages. Instead of being silenced, these variations must be used to the classroom's advantage in engaging with a multiplicity of languages.

Session 2: Chair's Remarks
Ms. Anjali Noronha highlighted key points from the presentations.

1. The point about the idea of transitioning from a language that is local and spoken by a social group that is marginalised which does not have access to power through a language of dominance, was highlighted.

2. From a democratic and equity-based perspective, languages are not naturally hierarchical. However, they are made so within the social, political and economic milieu in which they function.

3. A language is not a mere medium of communication. It is an integral part of a group's culture and identity. The exclusion of a language causes marginalisation of the group, and impacts their identity, which further creates inequity and a false sense of hierarchy.

4. What are the pedagogical implications for contexts where the home languages of children are different from the language of instruction? In a situation of multiple layers of hierarchy amongst the local languages, how can each child's mother tongue (MT) be prioritised in the classrooms, and how can interactions among these different MTs be facilitated?

5. Is there a way to address the domination of the textbook and create a wider space for "orature[7]" (oral literature) and identity as foundations for language?

Discussions

What should be the pedagogical approach to teaching tribal languages that have no script? What strategies can be considered for the challenges faced in literacy instruction in urban spaces, such as, with migrant communities?

Dr. Nag responded that the conception of an MLE-plus model would first need to imagine the different situations of children, and then be designed for enabling and empowering children in these situations. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all solution, in a vacuum of understanding each situation, cannot be articulated. She spoke especially of the need for MLE models that empower children to articulate their experiences in their home languages to fully exploit their educational value.

A clarification was sought on what Mr. Sen meant by the term "linguistic continuum".

Mr. Sen clarified that he used it in the manner of denoting a fluid space where many languages naturally co-exist, overlap, and flow into each other. There is a certain level of overlap among these languages in syntax, semantics, and language use, such that the users do not seem to view them as distinct and separate categories. Prof. Panda joined in to add that there were some conceptual problems to assuming extreme fluidity of languages. Translanguaging, as described by Ofelia Garcia (2009:13), suggests that there is only a single, unified language capability in the brain, but this claim warrants examination.

What do we mean when we talk about language for a democratic society?

Prof. Panda described the complex nature of the human brain and its functions. She pointed out that the human brain both accommodates enormous and complicated forms of diversities, and at the same time also encourages hierarchies and simplifications. This is an interesting and important factor to consider while establishing an understanding of the larger democratic participation of an individual. She suggested that we need an awareness of these competing tendencies within us, and a reflexivity about them.

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[7] The usage of the term is attributed to Prof. Mohanty as the audience was introduced to it by him during his presentation in an earlier session.

Contextual Understanding of Language and Literacy

Session 3: Curricular Contexts of Language and Literacy in India

Chair - Dr. Asha Singh | **Discussant** - Prof. Vrinda Datta

(L to R) Dr. Geeta Verma, Ms. Keerti Jayaram, Dr. Asha Singh and Prof. Vrinda Datta

Understanding Language and Literacy Practices in Government Primary Schools Located in Odisha and Uttar Pradesh

Geeta Verma & S Gayathri, CARE India, Delhi

This presentation provided an overview of CARE India's programme that worked towards addressing classroom processes and instructional methods, and teacher beliefs and practices. The programme was developed based on CARE India's earlier experiences from the field and the position paper on early language and literacy (2016). The programme focused on creating an enabling ecosystem at the school level to address early grade reading challenges faced by first generation, multilingual learners from Dalit and Adivasi backgrounds. The presentation by Dr. Geeta Verma focused specifically on an intervention study conducted as part of this programme and the impact it has had on the spaces that CARE India has engaged with.

In 2014, with the support of USAID, CARE India designed a composite early grade reading programme. It was located in seven districts from two states – Uttar Pradesh and Odisha – of which Balrampur, Bahraich, Shrawasti and Mayurbhani were recognised as the most marginalised districts. The programme was based on a set of key assumptions:

1. Reading is a critical tool for learning.

2. Reading requires an enabling ecosystem.

3. Children need an engaging environment both at home and at school.

The study was based on an initial baseline study to understand the child's immediate context/ecosystem, which was conducted with the support of Prof. Panda. The baseline study attempted to grasp sociolinguistic aspects of the home. It also attempted to understand processes in the classroom (such as teacher beliefs, teacher-student relationships, curriculum, pedagogy, gender roles and biases). The sample size of the study was 180 teachers and approximately 2,000 children. On the baseline study, Odisha fared slightly better than Uttar Pradesh in terms of the nature of resources available in classrooms, as well as in additional support provided for children at home. Teachers in Odisha showed more sensitivity and willingness to learn about their children's culture. The library as a space existed in both states, but was rarely used. The availability of print rich material was negligible.

The intervention study had a positive impact on almost all aspects studied. Significant changes were observed in classroom engagement, teaching practices, access to resources such as books and the library, an emphasis on oral language development, and on reading with comprehension. Dr Verma concluded by noting that children have the ability to learn if they are given adequate support in a meaningful manner.

The Learning Trajectories of an Early Literacy and Learning Programme: A Worm's Eye View

Keerti Jayaram, Organization for Early Literacy Promotion, Ajmer, Rajasthan

Ms. Keerti Jayaram outlined the journey of the Organization for Early Literacy Promotion (OELP) in her presentation. The OELP began its foundational work on early literacy and learning in 2006 in government schools in New Delhi, before relocating to rural Rajasthan in 2008. The sustained engagement in government school classrooms and with low literate communities has been evolving ever since.

OELP's work has been inspired by Marie Clay, who emphasised the value of being tentative and flexible as one conceptualises an early literacy programme. Equity and social justice lie at the heart of the foundational framework of OELP, which defines early literacy as encompassing spoken, written or other forms of language. The work at OELP has also been influenced by emergent literacy and socio-cultural theoretical perspectives which view literacy and language learning as active developmental processes through which young learners realise in natural ways that reading and writing have connections with their lived experiences and inner worlds. These perspectives are in stark contrast to the experiences that many young learners have in Indian classrooms at present. Most children engage with reading and writing mechanically. When asked why they want to read and write, the answers ranged from "to get good marks" to "to get good jobs". According to her, the reason behind such a disconnect is that many learners from oral cultures and/or low literate homes do not have opportunities to engage with print during early childhood, or to encounter print in meaningful ways during their school years.

In contrast, the OELP intervention aims to go beyond the concerns of access and outcomes, to concerns that emphasise what educational experiences mean for each child's identity, self-worth and learning. It does this through a two-year foundation programme to help facilitate the child's transition from home to school, from home language to school language, and from spoken to the written word. The two-year foundation programme lays a strong emphasis on building a foundation for schooling, for reading and writing, and for developing higher order thinking skills.

The programme structures time in terms of "blocks" of daily work, which include: read aloud and talk time; word study time; writing and expressing time; and skill-building time. A comprehensive assessment strategy enables assessing competencies at different stages. Community participation is enlisted through various initiatives and strategies, such as the summer *Kahani*

Mela (a literature festival organised and supported by the communities); and the *Potli Baba* initiative (where young learners are encouraged to read aloud books from school to elders at home).

The results have been promising: children are able to read short books and complete exercises at the end of a book by Grade 2. Ms. Jayaram summed up her experiences from the field saying, "The more young learners use their inner resources to read and write and learn, the better they become. The better they become, the more motivated they are to read and write, and engage actively with learning experiences. And a [positive] cycle with reading, writing and a meaningful engagement with learning sets in."

Session 3: Chair's Remarks

Dr. Asha Singh highlighted the key points raised during the two presentations and shared some of her own experiences to corroborate them. She spoke of the importance of oral competency, and the role of the school in shaping the identity of a child. She emphasised the importance of a print rich environment, and of using diversity as a resource in the classroom to make literacy and language learning more meaningful and engaging.

Discussion

1. How does one empower a teacher to be able to translate the intervention in the classroom and have a sense of responsibility and ownership?

Ms. Jayaram noted that teacher training and accountability is always a challenge. For an organisation to survive, there is a constant need to show good results, which is the accountability angle. The position paper on early language and literacy (2016) suggests a framework that might be helpful in translating ideas into action. There have been times when the OELP had blundered by handing down lesson plans to teachers that they are required to use in the class. Over time they have realised that teachers need to be trusted and given the space to experiment.

Dr. Verma of CARE India noted that teachers needed to be supported and motivated, that they are always shown in a bad light. Many teachers work hard to learn the language of their students and use it in the classroom. We need to place our trust in them, she reiterated.

2. What kind of stories have you heard from the communities?

Ms. Jayaram noted that there was a time when OELP tried to collect stories from the ground by asking the children. The children told them that they did not know of any stories. The team then visited their parents who, despite being extremely busy, shared many stories. The team noticed a pattern -- the nature of these stories was dialogical. There was a narrator and a listener. The story evolves when the listener asks questions.

Dr. Verma stated that a school has to be viewed as a space for the exchange of ideas, and communication. Morning assemblies offer the opportunity for children to share stories, puzzles, poems and so on, giving them ample scope for learning one another's language and culture; this space needs to be fully utilised.

3. A lot of OELP work deals with knowledge and dissemination. But the challenge lies in scalability. Is it because of diverse context and different variables present?

Ms. Jayaram noted that while the team has a conceptual understanding, scaling up is a challenge because it requires support from the government and other funding partners. The fact that they are a small team adds to the challenge. Also, teachers play a key role in the cycle. When they see a positive result, they help in taking it forward. She also expressed happiness on being recognised for the work and noted that such conferences could help in bridging the gap between practitioners and academics.

Prof. Kaul suggested that the interventions be looked at analytically and goals be chalked out for scaling up, including designing enabling environments for scaling up. Ms. Jayaram responded stating that academic knowledge is a constraint. The members of the team are part of the community, which is definitely an advantage; but this also implies, in many cases, that they require academic support.

Dr. Singh responded to this saying that even if a few people could clearly understand the means that the organisation uses and replicates the processes elsewhere, there would still be hope for meaningful work being borrowed and used. She also added that work such as OELP's should be concentrated in small pockets where there is scope for a deeper understanding of the field.

Contextual Understanding of Language and Literacy

Session 4: Panel Discussion:
Bringing Research and Policy together

Panel Members: Anjali Noronha, Eklavya, Minati Panda, JNU, Saktibrata Sen, Room To Read, Sunisha Ahuja, formerly CARE, Room to Read, Shobha Sinha, CIE, University of Delhi
Moderator - Venita Kaul

(L to R) Dr. Shobha Sinha, Ms. Sunisha Ahuja, Mr Saktibrata Sen, Prof. Minati Panda, Ms. Anjali Noronha, Prof. Venita Kaul

Prof. Venita Kaul began the session with the following questions to the panellists:

1. What could be some recommendations for the upcoming National Policy on Education?

2. How do we promote research in this area and what should the modalities for it be?

3. What kind of research needs to be conducted?

4. What should the mechanisms for funding and support for the research be?

5. How do we create an interface between research and policy?

Summary of Dr Shobha Sinha's Comments

Dr. Sinha emphasised the need for documentation and knowledge building. She spoke of how the magnitude of problems in India often creates a tendency for dilution. There is a link between these diluted solutions and a lack of knowledge. There is a need to build our knowledge of literacy rather than speaking and acting on the basis of assumptions that have not been examined. This brings in a pressing requirement for strong research and documentation of existing practices and initiatives.

Another issue with research in this domain is the rampant use of "deficit theory". This involves seeing the target group as deficient in their abilities to learn and respond. For example, one often hears the deficit theory being used in relation to children from marginalised communities. The panellist appealed for a stronger understanding of attitudes regarding engagements with children.

She expressed concern over the fact that most programmes and policies are implemented without a complete understanding of reality on ground. How can we begin thinking of ways of not merely supporting and developing teachers' competence but of also building strong foundations for teacher educator programmes?

Summary of Ms. Sunisha Ahuja's Comments

Starting with the wider notion existing within school systems, where a good child is the 'quiet child', Ms. Ahuja pointed to the gap between the reality on field and the understanding in academic circles of a child's expression and oral traditions. While the latter is favoured among academics, it is discouraged in many classrooms. Therefore, research and scholarly understanding often does not get translated into practice. The academic community needs to take up the role of providing support to, and collaborating with the "ground", instead of only remaining in the role of questioning the state of the ground.

In addition, there is very little research available in the Indian context that can be used to influence policy. We need research that can feed into programme planning, practice and implementation within classrooms.

Another area that has got very little attention is teacher professional development.

The panellist concluded by speaking of the need to bridge the gap between research and policy by reaching out to available forums and government think tanks, such as *Niti Aayog*, for collaborative actions around the issues of education and literacy.

Summary of Saktibrata Sen's Comments

Mr. Saktibrata Sen raised the point about creating dialogic spaces for interaction between practitioners, academics and policy makers. There is an abundance of knowledge in the country, but that very little has been organised in a way that is accessible to practitioners. Mr Sen appealed to academics and researchers to organise this knowledge in an accessible manner. He added that presentation of research should go beyond merely stating facts; it should also recommend solutions. He highlighted the need to focus research around issues which will be of immediate relevance to teachers and practitioners.

Summary of Anjali Noronha's Comments

Ms. Noronha stated that the discourses in language education have moved from Mother Tongue (MT) education to Multilingual Education (MLE). In a way, MLE has overcome the resistance that communities, parents and teachers have had to MT education. The panellist suggested that we rethink the idea of having only one language as a medium of education. Why can't we have an environment of MLE within which one or many languages are taught?

Ms. Noronha also pointed out that there is a dearth of indigenous research on language education, particularly MLE. She also noted that the overbearing presence of broadly prepared textbooks is antithetical to language and literacy learning. She proposed that we consider the different kinds of material that can be used for language and literacy learning. Can one advocate for policies that reduce the use of textbooks and make space for children's literature and local literature in the classroom?

Advocating the need for stronger connections with the community, and for creating spaces for community-based policies, she argued that for really long practitioners have only looked at the government for leadership, whereas one should begin considering community leadership, ownership and dialogue as alternate and more sustainable forms of leadership.

Summary of Minati Panda's Comments

Countries that scientifically develop their policy documents have two different bodies that contribute to these documents – a body of researchers, and another body of policy makers -- who work both independently, as well as collaboratively. Their roles are clearly defined within their specific domains. In India, however, this definition is vague. Most often, the researcher ends up being the policy writer too.

Language can be looked at from two different theoretical lenses. With the first lens, the number of languages one speaks is "countable". For example, a child could be viewed as speaking several different languages. However, in the second paradigm, one sees each language as a part of the same unified multilingual repertoire. The question is, which of these two perspectives should we consider for policy documents, implementation, and pedagogy? Dr. Panda went on to explain that in class, children are not conscious of switching between languages. They are borrowing words from a multilingual repertoire that they already have. So, in fact, they are "translanguaging", and not "code-switching". The difference is that code-switching is a conscious process.

She elaborated on her argument by describing the perspective of Ofelia Garcia who borrows from Chomsky to a certain extent. According to Garcia, there is only one mental grammar, one language structure of the mind; she completely negates the idea of multilingualism or multilinguality. This gives rise to the question: do we have one grammatical structure in our brain, or more?

Dr. Panda concluded expressing the need for a more nuanced approach to concepts such as monolingualism, multilingualism and even the meaning of "language".

Session 4: Moderator's Remarks

Prof. Venita Kaul summarised the key points discussed by each panellist.

She agreed that there is a lack of institutional memory in the country, as many promising people and initiatives have come and gone but very little has been documented. On research, she also urged academics and researchers to think of ways in which it can be made available and useful to end-users such as teachers and practitioners. She reiterated that teacher professional development for multilingual education must be made robust.

She also advised the group to be comprehensive in its recommendations. For example, in the recommendation for a reduced role of textbooks, one needs to also have a formidable alternative that can be presented to the policy makers.

Understanding Student Learning

Session 5: Understanding Language and Literacy Learning: Learning from The Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL) Project

Discussant: Sunita Singh, AUD Delhi

(L to R) Ms. Sneha Subramaniam, Ms. Neela Apte, Mr. Mounesh Nalkamani, Ms. Sajitha K, Mr. Ramchander K, Prof. Shailaja Menon, Dr. Sunita Singh

Abstract

The LiRIL project, jointly funded by the Tata Trusts and Azim Premji University, aimed to study how children learn to read and write in two languages – Kannada and Marathi – and to document the challenges faced by marginalised learners in this process. The project was conducted in two socio-economically disadvantaged areas – Yadgir block (Yadgir District, Karnataka) and Wada block, (Palghar District, Maharashtra). It used a longitudinal design, and followed 360 students per site as they moved from grades 1 to 3 (2013 - 2016). The schools in Karnataka followed the Nali Kali (Multi Grade Multi Level – MGML) curricular approach, while the schools in Maharashtra used Bal Bharati textbooks for teaching language and literacy. A variety of quantitative and qualitative data were collected over a period of three years, including children's performance on a variety of literacy tasks, classroom observations, teacher interviews, in-depth child studies and curricular analyses. A set of three papers coming out of the LiRIL project were presented during the session.

Growth and Variability in Early Reading and Writing: A Snapshot of Findings from the LiRIL Project

Ramchander K, Azim Premji University and **Shailaja Menon**, TISS-Hyderabad and Azim Premji University

The researchers presented largely quantitative data related to the growth and variability of students on various literacy tasks.

Although the LiRIL study collected data on 11 different literacy indicators, the presentation focused on four of these, specifically, the recognition of "*moolaksharas*" (basic *aksharas*), *swarachinhas* (second vowel diacritics, or *maatras*), word reading, and comprehension. Analysis reveals that over three years, students in both the sites had learnt most *moolaksharas*. However, with *swarachinhas*, even at the end of Grade 3, less than half the signs representing vocalic sounds had been mastered by students. Since most meaningful words contain *swarachinhas*, word reading was impaired due to this. In Wada, students were able to read words by Grade 2, while in Yadgir, most students were unable to read words until Grade 3.

The ability to recognise *swarachinhas* is the most powerful predictor of word reading. Students were introduced to nine graded passages to check the progression of comprehension over the three years. Comprehension was poor at both sites, but worse in Yadgir than in Wada. At the former site, even at the end of Grade 3, 85% of students couldn't comprehend the easiest graded passage.

The data also revealed significant sources of variability in student performance. This showed that there was a large difference in the performance of students from the two sites, with Yadgir performing worse than Wada. The MGML approach followed in Yadgir could be a source contributing to the low achievement of students at the site. The study also collected data on home background to check if it explained variability. In Wada, students' home economic status, educational background (including parents and siblings) and caste were a statistically significant source of variability. Interestingly, by end of the Grade 3, caste was not significant anymore. In Yadgir, only the educational background was significant. In both sites, schools were a significant source of variability.

The researchers summed up the key learnings of their quantitative analyses:

1. Most of the growth in the first three years of schooling was in *Moolakshara* knowledge. This impacts meaning making tremendously.

2. *Swarachinha* knowledge is crucial for meaningful word reading, but is currently being taught and learned unsuccessfully.

3. Students are not able to read grade level passages with comprehension. The situation is far worse in Yadgir than in Wada.

4. Schools are a significant source of variability.

The Child and the Script: Learning to Break the Code in Marathi and Kannada

Sajitha, K., LiRIL Project, **Neela Apte**, LiRIL Project, **Shailaja Menon**, TISS - Hyderabad and Azim Premji University & **Mounesh Nalkamani**, Kalike, Karnataka

Learning to read and write the script is an important part of a child's journey towards literacy. The LiRIL research shows that the majority of classroom time during language lessons focuses on teaching children the script. Yet, large scale assessment studies demonstrate annually that most Indian children cannot decode the script proficiently. What is going wrong with the teaching and learning of the script? Three key reasons were identified in this presentation.

Reason 1: Nature of the scripts not taken into account by curriculum. There is a widely held assumption amongst practitioners that Indian scripts are easier to learn than English because of the regular strong sound-symbol correspondences. However, the LiRIL research has shown that this is offset by the very large number of symbols that are used by many Indian scripts, comprising moolaksharas (basic aksharas), swarachinhas (secondary vowel diacritic signs), and samyuktaksharas (symbols representing conjunct consonants). Mastering this set of symbols poses a challenge for young readers, especially because Indian scripts are also visuo-spatially complex, unlike English which follows the left to right rule.

Reason 2: Ways of teaching decoding not very effective. The researchers observed the script is currently being taught in ways that make it less than robust. For one, strong sound-symbol relationships are rarely established, with most children spending time copy-writing symbols in a "soundless" manner. Second, *swarachinhas* are introduced late, so children do not get

opportunities to read meaningful words made from them. Third, blending *aksharas* into words is not emphasised in many classrooms. Fourth, rote and repetition are the key strategies employed for the learning of the script and children are given very few opportunities to "problem-solve" unknown words. Finally, they are given few opportunities to read connected text until Grade 3, which holds back the building of fluency in reading. These lead to a loss of meaning in word solving. The LiRIL study has shown that if children are not able to read 40 words per minute by grade 3, they don't understand what they are reading.

Reason 3: Developmental "phases" of decoding that children go through not considered in curricular planning. The Western scholar Linea Ehri[8] identified that children go through several phases in the process of becoming effective decoders. The LiRIL study was able to confirm that such phases are also discernible in the learning of Indian scripts. The researchers were able to identify six phases of decoding: Pre-Aksharic Phase, Partial Aksharic Phase I, Partial Aksharic Phase II, Partial Aksharic Phase III, Full Aksharic Phase, and Consolidated Phase. An understanding of these phases can help curricular planning and decision making. However, since the study looked at only two curricular approaches, it is yet to be verified whether these phases are the product of development or the manifestations of particular curricular approaches to teaching the script.

Meaning-Makers, Meaning-Takers: Of Comprehension and Incomprehension in Early Grade Literacy Classrooms

Shailaja Menon, TISS – Hyderabad and Azim Premji University &
Sneha Subramaniam (LiRIL Project)

Most educators would agree that it is important to understand what is being read. Yet, comprehension remains an elusive part of a child's learning journey in many Indian classrooms. In the third presentation, LiRIL researchers took a closer look at specific ways in which meaning-making is taught in Indian classrooms, arguing that many contemporary ways of interacting with texts are historically and culturally located, and therefore, somewhat resistant to change.

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[8] Ehri, L. (1999). Phases of development in learning to read words. In J. Oakhill & R. Beard (Eds.), *Reading Development and the Teaching of Reading: A Psychological Perspective*, 79-108. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

The presenters started with describing an exchange they observed in a classroom situation where a teacher reads a text and explains it to the students in great detail. Since meaning making (through teacher explanations) was being emphasised in this classroom, what exactly was the problem? Citing Dr. Shoba Sinha, the researchers referred to this approach as the "samjhana" method. When teacher takes the onus of explaining the meaning of texts, students are mostly reduced to playing the role of "meaning-takers", and not "meaning-makers".

The process of comprehension requires a reader to construct a mental representation of the text. It is an active, culturally embedded process, where the reader makes inferences based on her prior knowledge during a transaction with the text. However, in schools, comprehension is viewed as a one-way process, where a single meaning of the text is to be fed by the teacher to silently accepting students. The key factors that lay the foundation for meaningful engagement with the text—decoding, vocabulary, understanding structure of narratives, using prior knowledge to make meaningful connections and a more metacognitive process of monitoring one's own comprehension—are often neglected. Of these factors, the researchers highlighted three in their presentation.

Understanding of narrative structure. The LiRIL study found that children had a poor understanding of narratives. Almost 60-65% of the students exhibited no comprehension and could only label the pictures in a wordless picture book presented to them. Another 30-35% were able to read actions within a single picture frame, but were unable to connect different pictures to narrate a coherent story. Only 0-5% of the students could comprehend and or re-tell a story at both basic and advanced levels.

Using prior knowledge to make meaning. The researchers pointed out an interesting observation. Many teachers they had observed during the research had made connections between what they were reading and the children's lives. However, children were still quite poor at comprehending texts. To explain this situation, qualitative data were presented that showed that when information from the children's lives met information from the text, the prior experiences overshadowed information from the text, such that no coherent understanding of the text was developed. When prior knowledge is used in this manner, it does not lead to better comprehension. In fact, comprehension of the text is further compromised. Hence, less than a third of inferential questions asked at the end of Grade 3 were answered correctly by students.

Metacognition. Good readers monitor their own comprehension as they read (Duke and Pearson, 2002). This is called metacognition. They are able to notice contradictions between what they expect and what they find from the text. They notice whether they are able to follow the story or not. In response, they try to "fix" the comprehension problems that they may face. Many students in the LiRIL sample were not aware when they could not comprehend and rarely made any attempts to address their difficulties.

The presenters concluded that it is not sufficient to have prior knowledge about a topic; or to activate that prior knowledge while reading. In order to comprehend, it is necessary to be able to use that prior knowledge to monitor incoming information from the text. Establishing relevance of texts might help children with activating and using prior knowledge appropriately. Developing a sense of narrative is critical to creating coherence. We need a cultural shift in understanding where meaning lies. Giving teachers experiences with reading in this culturally different manner might be necessary to create such a shift.

Session 5: Chair's Remarks

Dr. Sunita Singh started her comments by stating that the LiRIL project was a big leap in the direction of addressing the gap in research in Indian languages. She noted that it was rather unsettling to learn what the study shows about the teaching and learning of early literacy at the two sites. She pointed out that the main objective of such a study is to create a knowledge base. In that spirit, she sought more information on the kinds of tools that the study used. Dr. Singh opined that tool construction is a challenge and its standardization is a complicated process and asked the team to share further insights into their journey and what they learnt from it. She sought an answer to the question; how does one decide what constitutes low versus high performance among children? She also sought clarity on what is considered higher order versus lower order skills in comprehension-related tasks.

Prof. Shailaja Menon explained that the tools were derived from the theoretical ideas from the west, but were piloted and modified over a two-year period at each site. Maintaining parity between the Kannada and Marathi tools was essential; but at the same time the contextual differences were borne in mind. All assessments were similar in structure and nature. The host organisations of the LiRIL project (Kalike and Quest) were of great support in the process.

Discussion

1. In terms of the sample, was it differentiated?

Prof. Menon responded that the samples were not very differentiated; but were all from the lower end of the socio-economic strata. She added that it was necessary to acknowledge that the sample was highly restricted in interpreting the results.

2. Did you study the curriculum carefully?

Prof. Menon clarified that a detailed curricular analysis was undertaken, and has been published. Exercising caution, she said, "Even though there is a stark contrast between the two curricula, I will not say that Wada is doing better, but [that] Yadgir is doing poorly!" The approaches in the two sites may be different but each of them poses certain problems.

3. Were storytelling and the culture of narratives used in the class? If yes, could you give us insights as to the kind of engagement that took place?

The presenters described how "stories" were used in the Nali Kali classroom, which used "story cards". These story cards are passages created out of groupings of *aksharas* that have been taught. – Therefore, these are not really stories as much as opportunities to practise phonics. This does not give students a chance to develop their sense of narrative, thereby causing orality to be completely ignored in these classrooms.

4. What other insights could your study provide in terms of classroom observations? Were you able to understand the kind of interactions that took place in the children's homes with their siblings and other adults?

The team said that they had spent a lot of time with three children in their homes conducting case-studies, and that they had a lot of interesting insights but would have to re-examine the data carefully to answer this specific question.

5. Did you look at the early childhood (education) experiences of the children you studied?

The presenters clarified that every village has an anganwadi, and all the children in the sample were enrolled in preschool, although nothing definitive could be said about their attendance in preschool prior to joining Grade 1.

6. What about the inputs from organisations like Quest or Kalike that have support programmes?

Both Kalike and QUEST have teacher/student support programmes, but at the time of the study, Kalike supported only teachers of struggling students in Grades 4-5. Therefore, it was difficult to study that programme. QUEST provided an intervention programme (before- and after-school) to approximately 100 of the 360 students in the sample. It was possible to look at intervention effects, and these were significant. However, the nature of support to teachers was more difficult to analyse.

7. You spoke of comprehension and the relationships with many factors. Were you also able to look at the relationship between listening comprehension and reading comprehension? Is there any relationship between the two? Were you also able to look at the kind of books students had to read? With respect to gender, did you observe any differentiation? What are the lessons that you would like to share with others who would want to embark on a similar study in the future?

Prof. Menon explained that a child's ability to engage with a wordless text and her sense of a narrative had a clear bearing on her listening and reading comprehension.

Students in the sample did encounter texts, but not the kind that was "rich".

The team said they could not comment on gender differences with confidence as they did not find any statistical differences based on gender.

Conducting a longitudinal study that spanned five years is not easy. The challenges of team building, coordinating different sites, maintaining communication and morale, and engaging with different types of analyses were all a part of the group's learnings in terms of process. In terms of content, four short booklets had been produced to share the team's learnings with teachers and practitioners.

Introduction to the Early Literacy Initiative

Shailaja Menon, TISS – Hyderabad and Azim Premji University

P rof. Shailaja Menon introduced the Early Literacy Initiative, a three-year initiative that she currently leads at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad. It is funded by the Tata Trusts, and is a domain-building, multi-site initiative.

Rationale

1. Low levels in children's reading and writing as shown by multiple reports and studies.

2. Lack of focus on early literacy in policy, teacher education programmes and practice.

3. Need for knowledge building in the domain of early literacy and language.

4. Need for networking.

5. The distinctive nature of early literacy – overlapping with, yet distinct from, early childhood education and early language development.

Objectives

1. Teaching – to strengthen teaching programmes in early language and literacy at multiple levels.

2. Research – to conduct new research in early language and literacy in India; and to disseminate knowledge that is already available. Three research projects undertaken at the time were described.

3. Advocacy – to provide visibility and leadership to work in early language and literacy by engaging in national level dialogues with scholars, policy-makers and other professionals working in allied areas. ELI has an active blog that runs thematic discussions through blog posts from various stakeholders in the field of language and literacy. They also plan to offer short-term workshops for practitioners. They hope to work with state governments and strengthen policy-making efforts at the national and state levels.

For more information, visit: eli.tiss.edu.

Kahani Mela by Organisation of Early Literacy and Promotion (OELP)

Keerti Jayaram (OELP)

Ms. Keerti Jayaram played a short video clip presenting the OELP initiative Kahani Mela. The Kahani Melas are ongoing process-oriented engagements involving children and their communities through books and stories. The key motivation is to connect children with the world of books by engaging them in various activities and tasks, as well as to engage the communities in their children's journey to conventional literacy. The events are organised with large scale community-based support, involving youth, children and the elderly from the participating villages.

The melas took several months to prepare, during which time students were encouraged to learn about the history of their village and gather local village stories from their elders. These activities were divided into three interactive sections: Padho (read); Dekho (see); and Karo (do). In the Padho section, a small library was created so that children and adults could come and read books together; the Dekho section included a display of material made by students, like storyboards, three dimensional storybooks, upcycling, puppets, a map of the village, history of the village, and interactive charts; and in the Karo section, children and youth could come and engage in various interesting activities like drawing, painting, puzzle solving, and story making with words.

The final event also included role play, puppet shows, poem recitation, and various other activities and performances.

The Kahani Mela is a recurring event which engages children and the community during the summer.

Understanding Student Learning

Session 6: Learning to Read and Write

Chair: Anjali Noronha, Eklavya **Discussant:** Maxine Berntsen, TISS, Hyderabad

(L to R) Ms. Aparajita Bhargarh Chaudhary, Dr. Malavika Rai, Dr. Sunita Singh, Dr. Sonika Kaushik, Dr. Maxine Bernsten, Ms. Anjali Noronha

Children's Engagement with Environmental Print in Preschool Settings

Sonika Kaushik, NCERT

D r. Sonika Kaushik presented a study she conducted at three different preschools settings: an anganwadi, a private play school, and the nursery section of a state-run school. The study aimed at understanding how children engaged with the print available to them in their immediate environment -- at home, or at school. The Emergent Literacy framework was used for this study, which explains the development of literacy in young children, and highlights the significance of the qualitatively different nature of children's emergent literacy. It also brings attention to the informal encounters children have with the print available in their respective socio-cultural environments.

The study examined responses of preschool children to specific environmental print items in their schools, homes, neighbourhoods. The findings from the anganwadi context was not shared in the presentation as the sample was very small.

The first task involved presenting children with in-context print – packets of items that they may find on a day-to-day basis in their immediate environment (such as a pack of Maggi). When asked to speak about what was presented to them, children from different settings shared personal narratives related to these products in somewhat different ways.

The second task involved getting children's responses to print presented in an "out-of-context" manner. In this scenario, children from the government school nursery shared personal narratives and also attached meaning to the print. In contrast, children from the private playschool (which used the Montessori method), tried to decode the print by using the letter-sound correspondences that they were accustomed to.

The third task required students to respond to handwritten print. Children from the government school looked at the functional aspect of print, whereas children from the private preschool related the print to sounds.

Data suggest that young children may be more attracted to the logo than the print. Children related to their experiences at school, but these experiences varied. The findings also suggest the importance of out-of-school experiences that young children have with literacy. Finally, how print was handled within the school context appeared to play a role in how children responded to it.

Nature of Reading-Writing Relationships in a Primary Grade

Malvika Rai, Independent Consultant

Writing is an important skill that children learn in school. It is an important medium for constructing knowledge and making sense of the world. It is also a very complex process. We know very little about the teaching and learning of composition in Indian schools. In her presentation, Dr. Malvika Rai described a study conducted to understand the nature of the reading-writing relationship, and facilitative factors that would enable a stronger relationship between the two. The study contrasted how fifth graders studying in government schools negotiated writing in a "traditional" and a "process-based" writing classroom.

The theoretical framework used for the study was that of process writing, focusing in particular on the reading-writing relationships.

The study used qualitative methods. Children in the traditional and process-based classrooms were observed over a period of five months, during their Hindi class. In the traditional classroom, children had limited reading and writing experiences. They seemed to have no vision of writing as a compositional process, and were not aware of the cognitive processes it involved. In contrast, in the process-based classroom, reading inspired children to write and explore further. Children also displayed a metacognitive awareness of the processes involved with writing, and made conscious choices to borrow from what they were reading, which is referred to as "literary borrowing". Reading was shown to have a positive influence on children's writing, broadening the child's experiences and perspective, while also building a repertoire of other key skills required for successful writing.

Dr. Rai concluded that, in an enabling context, children's composing processes show strong reading-writing connections. It also shows that literature plays an important role in children's writing. Finally, the teacher's conception of writing impacts how children explore writing and see its relationship to reading.

Examining the Continuum of Literacy
Aparajita Bhargarh Chaudhary and **Sunita Singh**, AUD

The presenters discussed the Indian Early Childhood Education Impact Study (IECEI, 2017) in this presentation. The study probed learning levels among children with a specific focus on language and literacy. It also tried to understand the impact of school-readiness on early grade learning, and the factors that facilitate learning between the age of 4 and 8 years. Three states - Rajasthan, Assam and Telangana - were selected for the study, which adopted a mixed method research design and was conducted in three stages.

During the first stage, a survey was conducted over 306 villages, 1,591 preschool centres and 11,225 children to get a district level estimate of children's preschool and school participation between the ages of 4 and 8 years. Children's school-readiness levels at ages 4 and 5 years and children's early grade learning outcomes from ages 6 to 8 years were also studied.

In the second stage, a quasi-experimental method was employed to study quality variations among Early Childhood Education (ECE) provisions across three sectors namely public, private and voluntary sectors. This was done to identify programme elements that influence children's school readiness and subsequent early grade outcomes.

The third stage involved conducting in-depth case studies of preschool programmes considered examples of 'good practice' and to provide a more nuanced assessment of quality of such programmes. A total of nine case studies were conducted across states in India.

Analyses of the quality of programmes attended by children suggested that the maximum time was spent in teaching the "3 Rs" -- Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Rote learning characterised the mode of pedagogy in both the anganwadis and private preschools. However, this was not the case in selected innovative programmes.

School-readiness activities were least prevalent in private schools in comparison to anganwadis and innovative programmes. Instances were observed within the sample, where there was no outdoor play or activities in the private school or anganwadis. Storytelling was observed only at certain anganwadis, and at a very minimal level. The quantum of formal academic teaching increased in subsequent primary grades from 25% to 61%.

Children were assessed on spatial concepts, pre-number tasks, matching numbers, pattern completion, picture description, phonemic awareness and sequential thinking. The assessment results showed that children were better at spatial concepts, following instructions and pattern making. They performed poorly in phonological awareness and sentence construction. The study also reported that children were socio-emotionally ready for school, but overall cognitive and early literacy levels were found to be low. Children who attended well-known innovative programme/practice centres were found to perform better in aspects like phonemic awareness and sequential thinking than children who attended other programmes. It was established that good curriculum and classroom experience can expedite learning. Further, children with higher school-readiness scored better on the tasks given during the primary school years.

Children who engaged with a curriculum that focused on cognitive aspects, experiential practices and those that laid emphasis on conceptual understanding scored high on school readiness. Some of the other factors like physical infrastructure, availability and use of play and learning material, print rich environment in the class, classroom planning and management, teaching and learning process, teacher behaviour are also significant for better learning levels. Children's age, mother's education levels, household affluence and early learning environment significantly influenced children's school-readiness levels.

Session 6: Chair's Remarks

Ms. Anjali Noronha stated that although the learnings from the IECEI were commonsensical, the fact that it shows data from three states adds to its credibility. The need for school readiness has to be given impetus. There is also a need to improve the quality of experiences that children have in schools to help develop cognitive-readiness, as well.

Discussion

1. What exactly do you mean by "school-readiness"? Do children have to be made ready as if they are lacking something? In reading, we have moved away from a readiness concept to an emergent literacy concept. Are there undertones of "reading-readiness" in your description?

The presenters responded that the idea was to gauge the comfort level of the child with the school and the teacher. Can they relate to the school? This was further applied to their motivation to complete tasks. Were they willing to complete tasks that were given to them? To understand school-readiness, parents were given hypothetical questions around situations and were asked to respond according to how they thought their child would respond in that situation. This was not directly related to the idea of reading readiness or any of its connotations.

2. Is there generalisation across the observation from three different states? Was there analysis specific to schools done? Or are you looking at homogenous schools?

There were variations across schools and states as well. They were also social differences, but caste differences did not matter, except in Rajasthan. Analysis specific to schools was not done, except to identify excellent schools and to conduct case-studies on them. Schools were also analysed based on whether they belonged to government-sector, private-sector, or innovative programmes.

3. What is the sample size of your study? Were these the typical responses? What is the background of the children?

In response, Ms. Chaudhary said, yes, these were the typical responses. The sample size included children from three different settings. Each setting had around 27 children. But, the task was conducted with children whose parents allowed the researcher to visit their homes, so she could make sense of the kind print that was there around the child. The sampling was definitely influenced by that factor.

Way Forward – Presentation and Discussion

Shailaja Menon and Sunita Singh

Some major themes of the conference were reiterated by the moderators. These included the necessity for the contextual understanding of early language and literacy, the need to understand the complex multilingual contexts in which Indian children become literate, the need to go beyond the binaries of oracy and literacy, emergent literacy, and the importance of research. The moderators then opened up the session for inputs and suggestions from the audience, which are summarized here.

1. *Strengthening ties between research and policy.* Recommendations based on these conversations need to be made to the National Education Policy, 2016. Advocacy with NCERT needs to be made at their annual conferences. The possibility of writing a policy brief after the conference was raised, so that people working with policy makers across the country could use the document, and modify it to suit their contexts and purposes.

2. *Assessment of language and literacy learning.* More work on assessment needs to be done. A National Assessment exercise was carried out in November 2015, where the focus was largely on learning outcomes. In

order to avoid that, educators need to come up with more effective and valid ways to assess learning environments.

3. *Resource pool.* It was suggested that organisations like the Early Literacy Initiative (ELI) create a web database of people working in the domain of early language and literacy.

4. *Focusing on middle, upper-middle class children.* Almost all the research presented in the conference deals with children from low literacy homes or low socio-economic backgrounds. Theoretically, there should be more studies dealing also with children that come from schools and backgrounds that are likely to acquire literacy.

5. *Space for networking at conferences.* Since the conference was tightly packed with panel discussions and paper presentations, it did leave not much time for informal discussions and networking. There is a need for more break-out sessions, poster sessions, and the like in such conferences.

6. *Call for papers, invitation to policy makers.* There is a need to have participation from not just educators and field workers at such venues, but also from policy makers. In addition, instead of having only invited papers, there could be broader participation if there is a call for papers.

7. *Discussion of good practices.* More discussion and documentation of good literacy/language teaching/learning practices is needed from Indian contexts.

8. *Funds for research.* Government bodies such as Niti Ayog, MHRD, and more importantly those at the state level need to be liasoned with, in order to make funds available for research and policy intervention.

NOTES