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**Inculcating Awareness for Sustainable Development in Early Years through Dynamic Pedagogy**

* *Have you ever wondered what and how young children should really learn in preschool?*
* *Have you ever been questioned about your philosophy and pedagogy of teaching young children and felt unable to give a clear answer? How dynamic and appropriate it is?*
* *Do the teachers really follow child centered dynamic pedagogy and practices in their class?*
* *How ECE contributing to a sustainable society?*

If we really want the answers to the above questions then we can understand that there is a need for a more balanced, high quality, dynamic and integrated early childhood pedagogy.

*This paper discusses that young children in preschool are curious and deeply interested in their immediate surroundings and they are capable learners of content knowledge. In order to be responsive to young children’s prior experiences, knowledge, the author discuss as that children’s previous experiences, knowledge and the subject content knowledge of practitioners i.e. understanding how young children develop and learn--- both require more explicit attention in order to extend children’s learning in preschools. The importance and understanding of high quality pedagogy in early childhood education and teachers’ professional development to reach the sustainable development goals are the main components that are drawn in this paper. High quality early childhood education plays an important part in building a sustainable society because it is considered as a first stage in fostering a sustainable lifestyle, where children gradually develop balanced and holistic personality. Early years education is particularly more important for young children who are from marginalised and disadvantaged sections of the society. This paper is an attempt to outline some developmentally appropriate pedagogies and practices for young children’s sustainable education and the challenges in undeveloped places.*

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1. **RATIONALE FOR HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PEDAGOGY**

There is a growing awareness towards recognising and investing in early childhood education. Thinking for ECE originates from the pioneering work of scholars and philanthropists such as Rousseau, Froebel and Pestalozzi who identified from as early as the 18th century that young children require a specialised form of education and care (McMillan, 2008). In 1960s, such thinking came to the forefront, where ECE appeared to be an increased interest and understanding of the importance of and need for early childhood education and care for young children. Since then there has been considerable growth of research both at national and international level on the importance, ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­need and effectiveness of quality early childhood provision for young children not only in terms of developmental gains and improvements in later school success, but also for society in terms of economic growth. Researches also suggest that the nature of the stimulating , enabling learning environment to which the children are exposed during the first 6 years of their life play a very important role, thus prioritising the importance of the high quality early childhood educational experiences for *all* young children. The latest neuroscience researches also emphasise that the first five years are the critical years and that these are the impressionable years for whatever the young children learn during these years are deeply embedded and it become almost difficult to change or repair in later years.

*Riley (2007) indicates that recent research in the neuroscience field has highlighted three important findings that may influence thinking about education in the Early Years, namely:*

* *The development of the number of synapses between neurons increases rapidly in early childhood;*
* *there are ‘critical periods’ when sensory and motor systems in the brain require experience for maximum development; and*
* *the more enriched and intricate the learning environment, the greater the number of synapses will form.*

1. **Challenges faced by practitioners in diverse early classroom in developing quality and appropriate pedagogy?**
   * Getting help from other people such as parents and other members of the community;
   * Lack of time for preparing visual resources, tactile material, sign language;
   * Not knowing the needs of young children;
   * Not knowing if what you are doing is right or not;
   * Not knowing every language that is represented in the classroom;
   * Limited teacher confidence about subject knowledge or lack of subject knowledge (it may limit learning and teaching opportunities as well as children’s enquiry based learning).Lack of appropriate balance between allowing children to express through play (for social and emotional benefits) and providing enough guided play based activities and challenge in the process to ensure genuine progression of children’s cognitive skills.
   * Lack of proficiency in implementing REAL play based developmentally curriculum;
   * Lack of opportunities and platform to discuss appropriate pedagogies with other teachers and specialists. (**Giving teachers time for dialogue to discuss approaches to good pedagogy in promoting diversity and equity is an essential ingredient for quality pedagogy).**
   * Lack of in-service courses / workshops on quality pedagogies in ECE;

**III. Whether we are providing and using appropriate pedagogical approach required to ensure the holistic or all round development of young children-----**

Research evidence indicates that purposeful teaching and learning occurs when teachers’ subject knowledge contributes to appropriate pedagogical strategies used during authentic learning experiences as children try to make sense of their experiences with the people, places and things in the world around them. There is an increased focus on subject content and teaching respectively in early childhood education, emphasising its compatibility with a play-based pedagogy. But the number of the preschools following this is very meager. Most of the ECE centers and preschools develop their own curriculum and pedagogical approach, but how far that is appropriate for young children is a big question. ***In the name of play way method, preschools are replacing free play with table activities where children are busy only completing the worksheets/ workbooks.***

*Knowledge of subject content in early childhood education for practitioners is non –negotiable. In addition to subject knowledge, understanding young children --- how they work, manipulate with learning material; what they talk in small groups with their peers ; how they react in varied situations; what vocabulary they use; are they involved, listen to story---- what questions do they ask;*

*And what and how, we as educators encourage and extend their thinking or do we just provide them abstract worksheets for filling in colour or copying? Do practitioners give their children a fear free atmosphere where they have freedom to explore, observe, solve problems, ask questions and so on?* When, and how often, teachers provide actual play based learning sessions in their ECE centers? How often they use specified resources; what interest or activity areas they have in their centers; are all areas going well; what are the areas that are not going well need and further improvement and development.

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| All those who are concerned with young children’s education need to provide age and developmentally appropriate experiences to make learning as equal as we can, especially for those children who lack certain experiences. |

**IV. What should we do?**

**IV(a). Effective pedagogy in early classrooms:-**

The pedagogical approach must ensure provision of free play within safe and set limits where children’s curiosity is maintained so that they can explore, discover and find their own answers. Teachers should act as a guide and facilitator and engage in a process of construction. Teachers intervene whenever required and encourage children to investigate further as a scaffolding process. Good practice in ECE integrates indigenous knowledge sustainable living practices, basic human rights and learning through hands on experiences.

**IV (b). Scaffolding as a teaching strategy:-**

The most important pedagogical strategies to encourage play where teachers become co-constructers in children’s learning and get involved in the scaffolding are:

‘Play based free and instructive activities and meaning interactions’.

The most effective teachers uses a variety of and mix of appropriate pedagogic strategies such as modeling, questioning, explaining, demonstrating and scaffolding in an effort to encourage and engage children in meaningful play based learning activities , games and experiences. Participating in children’s emotions is another very important pedagogy for example, “fun or anxiety can make an important contribution to their learning dispositions such as positive self-esteem, confidence and persistence. The pedagogical interventions and engagements such as emotional engagement, maintain an eye –contact with every child, touch, responsive to individual children, warmth, non-verbal gestures, polite and affectionate language all have an important role to play in supporting children’s learning; how the practitioners create a stimulating environment in the classroom----asking open-ended questions( what would happen if… ?) joining children’s play (continuously observing to see when the intervention is required), giving freedom to ask questions and queries, allowing children sufficient time to complete their activities and guiding them throughout in ECE center can all impact significantly on a range of young children’s competencies. In language learning for example when the children are engaged in looking at picture book—turning pages—teachers enter for deliberate scaffolding , giving a context to children for discussion, extending vocabulary, sentence structures, etc. Scaffolding can be used in extending children’s competence in all the learning areas for example ask a child to describe her observations ( about a plant with a flower which the child is looking at from the window)--- giving opportunities for explaining . Apart from scaffolding learning experiences teachers need to help children build connections and weave with their previous learning experiences. Early childhood teachers need confidence in their subject /discipline knowledge and an understanding of pedagogical strategies to work with young children’s knowledge, needs and interests. When the teachers know their discipline thoroughly they can extend children’s knowledge within a play-based emotionally supportive and enabling environment. When teachers have knowledge of child development they feel more confident about integrating play based activities in the ECE curriculum, aware of the gaps in programme and more open to children’s performances, interests, ideas, contributions, and questions. The teachers should not simply allow children to play in isolation; but rather they use play as planning process. Wherever required teachers need to do specific interactions to support children’s play through the use of play scenarios *for example while playing Doctor –Patient, teacher may enter like a nurse with a note pad and a pen to write prescription for the patient and so on.*

Peers are equally important for scaffolding for example when children are engaged in small group activities----block building, dramatisation, dolls play, circle time, language games, helping and sharing with each other and so on.

**V. Need for professional development**

Professional development may be an essential strategy to develop teachers’ ability to construct knowledge with children that stresses subject content and discipline learning.

The teachers’ professional knowledge of subjects i.e. knowledge of early childhood education and child development can assist them to construct knowledge with children in ways that relate meaningfully to children’s prior knowledge and experience. The critical importance of teachers having sufficient depth of child development and ECE in order to respond meaningfully to and extend children’s interests and inquiries is highlighted. It is an important component of effective early childhood pedagogy and it is just as important in the early years as in later stages of education.

Subject/ content knowledge, , pedagogical approaches and appropriate curriculum for early childhood education is strongly recommended so that teachers can teach confidently and bring quality within holistic, integrated, early childhood contexts.

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| **Quality Pedagogical approach in early classes is viewed like this:-**   * **ECE Center:- a natural environment free from fear and barriers**   Arranging outdoor and indoor environment:- Equal pedagogical importance to outdoor and indoor play activities;   * **Curriculum development**:- Balanced and Flexible with lots of opportunities for free play where teachers facilitate and scaffold children’s learning; * **Focus of programme:-** Child as a whole—activities planned for all five domains * **Pedagogical strategies:-** *ALL* children learn together; allowing for asking questions, exploration and observation; learning through free play and play based activities and through teacher’s scaffolding; * **Language development and emergent literacy :- emphasis on promoting language and literacy in all five domains and in all interest areas;** * **Observing , knowing and Assessing children**:- Assessment is informal based on developmental goals; process –oriented learning where final product is not so important; * **Overall Quality** :- Play based age and developmentally appropriate child centered curriculum that focus on classroom processes, performance rather than child assessment----- where teachers work as a team so that every child flourish;   **Teachers need to provide a balance between the opportunities provided for children to benefit from teacher-initiated group work and the provision of freely chosen yet partially instructive play activities.** |

**Conclusion**

To conclude, Play based age and developmentally appropriate curriculum follows an integrated pedagogical approach that suggests merging of teacher and child initiated experiences; actively engaged children; activities based on children’s interests and needs with teacher’s strategic support. We all who are working for and concerned about young children should try to increase their curiosity, enthusiasm, and problem-solving skills so that they will be capable of making effective use of their knowledge to solve new problems of sustainability. The attitude towards early childhood education has changed rapidly in recent years but still we have to go miles further. All passionate teachers know that ECE is an important stage. Sustainability is a prerequisite and every child in India should be entitled to quality preschool education. The vision of RTE Act that every child should get quality elementary education will be realised only through strong foundations of Early Childhood Education.

*So, in today’s 21 century, are we ready to develop pedagogy according to children’s every changing needs and interests? We need to improve the overall quality and effectiveness of early childhood pedagogy.*

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