



## Training the Teacher

**Dr. Geetika Verma**, writes on the need for building teacher capacity around language and literacy needs of the most marginalized

One of the key objectives of education is the achievement of all goals that depend upon the learner's ability to read, write and comprehend.

The Indian Census (2011) shows that India has made dramatic strides in this regard, the national literacy rate increased from a mere 18.33% in 1951, to over 74% in the 2011 census.

The concern is the limited conception of literacy either as ability to sign one's name or to learn to decode the script at a basic level.

A second set of concerns includes educational outcomes that suggest a deep underlying problem with curriculum, pedagogy and teacher education.

ASER data (2012-13) suggests that 54% of the students surveyed were unable to decode a second-grade text in fifth-grade. The findings of the Planning Commission Evaluation Report on the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2010) also indicated that only 42% at a second-grade level could read letters in their local/regional language script.

Despite the limitations of these large-scale

studies, their results suggest that many children in India are struggling to acquire even the most basic proficiency with reading and writing.

When children enter school, the general expectation is they will learn to read and write. When several children are not able to do even after spending quite a few years in school, the reasons are sometimes sought in the child and the child's background.

There is rarely a question on whether teacher's knowledge, beliefs, approaches and strategies for teaching literacy is contributing to these dismal educational outcomes.

The learning outcomes are tip of the ice berg; they suggest a deep-rooted apathy, which are far more ingrained in the way we plan and prepare our teachers, this includes how much importance we place on training, provisioning, incentivizing, motivating teachers who form the backbone of the entire teaching learning.

There is a need to introspect whether teacher development process sensitizes and equips



teachers in terms of – understanding the criticality of growth and development in early years and the role of teacher in this critical stage, sensitivity around different kinds of learner and their needs (first generation learners, children from most marginalized setting), equipping teachers to design inclusive teaching practices that works simultaneously on different components of literacy (oral development, phonemics, phonics, comprehension, reading fluency), understanding assessment as a learning tools, creating teaching learning resources that aligns with learners need, age, level, language, culture and interest.

Early literacy teacher development approaches should zero on the following reality to be able to do justice to every learner who enters the schooling system with an aspiration to move higher up in life:

- a) Given a large proportion of Indian children who grow up in non-print environments, teacher development initiatives should enable teachers to appreciate and build oral language skills as a foundation block to build further blocks of reading and writing. There is a need to build bridges, create literacy resources that banks on oral repository of a child
- b) Early literacy approaches and pedagogy should foster the child's ability to use mother tongue hence build a strong foundation for a child to acquire conceptual constructs. This would form the basis for further learning, comprehension, cognition, language and literacy development.
- c) Multilingualism being an innate characteristic of Indian society, Early literacy approaches needs to tap and groom this as a resource in the classroom. The multilingual proficiency in learner needs to be enhanced through a pedagogy that values different cultures, identity, uses peer learning methods, exposes children to different languages and reading resources, encourages children to reflect

understand the commonness and differences among different languages.

- d) Assessment processes in early years should foster acquisition of learning continuum that leads to reading and writing. The focus should be to help children learn and enhance their ability to manipulate different language skills that will enable them to express, negotiate, critique and create as empowered individuals. There is also a need to prepare and assess learner on their ability to read fluently and comprehend as an important bench mark at grade 2 level and fix accountability at different level to ensure this happens.
- e) There is a need to appreciate that teaching how to read and write is nuanced and requires purposive small steps that will lead them to. There is a considerable emphasis on creation of an environment where literacy and reading gets blended as part of the natural classroom, school environment.

On the other hand, considerable time, effort and specific learning experiences needs to be designed on working on individual milestones that leads towards reading, writing – this includes building understanding around sounds, manipulating sounds, building association between sounds and symbols, working independently on symbols, vocabulary building. Using all these blocks in a natural setting of conversation, storytelling, reading fosters comprehension and oral reading fluency in learner.

f) In the entire process of teaching reading at early stages, motivating the learner at every step and enjoying the process of learning becomes a prerequisite condition. The emphasis needs to shift from seeing or evaluating learning as right and wrong and to see how knowledge is being constructed by the learner will create difference in terms of self-esteem, confidence and reflective ability in the learner.

India as a democratic country needs teacher education system that is resilient, which can customize its teaching learning process to empower its diverse learners. This requires coming up with a teacher education framework that gives space, opportunity for its teachers to reflect, innovate and reach out to the most marginalized.

In the absence of recognizing this as a country we will be losing out generation of learners who fail to contribute purposively to themselves and society at large.

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