

My Page

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The rapid proliferation of play schools for the pre-primary years is a fairly recent phenomenon. It is the first step towards a formal system of education. The following description has been gleaned from observations made during a four-day visit to a play school in Delhi.

The play school was a part of a reputed chain of schools. The play school had three play groups and a section each of nursery and kindergarten. Each play group had 20-25 children, two teachers and an attendant. Even though the stay at the school was fairly short, it revealed a range of significant aspects of the curriculum and the classroom environment. I have discussed each of the themes as given below:

The classroom environment

For young children, making one of their earliest and independent forays into the school system, it was a warm and welcoming environment. The room for each group was vibrant and an inviting space. However, despite the smart effort of using wall length mirrors to lend the rooms a feel of spaciousness, the available space did not seem to do justice to the activities organized in the class. The furniture for children was suitable for their physical stature

and had interesting characters made on them. For instance, One of the pre-nursery groups had the character of Noddy painted on benches. I did not see chairs for teachers in any of the groups I observed.

The display boards in each of the observed groups were done up in an interesting manner. The themes for the boards seemed apt for the group, but the variety of themes could have been bewildering for the kids. For instance, the board in the pre-nursery group, under the broad title of 'creativity' displayed print and illustrations on the following themes: colours, numbers, things, weather and Janamashtami. Also, during those four days, I did not come by any children's work on display in any form.

The teachers were kind and affectionate in their dealings with children, though with a tendency to be louder than required. Even though the children seemed comfortable in approaching their teachers, the interaction, largely, flowed one-way, from teachers to children. The teachers seemed familiar with each child's needs and tendencies and acted promptly if a situation arose. Mostly, children were addressed as 'babies'. This conveys the assumptions the school/teachers have about children.

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The nature of curricular activities

The plan for each day was clearly chalked out. It was written on the board at the start of the day and guided the teachers as the day progressed. A day's plan for a play group was written as follows –

1. welcome
2. assembly
3. rhyme time
4. matching the cards
5. lunch
6. physical activities
 - i. jumping
 - ii. crawling like an ant
 - iii. hop like a rabbit/frog
 - iv. twist
 - v. free dance

This was clearly not meant for children and not shared with them. The classroom was always well-equipped with the material required on a particular day and if needed there was sharing between groups. The coordination between the two teachers was good and they took over from each

other whenever required.

The school at the time of observation had a festive mood and was gearing up for Diwali celebrations. Each group had some activity which carried the spirit of the festival. The pre-nursery groups, for instance, decorated diyas with assistance from teachers. The groups were also rehearsing for role-play on the Ramayana. Other activities planned for conceptual learning focused on recognition of numerals, matching print with associated graphic out of a set of four cards, recognizing a fruit depicted on a card and naming it in chorus, working on puzzles, identification of colours. Most of these activities were organized on a one-on-one basis and did not leave room for interaction between children. The group was kept engaged in one activity by a teacher, most of the time choral singing of rhymes while the other teacher drew out one child to do the activity on a concept with one child.

The description shared above is of a particular play school and does not represent the diversity of systems for the pre-primary years.