

Did You Know

Resource Package for Awareness in Early Childhood Care and Education

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The early years in a child's life are considered to be crucial as these are the formative years and, primarily, shape the child's personality, and hence, lead to overall development. Therefore, these are the years, in which the child needs enriching experience, environment, nutrition and care to develop holistically. Most countries define early childhood years as the period from birth till eight years of age. During these years, all that the child learns will have a lasting effect on the mind and body. Researches indicate that investment in early years determines the quality of a person's future life.

Countries across the world have realised the need for early childhood care and education. In India, various constitutional policies and provisions have been framed for providing quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to children up to the age of eight years. The 12th Five Year Plan acknowledges the importance of ECCE. The National Early Childhood

Care and Education Policy, 2013, considers the early years as critical for the child's overall development and lifelong learning.

But early childhood education is not recognised in the Right To Education (RTE) Act, 2009. However, the Act urges all States and Union Territories (UTs) to provide free preschool education to all children above the age of three years.

Many researches and field works have been conducted and documented to build a common understanding on ECCE, yet stakeholders need to be oriented to understand the significance of ECCE and the practices that need to be followed as part of the programme.

Various national and international organisations and other stakeholders discourage rote learning. They also decry building pressure on children at an early age for reading and writing. The UNICEF, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government

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of India, and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) have also developed a number of documents that emphasise on the need to develop an understanding of the basic concepts of ECCE and its main components. These encompass curriculum, teaching-learning process, preschool environment, and role of teacher and parent in the child's life. Educating stakeholders about the concepts of ECCE will help ensure appropriate implementation of ECCE practices.

The National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, 2013, has, primarily, been formulated because of gaps observed in planning and implementation of earlier programmes meant for children aged below three years. Parents, teachers, education planners, education administrators and the local community are not fully aware and lack understanding about ECCE practices. They have little knowledge on the significance of early years in a child's life and their role in promoting the child's holistic development. Therefore, it is important to build an understanding among various stakeholders about the first three years in the child's life. This is the stage where a lot of care is required for ensuring the child's holistic development and building the foundation for learning. All stakeholders, especially, parents as 'caregivers' can help in providing a conducive learning environment for their children at home, thereby, educating them. Hence, there is a

need to emphasise on the importance of 'care' and 'education' as major components of ECCE.

Various policies and provisions highlighted the need to bring quality in ECCE practices, which include, curriculum, play, learning environment, nutrition, health, immunisation and hygiene. The challenge was to create awareness among different stakeholders like education planners, education administrators, teachers, parents and community members about appropriate ECCE practices. Initially, three awareness generation programmes were organised in various communities, in which ECCE functionaries from 17 States and UTs participated. During the programme, some support material like banners, leaflets, films and posters were made and used. After the successful execution of the programme, the functionaries working in the area of ECCE (members of SCERTs, SIEs, DIETs, SSA offices and ICDS of different States and UTs) observed and proposed the need for a readymade resource package, which has all necessary material to support the programme.

For addressing this need, the Department of Elementary Education (DEE), NCERT, developed 'Resource Package for Awareness in Early Childhood Care and Education' to be presented as an exemplar to all stakeholders in order to spread sensitivity and awareness on appropriate ECCE practices that need to be adopted. It has been

developed in Hindi and English to cover a wider audience. The package has a combination of folk, print and electronic media like documentary film, audio spots, posters, banners, leaflets, puppets, scripts for puppetry, drama and role-play, etc. To generate the interest of the stakeholders, a musical instrument, *Dhapali*, is also provided in the package. The documentary film *Khula Akash* (Chandra, 2013), with subtitles in English, and audio spots *Srijansheel hai Baccha* (Chandra, 2012a) in Hindi, 'Child is Creative' (Chandra, 2015a) in English, *Bageeche ki Sair* (Chandra, 2012b) in Hindi and 'A Walk to the Garden' in English (Chandra, 2015b) have been developed by NCERT to communicate the significance of ECCE. These audio–video programmes are available on NCERT website and YouTube channel for wider reach.

These programmes highlight appropriate ECCE practices that need to be adopted, the importance and need of the curriculum, preschool environment, classroom management, teacher training, role of teachers and parents.



Figure 1: Puppet show

A 'manual' is also given with the resource package to guide the stakeholders, explaining each aspect of planning and the need for executing awareness programme in the community. The manual contains a description on the usage of the material enclosed in the package.

The package also contains three scripts — *Inhe panapne do*, *Khel-khel mein* and *Sonu ki Ulajhan* in Hindi; 'Let them Blossom', 'Learning through Play', 'Sonu and his Confusion' in English. These scripts aim to disseminate meaningful messages related to ECCE practices through drama and role-play in the community. Separate scripts are also provided for puppet shows. Along with the puppetry scripts, the package contains puppets of mother, father, girl and boy.

Towards the end of the manual, different annexures are given, which have a sample registration proforma, feedback form, material required and suggested programme schedule. The stakeholders are free to adapt it for planning and implementing similar programmes in their own States and UTs.

At the end of the programme, it is important to ascertain if ECCE practices have been implemented correctly among different stakeholders and the improvement they have brought in the learners. Feedback forms have been provided in the annexure to be filled in by the participants. The package is made of waterproof material and is packed in a waterproof bag.

In 2014-15, three awareness generation programmes were organised in different communities of Uttarakhand and Delhi. More than 500 community members and 60 functionaries from various institutions of 17 States participated in the programmes. The Resource Package for Awareness in ECCE was also tried during these programmes. The modifications made in the package are based on the feedback received. Since the resource package intends to create sensitivity among different

stakeholders, it is useful for them. The material provided in the package not only support the whole programme but also make it easy for the stakeholders to conduct the awareness programme in the community by effectively disseminating information and generating interest through different medium.

The price of the package (Hindi and English) is Rs 12,190. For procurement details, the Division of Educational Kits (DEK), NCERT, New Delhi, may be contacted.