

Case study — Early Literacy Project

Six-year-old Savita is studying in Class I of a school run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Like many of her fellow classmates, Savita had struggled with classroom reading and writing activities, being unable to recognise most alphabets. Fearing ridicule from her 'cleverer' friends, Savita would not even make an attempt.

However, of late, she has begun exuding a newly found confidence, along with her classmates.



They have started participating actively in reciting the alphabets, besides learning to look for words hidden within '*akshar*' (syllable) charts, which they subsequently read and write.

This transformation has been brought about through the **Early Literacy Project (ELP)**, which is working with classes I, II and III within select MCD-run schools in South-west Delhi. Most children within these schools belong to migrant families from different parts of India and bring with them varied linguistic, social and cultural traditions.

For young learners like Savita, the dialect spoken at home is often not the same as the Hindi used in the classroom, making the transition from home to school difficult. They also do not have any support for reading and writing at home, since their families come from oral traditions. Addressing the diverse needs of over 50 children of different ages within one classroom has been a challenge for the **ELP**.

The **ELP** believes that it is of primary importance for children to experience and understand that reading and writing have deep connections with their lived experiences and inner worlds, and could, in fact, be considered the written forms of spoken language.

Initially, a multi-pronged approach is adopted, based on the simultaneous introductions of letters, words and continuous text. These are graded based on carefully selected alpha-syllable groupings. *Akshar* charts based on these alpha-syllable groupings are displayed, and the children practice reading these charts and learn to combine different syllables to create words.

The **ELP's** approach for early readers aims to create easy, non-threatening, 'print rich' classroom environments in classes II and III, which enable children to actively engage with a variety of print material displayed on the classroom walls. Reading and writing activities are planned for using these materials.



The print rich class has been conceptualised as a buffer zone between the child's 'real world' and the world of 'school', where the child can feel free to interact with written text in a variety of natural ways, without being afraid of committing mistakes.



Bi-weekly story telling periods have been set up in all **ELP** classes, which, besides providing children with enjoyment, also give an opportunity to relate these stories with their personal narratives and real experiences.

As part of the sub-theme on 'Nurturing education as a field of study', the Trust supports research in critical areas within the field of education. Consequently, through its Small Grants programme, the Trust is supporting a study being conducted by a team of researchers on the **ELP**.

The objectives of the study are:

- To develop 'print rich' classroom learning environments and related methodologies through a process of sustained interventions in classroom learning materials and transactions in Hindi, with the active engagement of the regular teacher practitioners
- To assess the impact of a 'print rich' classroom culture by periodically monitoring the achievement levels of learners.

The study is being conducted in six government schools, and covers 1,200 students and 30 teachers of classes I to III. Given the paucity of research in the Indian context, the research and the insights gained through this study would be valuable in benchmarking observable behaviour of children from marginalised backgrounds studying in government schools, and fine tuning intervention strategies based on the outcomes.