

Background of the Early Literacy Project and recommendations based on evaluation of the project

The Early Literacy Project (ELP) has aimed to address the reading and writing processes of young children who come from sociocultural groups that typically underachieve in school, by attempting to develop culturally and linguistically meaningful teaching materials and methods through sustained and active engagement inside classrooms over an entire academic year. The understanding within ELP is that classroom based learning methods that evolve organically and are grounded in the classroom realities will be meaningful for the children who use them, since they will be sensitive to the linguistic and developmental needs of these children, and also to the social contexts that the children and teachers come from. ELP believes that engagement with these contextualised learning methodologies will lead to increased level of literacy of children from resource-poor and marginalised communities. ELP has attempted to take into account the vital connections that exist between the ability of children to read and write and the use of instructional texts and classroom materials that are written and read in ways that are familiar and meaningful to the children. Work within the ELP project has been taken up at two levels:

- a) For young beginning level readers and writers the methodologies focus on building the knowledge and skills required for phonological processing and for meaningful construction.
- b) For young readers and writers who are at a more advanced level the methodologies aim to strengthen reading and writing with understanding and develop a supportive print rich classroom environment to enhance and strengthen meaningful and purposeful reading and writing.

Objectives of ELP

1. To build the foundation competencies which are required for reading and writing with understanding in Hindi, in young learner classrooms for beginning level learners from neo-literate rural backgrounds.
2. To develop supportive literacy learning environments inside classrooms, along with methodologies that enhance reading and writing with understanding.
3. To facilitate a smooth transition from home to school for young beginning level literacy learners.
4. To motivate children from rural backgrounds to actively engage with reading and writing in ways that they find meaningful and engaging.

Based on the findings of the report on evaluation of ELP, the following recommendations are being made:

1. Based on the findings of this evaluation study, an evaluation of the existing programmes for early literacy within the Indian context may be undertaken for assessing the effectiveness of the cognitive and affective aspects of these existing programmes.
2. With the objective of implementing the RTE Act, the ELP methodologies be utilised within programmes for out of school children to facilitate and promote the effective mainstreaming of such children.
3. Since the ELP methodologies have evolved through a sustained engagement within classroom

inside government schools which cater to marginalised children both in the rural and urban context, and these methods have focused on facilitating a smooth home-school transition for such children, therefore these ELP approaches have direct implications for school programmes which cater to children from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds. The ELP methodologies may therefore be considered to strengthen foundations of reading and writing in existing school programmes within both the government and non government sectors, especially in schools which cater to children from marginalised communities in the Hindi belt.

4. Further research on children's natural language processes, reading and writing behaviours and thinking processes is required. Such research has important implications for promoting effective pedagogies which enhance meaningful school learning and build foundations for the processes of reading and writing. This is a gap area within the Indian context. It is essential to build deeper insights of children's learning behaviours based on research and to be able to critically evaluate existing programmes, as well as methods such as the ELP methods and further improve them. Such initiatives may also be promoted for enhancing reading and writing within other Indian languages which are not based on the Devanagari script, such as within tribal languages or languages within the southern states of India.
5. The major findings of this study along with the methodologies used within the ELP intervention may be shared with teachers, teacher educators, administrators and policy makers.