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Towards Joyful Learning

We can now heave a sigh of relief as the days when our children need not carry heavy bookloads to school are not far off. It is indeed a welcome news that the National Advisory Committee on reducing the bookload on children under the chairmanship of Prof. Yash pal has recommended administrative and legislative measures to reduce the burden of heavy school bag, home work and the over dose of learning inflicted on children. The committee has advocated a ban on admission tests and interviews in preschools.

It is heartening to note that the recommendations made by NCERT on improving preschool education, much before the appointment of the Advisory Committee on bookload have been reinforced by the present recommendations. Through seminars and workshops NCERT has been sensitizing school authorities and parents on the ill effects of the over dose of learning imposed on preschool children in the form of 3 R's - Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.

While many would think that the recommendations related to heavy school bag and home work are applicable to children of primary schools, no doubt, these have more implications for the children of preschools. In cities, one often witnesses the sight of tiny-tots walking with faltering steps unable to carry their heavy school bag. Neither are these children free from home work. It is no secret that in many a preschool, parents are tested for their competency to help their children in their home work and then only admission is granted to their children. Let us hope that the recommendations of the National Advisory Committee would be an eye-opener and that the heavy school bags and home work would vanish in preschools faster than in primary schools.

The problem of bookload brings to mind another scourge-the scourge of dress code-that has afflicted our preschool system. It is not uncommon that preschools compel children to wear shoes and tie which do not do them any good except giving them a snobbish idea that to wear shoes and tie is a symbol of elitism. Insightful parents do sense their children suffocating, though unconsciously, under the uniform made of synthetic fabrics (often supplied by the schools themselves), tight shoes and necktie. Don't you think that children are robbed of joyful learning not only outside their class room but inside the class room as well by these practices?

Music Experiences for Young Children

Dr. Suman Verma

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There are many reasons for including music in early childhood programs. Through music children experience pleasure, joy and creative expression. Music is one of the acceptable avenues for release and expression of feelings, moods, and emotions. Music allows for the development of desirable feelings and moods, and for the dissolving of undesirable feelings and moods. It can quiet or calm children, create listening moods, or soothe hurt and troubled feelings. Music has therapeutic value and, as a result, can also enhance the child's feelings of self-worth. Songs can be sung that include the child's name, or children can "author" words, phrases, or verses of songs. Children should be permitted to "put themselves" into music—to interpret music in their own style and to make up new words, new melodies and new movements. Many songs can also call attention to clothing worn by the child, or physical attributes possessed. Children can sing about their activities. They can name a locomotor skill or other activity and dramatize it while singing about it. The child's attention span can be increased through music: listening especially to songs that tell a story or give directions to follow provides excellent opportunity for careful concentration and attention. Language and concepts can be developed through music; new songs often introduce new words and concepts. Music skills such as rhythm, pitch, and tone are introduced to the young child. Opportunities for participation should always be available for individuals; however, the sense of belonging to, and functioning with, the group are always enhanced through music participation. Most of all, children basically

enjoy music. They enjoy the intricate tunes and melodies; the words, which often tell a story or capture their sense of humor; and the rhythms, which often create spontaneous body movements such as toe tapping, or hand clapping.

Music Goals

Since music should be integral part of the early childhood curriculum, its main objective for this age group is the child's enjoyment of music. Therefore emphasis should be on the child, not the teacher; the enjoyment, not the skill; the process, not the product. Musical experiences for both adults and children defy time limits, exacting goals, and expectations. Time for music is all the time! Through the music program in early childhood, the child should acquire the following benefits :

- Success, joy, and pleasure through participation
- Opportunities to experience music through a variety of activities, materials, instruments
- Acquaintance with a variety of types of music
- Awareness of contrasts in music, such as fast and slow, high and low, loud and soft
- Responsiveness to simple rhythms through locomotor movements, body movements such as clapping or the use of rhythm instruments
- Opportunity to sing a variety of songs

- * Ability to express the mood or feelings of a musical selection through body movements

The teacher should individualize these goals for the particular group, and also for the individual children within the group. The teacher must know each child's functioning level with regard to musical skills and interests.

The teacher's role is to show an interest in the spontaneous beginnings of music the child creates. There should be time available for music. Not only should music be planned for every day, but it should also be used spontaneously to support other parts of the curriculum, to create variety, and to provide transitions into activities. Care should be given to provide adequate space for musical activities, particularly during creative movements and expressions. Allow for freedom of expression, and also some freedom regarding participation. Young children should be free to become involved in music and to express their own feelings, moods, and interpretations. Criticism and demands for perfection in performance skills have no place as these early music beginnings are taking root. The teacher's role includes planning activities that will encourage music participation and expression, as well as providing materials and experiences that will stimulate creative thinking and action.

Since young children are highly motivated by praise, the teacher should further motivate musical competencies by praising individuals. Comments such as "Radha has found a different way to use the rhythm sticks" or "Ram has learned that you can even jump sideways" provide individual motivation.

An important part of the teacher's role is planning musical activities and experiences. These "teacher-initiated" activities include teaching songs and musical games, planning music activities that support and relate to curriculum areas, planning musical dramatizations, using rhythm activities and rhythm instruments, and encouraging creative body movements. However, the teacher should also take advantage of "child-initiated activities". The children may begin singing or chanting during play. They may sing familiar songs, make up their own tunes, or use new words to familiar melodies. A child may begin spontaneously humming or rhythmically moving; the teacher should take advantage of the opportunity to praise the effort and encourage the child to continue.

Teachers should make opportunities for increasing their own musical competencies. They should develop enthusiasm for the music program, since their own feelings will be caught by the children, rather than taught to them. Although teachers may not see themselves as musicians, music can still be a valuable part of the program. The teacher need not have an operatic voice, nor have had voice training, to teach songs to children. The teachers who enjoy music and sing with enthusiasm, regardless of ability or training, are the ones who receive the greatest response and involvement from children. Music is a universal language; one does not have to understand the terminology or musical mechanisms to enjoy it. It is most effectively approached as an experience to be lived, rather than a subject to be taught.

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION - A MODIFIED MONTESSORI APPROACH

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The implementation of any educational system ought to begin with the creation of an environment that protects the child from the difficult and dangerous obstacles that threaten him in the adult world.

— Maria Montessori

Background For Approach

International Grammar School, Sydney is a unique institution. It follows a bilingual approach from Preschool through to High school. Pre-school years being the foundation years, the bilingual approach is introduced at this early stage with languages for every child (English and a second language). All the second languages that are offered in the main school curriculum are offered at the Pre-school level. Individual attributes of "Montessori" and "Early childhood methods" are combined to develop a more effective Pre school system that forms a basis for subsequent learning and social adjustment within the main school curriculum.

Need

Existing teaching techniques have been restricted to approaches pertaining to a single method or philosophy. However, the need to design and implement a cosmopolitan program to enhance the multicultural and bilingual aspect of our school and cater for the varying needs of a modern society, have prompted me to integrate Montessori and Early childhood principles. The Pre-school classroom is brilliantly presented with all the Montessori didactic materials to pursue the "Montessori" path of education for the Pre-primary children. We had to blend in the second language, music, drama, and craft activities harmoniously. This congenial

compound is achieved by varying the Montessori approach to accommodate the Early childhood ideas and principles in all the sections of the classroom (detailed later under the "Method" itself).

Aims

1. To preserve the basic Montessori method of education as the foundation in the Pre-school years.
2. To modify it and bring in Early childhood principles to promote educational efficacy.
3. To attain the primary school requirements of bilingualism, drama, music and craft.
4. To maintain the hybrid method as totally child centred.
5. To encourage greater parental involvement.

Implementation

Modifications with Montessori method as basis:

The classroom is fully equipped with Montessori materials. These involve sequential sensory motor and intellectual exercises for reactive muscular and mental development. The structured curriculum of Montessori education is designed to allow the principles and objectives of early childhood education to develop the social, cultural and creative facets of the child.

This child development is prominently advocated by the Early Childhood philosophy and is integrated into the Montessori method of sensory, motor, and intellectual development, within a structured curriculum. The Montessori program usually expects children to attend all five days (half days which are later extended to five full days per week). However, at International Grammar School (IGS henceforth), per school enrollment incorporates a combination of sessional, and full time students. The enrollment is split into two, three, or five day weeks for each individual student. This has necessitated modified group programs to be tailor-made for each student depending on his/her attendance. The classroom is a conglomerate of thirty children of varying age groups (ages ranging from three to five years). The children are free to move around and choose any activity using Montessori equipment and pre-primary activities. It is imperative that the preparation of the environment and manipulation of the materials is done correctly to preserve the delicate balance which makes the system operate.

The classroom procedure follows a definite structure with sequential time blocks for the various activities. The children are guided initially (the degree of guidance depends on their readiness),

1. The morning session begins with activities involving Montessori materials. The following areas of education are covered :

a) Practical Life Exercises

b) Sensorial

c) Language

d) Arithmetic

e) Geography

a) **Practical Life Exercises**

They involve real life activities to teach the child self-care skills and care of the envi-

ronment. Apart from the typical Montessori activities like pouring, polishing, dressing frames etc., various educative puzzles, manipulative blocks, constructional kits, and art and craft activities are also kept in this section. This is the modification in the method that has been successfully added on to involve more children in various activities to discover themselves. In doing these daily house-keeping tasks like mopping, sweeping, polishing, cloth-washing etc. the child has ample scope to communicate in the second language with the language assistants. These activities help to promote the development of the child's fine motor skills, independence, and self-esteem.

b) **Sensorial Exercises**

All Montessori materials to involve the child in sensory training for perceptual efficiency, tactile manipulation, etc., are well supported by many supplementary exercises such as attribute blocks, sorting games etc., to make it more interesting. In the Montessori education, every topic follows isolation of quality and categorisation—for example, in the geometric cabinet, the child learns to identify one quality at a time—the shape and colour are constant but the size varies. But in the attribute blocks more than one quality varies. At IGS, being a modified Montessori, the "isolation" quality of the Montessori equipment makes the child master the environment but at the same time the absorbent mind of the child working with various other materials during the sensitive periods allows him to explore and manipulate the environment.

The Montessori sensorial apparatus are designed to suit individual and group activities—the design is materialised abstraction of generalised quality. The child perceives the quality. Certain constructive materials are given along with the Montessori materials within the prepared environment—these materials are changed around

from time to time to provide variety for the child. The materials allow for the child's creative variations stemming from their understanding of the environment. The child is able to explore the various qualities he/she has acquired while being aided by a creative mind to look for further variations without being destructive. This philosophy of creativity permeates throughout the classroom.

The notion of self discipline is integral to the Montessori philosophy—thus the child is able to develop freely, but within carefully placed guidelines. The guidelines (or limitations) are not directed at what they do, but how they do it. The sensorial sections of the classroom helps the staff to evaluate the child's control of movement, ability to follow a sequence etc. The modified system focuses on the objective of the material and expands the child's vocabulary. For instance, the presentation of the sensorial equipment focuses on that material's objective, but due to greater interaction in the classroom, the materials are usable with increased flexibility and there is more vocal interaction. Such vocal interaction is also carried out in the second language if a language teacher is involved. This produces a progression from restricted to refined knowledge.

The bilingual approach of the school is brilliantly achieved with the use of the sensorial section—the Montessori equipment is so conceptual that with the language used at this stage it helps the child to retrieve the concept and helps him to apply the language in his other daily routine—e.g. in our classroom we have always had prompt responses from children with appropriate words and phrases in their chosen second language as and when the lesson was done in English. So the language becomes second nature to the child. This gives the recognition by others of the child's knowledge and helps him in the overall development.

c) Language

Language activities are followed with Montessori materials as basis for learning to write and read e.g. tracing the sand paper alphabets with sounds (Foundation style as required by the Primary school), metal insets for pre-writing exercises etc., Many language cards are made available to the child covering various topics (all topics are isolated and categorised by subject matter). Picture cards with a blend of topics are prepared as an extension of vocabulary. The bilingual approach is achieved when the second language assistant uses the language cards while working with a small group of children in their chosen second language. All the various Montessori and non-Montessori materials are developed to satisfy the needs of the child bilingually in individual and group situations. These cards aid the children to develop their vocabulary, e.g. butterfly *la farfallina* (Italian), cat-*le chat* (French) etc. Similarly, the Montessori cards on parts of the flower, tree and leaf, and parts of the body, are simultaneously taught in English and in the second language every day. In all these activities the child has total freedom in the choice of language. The teacher merely guides the child without any pressure in the use of materials and language. The child is very absorbent during the sensitive period and the language development, mostly pertaining to spoken language is phenomenal. Every child in our pre-school starts the day pleasantly wishing the teachers in the various languages—*Bon jour*, *Bon journa*, *Ohio Good morning*, etc. It is a pleasure to obtain such results in a pre-school curriculum while adhering to the International School's philosophy.

d) Arithmetic

With the Montessori method the child is taught to understand the concept of numbers by handling "arithmetical aids" like the Number rods, Spindle box, Golden bead

material, etc. I have also introduced various related games and activities to promote greater responsiveness and stimulate interest in number work. Thus the basic concept is established in the child's mind by the materials and the games extend their knowledge in group work. Bilingualism also filters into this part of the system by introducing the children to the numbers in the second language. Continuous repetition acts as a reinforcement and strengthens the children's vocabulary. I personally experienced this one day when the children voluntarily began counting in Italian on our way to the nearby park. Although the Montessori materials are extensive, regular teaching methods like dice games, numerical dominoes, coloring number sheets, etc. are used to enhance the child's conceptual knowledge.

e) Geography

This subject is well covered by the Montessori map puzzles of the world and the continents. The children in the International schools already have a basic knowledge of the countries of the world. This multicultural aspect of the school is fully realised in our Geography section of the pre-school classroom - where the children have an opportunity to sit in a group with the native speakers of their second language and discuss the different countries, their people, culture food etc. It is well supported by the picture cards in the folders of the continents. This globalism is further enhanced and made more interesting by colouring the maps, flags, etc. When the syllabus is formulated for the term, one country from each continent is covered as the topic of the term and the children have the opportunity to expand their knowledge of that country.

Music

The entire group then proceeds to a twenty minute music session. This is conducted by specially trained teachers, who

teach music in our school from pre-school to high school classes. So there is good interaction between the child and the teacher from very early stages. This also enables the teacher to plan and program music lessons according to the needs of the children and the group. Our pre-schoolers have a very healthy, supportive and informative interaction with the music teacher, who follows the Orff-Schulwerk philosophy. There is a basic curriculum which includes speaking, singing, rhyme and rhythm, movement, listening, pitch and beat, music language etc. Since the most absorbent age group of children is between three to six years, the musical awareness and learning is at its peak in the pre-school years. Carl Orff's idea of music pedagogy involves the whole child. He wanted the music teachers to maintain the essence of his educational ideas with an emphasis on 'hands on' experience. This is strictly followed in our pre-school music sessions every day for twenty minutes. With these foundations well established, the children are ready to enter the more formal aspects of music at the primary school level. These music sessions at IGS are designed to be playful, enjoyable and simultaneously educative and purposeful. Music lessons develop the children's muscular co-ordination (needed to pick up the musical instruments and play them), perception (reading rhythm cards - Ta, To, Ta, Te, Ta etc.), voice modulation (pitch training), and flexibility (movement to music). During these music lessons, the class teacher or one of the assistants is also present in the group with the music teacher, to help the children feel at ease.

Second Language

It is presumed that by the time children reach school-going age they probably have a speaking vocabulary of several thousand words. Since IGS is committed to its bilingual approach and children come from different cultural backgrounds, it is a very challenging

and stimulating experience for the teacher to provide the child with an environment which will suit his/her needs. The language development is unique to each child. In our multicultural environment, the children are exposed to many languages from other children and teachers. The Second language lessons are so popular that we often come across children voluntarily expressing themselves in their second language. For example one of the Australian children (4 year-old) went home and asked her mother, 'mummy, what do you say for 'Dimanche' in English?'. When I do the 'days of the week' in English (in group time) the children promptly respond with equivalent words in their second languages (e.g. Lundi, Mardi etc.). In fact, their eagerness in learning languages extends to others like Tamil, Spanish etc. (in their group lessons) when the topic of people of the world and their languages are covered. The second language sessions are held every day for half an hour with small groups of children to learn the language chosen by the children. Apart from these lessons, the children are 'spoken to' by the assistants in the pre-school classroom (who are native speakers of that language and who take the second language lessons) through out the day. Speaking, is not only a basic means of language development but it also consolidates their language learning. This is achieved at the earliest stage at IGS pre-school in all areas of learning. The second language is used in short trips outside in picture reading, story telling craft activity, cooking etc. The bilingual aspect is thus evident in all areas of learning and at all times in our pre-school.

Circle Time

This is a group activity with programmed topics (weekly program). This is a twenty minute session following the Montessori activities in the morning and another twenty minute session following sleep/play time in the afternoon. This is programmed by the teacher covering topics as per the needs of the children.

- a) Montessori didactic materials need to be presented to check and evaluate whether the children's understanding of the same are proper.
- b) Topics in Science-simple experiments in air, water etc., germination of seeds, life-cycle of butterfly etc., books on various topics like reptiles, insects, mammals etc.,
- c) Geography - The 'Montessori' geography map puzzles of the world and the continents, land and water forms, etc all of which are covered in thorough detail.
- d) Grace and courtesy lessons, classroom routine and manners are periodically re-inforced.
- e) Language and Arithmetic topics-these are programmed according to the level of the children in the group (e.g. a group of older children doing the 'Teens board', and the group of younger children doing the numerals and concepts 1-5 in Arithmetic).
- f) The afternoon session of twenty minutes involves the active participation of the children with story telling, drama, action songs and finger play, show and tell, balancing and walking on the line, silence game (a 'Montessori' activity) etc.

Thus, teacher and child centered curriculum has been simultaneously achieved.

Out-door-Play

Montessori approach has a vast scope for the development of fine-motor skills in a child. The Early childhood principle of 'play' as an essential ingredient in pre-school is introduced in IGS for the children to fulfill their gross-motor development with equipment appropriate to a particular age. Activities include throwing, balancing, pushing, climbing, etc. The equipment encourages the children to share

and co-operate. They also learn to increase their social skills, language, and vocabulary. During this time, creativity, playacting (involving families, hospitals, etc) and interaction with their peers and adults are the focus of their activities. At IGS we also aim to fulfill the physical requirements of the children by providing playground. They enjoy their outdoor play with sand and water and thrive on outdoor equipment such as balancing boards, climbing frames, blocks etc, which are designed to improve their physical co-ordination. The outdoor activities are specifically structured to complement all the knowledge established in the classroom. During play time, the second languages that are learnt in the classroom become 'expressive, and at this stage the playground almost instantly is transformed to a "miniature world" of its own.

Sleep Time

The post-lunch session incorporates an hour of sleep time. This is not compulsory for children who choose to pursue other activities such as outdoor play, reading, or 'quiet time'. Sleep time is foreign to the Montessori way of education, but is necessary to help the children cope with the long, and demanding day. In pure Montessori schools, the children only stay for three hours (three year olds). An additional two hours are added when the children are over the age of four (four and a half year olds). This smooth transition means that there is no need for sleep time as the children are energetic throughout their school day. Modern society places a lot of pressure on the education system as parents require the school to cater for the children for the entire working day-this is only possible if the children are given an opportunity to rest. By making the sleep time non-compulsory, we have preserved the Montessori philosophy of not forcing the child into something he/she is not at ease with. The children take a comforter or book and go to sleep on their

own and are continually supervised by the teacher during this period

Craft Activities

There are various art and craft activities available for the children during the morning session. They are free to choose from coloring, pasting, cutting, serving, etc. In addition to this, there are another twenty minutes to half-an-hour in the afternoon (after sleep time) devoted to planned craft activities. Often these planned activities are an extension of the material covered in the morning-e.g if morning session was Australian geography, the afternoon craft session may involve activities such as coloring in the Australian map or pictures of places of interest in Sydney, etc. Programs such as 'Origami', play dough and clay modelling are specifically aimed at promoting motor skills. The Children are also allowed to choose their own craft activity(s) in addition to the planned activity(s) to nurture creativity. Once a week this session is used for playacting, story-telling and puppet shows to enhance the children's skills in language and public speaking. By scheduling this session at the end of their day, I have found that the children finish on a very cheerful and satisfied note.

In traditional Montessori schools, parental involvement had always been restricted to activities such as fund raising and management. At IGS the parents involvement extends to a close interaction with staff and children. The parents are encouraged to stay with recently enrolled children to help them settle into the new environment. Parents who are skilled in a particular activity (such as acting etc) which will further the children's education are encouraged to perform for the class e.g one of the parents at IGS who was a student of Early Childhood Education, demonstrated dramatic skills on the topic 'Trip to Space'. This particular demonstration helped us gain an insight into the Early Childhood approach

to drama. We also had aerobics classes set to South American music once a week conducted by another parent. On another occasion the children were taught the art of pasta making by one of our Italian parents. The parents often volunteer to accompany us on various excursions. This additional involvement by parents not only helps the children, but it also gives the parents an opportunity to appreciate the education system and gives them a better understanding of their child's development.

Feedback

The Primary teachers, parents, and the school management have given a positive response on the success of the system.

Conclusion

The system I have presented to you has been operational for the past three years at IGS. I have continuously monitored the feedback and made all necessary changes for fine tuning. IGS has been very pleased with the results as the system not only identifies the aims of a modern education system but also achieves them successfully.

Feeney et al explain: "*Curriculum needs to enable learners to make associations and perceive inter-relationships among disciplines of knowledge. Learning needs to be integrated and organized around themes of interest to learners. Most important, each person must be valued as an individual and his other uniqueness recognised and respected*".

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POINTS TO PONDER

The true teacher, then, is only following the lead given by the mind and nature of the child. But he is following that lead, while himself conscious of great intention. Intellectual power is not so much a special ability for this or that, as an irresistible pushing onwards of the mind towards the coordination of larger areas of experience in continually depending sequences. It is, in other words, energy, rather than a habit or trick, of thought. But this energy will only be awakened successfully by one who is conscious of striving to evoke it.

— Sister Nivedita

For, there is a psychological health as much as physical health; there is a beauty and harmony of the sensations, as much as a beauty of the body and its movements. As the child grows, in capacity and understanding, he should be taught, in the course of his education, to add aesthetic taste and refinement to power and precision. He must be shown, made to appreciate, taught to love beautiful, lofty, healthy and noble things, whether in nature or in human creation.

— The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry

CREATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FOR GENDER EQUITY*

Mrs. Manorama Jafa
New Delhi

In our country, the whole social structure is male oriented and I feel it is quite a challenge to create children's literature for gender equity. In fact the challenge is to create a new social order, to change the attitude of people towards the girls, particularly the attitudes of women themselves and to develop a sense of self assurance among the girls.

There is a view that the key to change in the status of women lies in the improvement in the literacy rate. The states of India with good female literacy record have more gender egalitarian cultures. According to the 5th educational survey brought out a couple of years ago by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), school enrolment of girls has increased considerably. In the decade 1981-1991, female literacy has increased by 10 per cent against 75 per cent for the male.

With the spread of literacy, there is going to be an increased demand for books for children, offering a great opportunity for creating new literature for gender equity. Let us take a look at the book scene for children. In 1983, India published 20,000 titles, of which only 500 (non text-books) were for children. Out of about 3000 publishers in India, only twelve are exclusively publishing for children.

The scene in India has been changing rapidly in recent years. It has broadened its range, increased in depth and has gained by the growing awareness about the world. Books for children are being published in different language groups and their numbers are increasing year by year.

The awareness among the parents that children need books has also been growing. In fact the largest single category of books sold at the last book fair at Delhi was books for children.

A large number of books continue to draw from the folktales and other traditional literature. Some good non-fiction and plays are being published. There are also collections of nursery rhymes and poetry. Above all original and creative fiction is also being published though the number is small.

There are two levels of children's literature in India. They are the traditional and the new and creative literature.

Traditional Literature

India is a land of tales and folktales. We have an ancient rural tradition, going back to the collection of stories called Panchatantra. In addition to this vast reservoir, we also have stories based on legends, mythology, religion, classics and history. Parents, teachers and librarians have been encouraging children to read these in the hope that this would make children familiar with the Indian tradition.

One of the most popular stories of Panchatantra is The Monkey and the Crocodile, where the crocodile husband hides his own desire to eat up the monkey and cleverly shifts the responsibility for killing the monkey to his wife, thus putting the blame on her. In almost all the Panchatantra stories females play a passive role and whenever they are active they are depicted as anti-heroines.

The mythological stories of Ramayana and Mahabharat were written from the view

* Paper presented in the 26th annual conference of IAPE at Madras

point of male heroes. The story of birth of Krishna tells about the preference of the boy over the girl. The neighbour's baby girl was sacrificed to keep baby Krishna alive. The tradition continues which has roots in ancient times. The story tellers too including the grand mothers of today, start their story, "Once there was a king..."

The stories associated with the festivals of Raksha bandhan and Bhai Dwij in north India also show that girls (the weaker sex) have to seek help from brothers when they are in distress.

The traditional literature which has its base in oral literature is male oriented and stories have been written from the view point of males. Women were made to play only a secondary role.

New and Creative Literature

Only in recent times we have begun to treat children as a separate entity requiring literature prepared specially for them. This new and creative literature has brought in new thoughts and concepts. But the superiority of the male is so deep rooted in the society that even those experimenting with modern concepts have not been able to get over the biased attitude towards girls.

I wanted to find out how the gender equity has been treated by Indian writers for children in recent years. For this I looked at about two hundred picture books in English language published in the last thirty years. I found only 13 books which had both a boy and a girl and were not discriminatory. Shobana is a picture book published in 1965 by children's Book Trust. This is written by Margaret Kidd and illustrated by Marilyn Hirsh. The others were 12 titles (picture books) from the National competition for writers of children's books organised by Children's Book Trust and UNICEF in 1985. The theme was intended to portray boys and girls as equals.

I also looked for the reaction of the target audience about the above mentioned 12 books, which were specially prepared with a boy and girl theme and also keeping gender equity in view. In conversation with book sellers, it came out that while these books were selling, the demand for both traditional stories and also the modern girl oriented stories was much greater.

The paucity of books falling under this criterion lead me to look for the reasons. There are three things a children's writer has to keep in mind while writing a child's story, namely, what children like, what they do not like and what should be given to them.

Writing a story with gender equity in mind and also keeping within the comprehension of readers of different age groups can create additional problems.

It is also a fact that an effective story is somebody's story. When writing a story for children, the writer has to keep in mind one character who should have heroic qualities, because the young reader wants to identify himself with the main character and not with the antihero.

The hero could either be a boy or a girl. But when a writer has to deal with a theme where a girl and a boy are given equal weight the focus of attention would be shared by two. Besides, I find that it is easier to write a girl oriented story than to write a story with a boy and girl. The girl oriented story can be more powerful than a story which focusses on both a boy and a girl.

Since boy and girl theme is a forced theme, the writers have to make a forced effort which may end up in a weak story-plot and in showing an aggressive attitude of girl character towards a boy. All the time the writer would have to maintain an exquisite balance between the hero and the heroine.

Any story requires a good beginning, engrossing middle leading to a climax and satisfying end. While evaluating the manuscripts on the theme I found many more challenges. While writing a story, the writers very often could not keep within the limit of the theme. The story must be liked by the reader since a writer only writes for a reader. Therefore his/her story should be read and appreciated. It should touch the heart and be remembered by the reader.

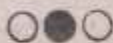
From the survey of literature and also from my own experience working with a large number of writers over the last 20 years in different places in India and also other countries, I would interpret gender equity as follows :

—We should give due recognition to the concept of equality between a girl and a boy, emphasising that equal opportunity should be given for their growth and development, giving them also freedom to choose their paths in life, to pursue their desired goal. At the same time there is

need to discourage any aggressive attitude towards each other.

—There is also need to encourage more girl oriented stories depicting her achievements and accomplishments. As stated earlier, a good story has to be a story of one person, written from his or her view points. It is very difficult to sustain two view points at the same time. In fact, I am unable to recall any story which has been written from the viewpoints of both a boy and a girl and would also leave an impact. In order to achieve this objective it is also necessary that the gender equity should be promoted through the behaviour of adults towards a boy and girl depicted in the stories for children.

Therefore, I would suggest that the gender equity should be promoted by encouraging girl oriented stories with a single viewpoint and publishing such stories in large numbers. Of course, we should expect that in their adulthood, they would promote gender equity in their homes and their lives.



Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

— Bible

The Childhood shows the man
as morning shows the day.

— Milton

The child is father of the man.

— Wordsworth

I do not love him because he is good,
but because he is my little child.

— Rabindranath Tagore

CHILDREN AND MATHEMATICS

Mrs. Indira Seshagiri Rao
Hyderabad

Mathematics is one of man's most important inventions. It is essential to the study of many fields of human activity and in this technological age, appears to be growing in importance daily.

The study of mathematics—even by very young children—is necessary for their intellectual growth. It is also a very satisfying activity if it is being taught in the right way. The logic of the subject has a strong emotional appeal. Some children even find something akin to beauty in the ways in which the mathematical ideas fit together. Of course, not all children find this aesthetic pleasure in their mathematics. Indeed, mathematics, as it was taught not so many years ago, was often a very dull affair. Far from giving pleasure and a sense of satisfaction, it sometimes built up fears and phobias, and children shied away from mathematical activity professing that they did not like it and could not understand what it was all about.

Today, big changes are taking place in the teaching of mathematics. This is because teachers at all levels are seeing mathematics in a new way. Indeed, the subject itself is changing.

In recent years we have found out a great deal more about the ways in which children learn. The careful experiments of psychologists (scientists who study ways in which people develop and behave) have made it clear that learning is a very complicated affair. If learning depends upon direct experience, then it seems necessary for children to have direct experience of mathematics for their learning to be efficient. Many of the new ways of teaching mathematics to the young children include a great deal of real experience.

Many people who use the term "mathematics" think of the various branches of the subject such as the algebra, geometry and trigonometry that they meet in school. These are the branches, and there are many others but mathematics is much more than this. Some mathematicians would say that mathematics is really a way of thinking. The thinking is about number and about space and the things that are in space.

By "space" we do not mean the emptiness in which the stars and planets move, but simply the space that is all around us. The things that surround us have shapes. Some of the shapes are simple and some are very complicated. For example, the tiles on the kitchen floor may be square. This is a simple shape. If you look at your hand you will see that the shape is complex. Nevertheless, mathematics helps us to describe both shapes.

Thinking about numbers is rather different. Numbers are not real in the sense that things like tables and aeroplanes are. Nobody has ever touched a number! Actually there are several kinds of number, but let us consider the most elementary kind called Natural Numbers. We have a set of books. The number of books is twelve. But the number twelve cannot be seen or touched and nothing to do with the books. It is an IDEA IN THE MIND. Another set of objects has the same number. Although the things are quite different, the number of this "set" of objects is also twelve. If we take one thing away from the set, the number will change.

This is a simple example of the meaning of a natural number, and also of the abstract nature of mathematics. Because mathematics

Balak

is concerned with abstract ideas it is essential to have a "language" of symbols to represent the ideas. Our own language fulfils the same purpose. It has been stated that numbers are abstract ideas, but if the numbers are to be useful they have to obey certain rules. These rules that govern the things that can be done with numbers are sometimes called laws or axioms. It is necessary for children to know the laws, but

they should not be learnt parrot-fashion. A realisation of the generalities that govern the behaviour of numbers is first built up from experience and then-and only then-are the laws clearly stated.

It should be our endeavour to make 'Mathematics' an enjoyable experience for children / students of any level.

**MADRAS BRANCH ADDRESS**

Please note that IAPE's Madras branch address is
 Ms. Usha Raghavan
 C/o Indian Council for Child Welfare
 3rd Main West
 Shenoy Nagar
 Madras-600040

and not as given in the April '93 Balak. Error regretted.

Editor

**NEWS FROM BRANCHES****Coimbatore Branch**

Workshops were conducted on the themes of Teaching languages and subjects, Puppetry, Story telling and Making children's books in the month of November '92. In the same month an orientation course in counselling was also conducted.

In December '92 a guest-lecture by Dr. Jayanthi Narayan on "Identifying Children with Learning Problem in Regular Schools" was the important programme.

Mrs. S. S. Jayalakshmi, the Executive Vice-President and Mrs. Visalakshi Rajagopal, the Treasurer of IAPE attended a two-day seminar on Universal Primary Education conducted by NCERT and UNICEF on 7th and 8th January '93.

On 15-3-'93 World Day for the Disabled was celebrated which was presided over by Mrs. Nandini Rajendran, the Director of Social Welfare Board.

An one-day workshop on "Interact and Learn" was organised on 17-7-93. Ms. Claire Russel, an eminent linguist from York University, Oxford conducted the workshop.

STREET CHILDREN: A CASE FOR CONCERN

Dr. Suman Verma

I recently attended a workshop on 'Children and Youth at risk' organised by the International Society for Study of Behaviour Development from July 17-18 1993 at Recife, Brazil.

The increasing number of street children all over the world expresses very well our social reality: famine abandonment, disease, violence, extermination. In the face of this reality the theme of the workshop was appropriate and the group, with participants from different countries delved upon alternatives and action strategies for the societies which do not accept having so many children and teenagers relegated to the position of dropouts. As well thinking citizens, it is imperative that we join hands and work in order to offer our children life conditions that will dignify and promote healthy human beings for a better future. By the end of the workshop, one parted with a feeling of satisfaction with the outcome wherein, jointly, one had looked at problems of street children and those working with them and together worked on solutions - the necessary bond of friendship which links us all across the globe.

On July 22, while I was still in Recife I heard the shocking news that eight homeless children were shot in Rio de Janeiro as they slept on the streets. The victims were from among the thousands of homeless youngsters who fend for themselves on Rio's streets. By day they survive by seeking handouts and doing odd jobs. By night, they huddle together on cardboard sheets and blankets in the slums or along main thoroughfares. The killers allegedly off duty military police officers found their victims near church square, reportedly shot several on the spot, while others were chased down or ambushed in other locations. The

terrible aspect of this crime is that it is distinguished only by the number of its victims - and by the number of gangs doing the killing. In Rio, street children are executed all the time, according to Brazilian human rights organisation. The triggermen are not only teenage rivals, they are also vigilante groups and rogue cops who have arrogated to themselves the roles of judges and executioners. If, as authorities report, 4611 children and adolescents were murdered in Brazil from 1988 to 1991, these death squad killings have indeed reached alarming proportions by any standards.

On July 24th, I was in Rio and went to visit an institution being run for street children. One of the children who was killed belonged to this institution. Anguish, fear, pain over the death of their friend was clearly evident on the grief stricken faces of the children living in this institution. Out of fear, the children had fled the streets and were taking shelter in various institutions anticipating more killings.

I left Rio with a heavy heart and a disturbed mind... what use do conventions serve, with heavy recommendations for the protection of the basic human rights, if this is what is going to happen to helpless children? How does one bridge this gap? The killings of street children points to a dangerous tear in Brazil's social fabric that must be repaired. Today, Rio is the stage of these ruthless killings. Tomorrow, it could be anywhere else. Street children are a reality all over the world, in the present day context. Thus, there is no time to sit back and label the problem as theirs, mine or his. We need to stand collectively and consider it as our problem, and join hands in protecting these children, who have as much a right to security and dignified living as you and me.

CONFERENCE NEWS

27th Annual Conference of Indian Association for Preschool Education

Theme : The Child and the Environment

Dates : December 1 - 3, 1993

Venue : College of Home Science, Marathwada Agricultural University, Parbhani (Maharashtra)

Parbhani is the district Head quarters of one of the seven districts of Marathwada region of Maharashtra State. It is well connected with rail on Aurangabad-Hyderabad metre gauge of South Central railways. Nearest broad gauge junctions are Secunderabad (321 kms) and Aurangabad (178 kms). Through train has been introduced recently from Bangalore. From north India it is connected through Jalgoan, west through Manmad and east through Akola. The nearest airport is Aurangabad.

During the month of December Parbhani is usually pleasant. Following excursion tours will be arranged on payment basis: 1. Ajanta Caves, 2. Ellora Caves, 3. Sachkand Gurudwara, Nanded, 4. Parli Vaidyanath temple and 5. Aundha Nagnath (Jyothir lingas).

The venue is a campus university with a beautiful natural surrounding.

Tentative Programme of the Conference

The First Day: Keynote address and General sessions consisting mainly of talks demonstrations by invited experts on aspects like puppets, video, music and movement, story, play materials, etc. followed by group discussions.

The Second Day: "Teachers Share" and group discussions on the following themes:

- Modern trends in child rearing according to changing environment
- Early stimulation for child's development

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- Pressures on child
- Creating an environment for effective Early Childhood Education
- Creative and adventure playgrounds
- Play materials for young children suited to different environments (Identifying, preparing and using play materials and traditional games from different environments)
- Using environment as a resource for ECE
- Creating conducive environment in the community for children of migrant labourers, disadvantaged and underprivileged children and
- Children with special needs.

The Third Day: General session and valedictory

Secretaries of different branches of IAPE may please discuss with their members and suggest names of participants in Teachers Share sessions to the Headquarters.

The programme folder will be sent to the members as soon as it is ready.

