



# Nurture

Issue No.IV December, 2007

Pakistan's Pioneer Publication on Early Childhood Development

## **What Do We Believe About Learning?**

**What Teachers Can Stop Doing  
To Facilitate The Nurturing  
Of Children**

**Learning in the Early Years**

**PLUS** Resources for Parents & Teachers

# Nurture

Issue No. IV December, 2007

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# Editorial

An increasingly complex and tumultuous world requires children, individuals and communities to be able to continually develop and utilize different kinds of knowledge frameworks, value systems, intelligence structures and skills in order to make sense of, adapt to and contribute to changing their social and physical environment in constructive ways. Within this broader vision of human consciousness and participation, notion of learning must take on new meanings. Learning can no longer be viewed as a ritual that one engages in during only the early part of one's life with an occasional refresher course to cater for incidental needs during adulthood. Nor can the value of learning be seen in one-dimensional terms as related only to obtaining a job.

However, most schooling or education systems throughout the world are not fully equipped to address the multiplicity of individual and community learning needs that healthy societies increasingly require. This is not only illustrated by the 900 million illiterate people around the world and the 130 million school-aged children who are out of school, but even more dramatically by the vast majority of learners who leave the education system with limited accomplishments, learning capacities and motivation to learn that hardly sustain beyond the schooling cycle. More problematically, conventional education systems have not succeeded in reflecting (in fact, often contradict) the vast range of new ideas, experiences and understandings from a variety of disciplines that relate to processes of learning.

This issue of Nurture represents RCC: ECD Programme's pro-active response to addressing the deep cognitive and social problems that confront parents, teachers and communities as we relate to the role of learning for children. It views the processes of engaging in collaborative, multi channel and innovative learning as being critical for both the development of children and individuals and the linking of culturally diverse communities. This issue of Nurture seeks to open up the much needed discourse on learning with an aspiration to empower its readers to choose and to actively construct a robust learning environment for our children. To engage in a dialectical process of developing and implementing a new vision around learning, Nurture seeks to invite dynamic partners throughout the world to connect (ranging from governments, NGOs, schools, private companies, donor agencies, universities, Foundations, etc.) and to initiate an on-going dialogue, critical reflection and creative action with them around diverse interconnected themes, such as local knowledge systems, thought process research, complex adaptive systems and other areas related to children's learning. The action and reflection undertaken by its partners ultimately defines what Nurture is i.e. a vehicle for changing children's learning environments in and out of school. As always we look forward to receiving our readers' valuable suggestions.

Happy reading!  
Somaiya Ayoob  
Editor  
Nurture



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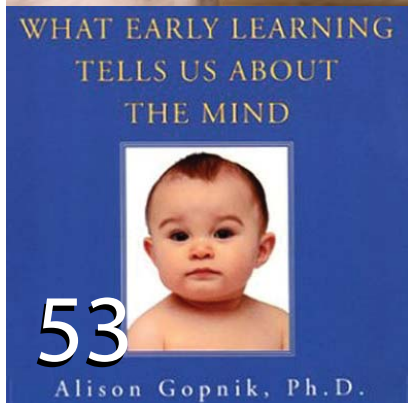


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# Letters to the EDITOR

**N**urture is Pakistan's pioneer magazine on Early Childhood Development. The magazine is published bi-annually and captures different themes on Early Childhood Development.

If you have a short message, critique, suggestions or any comments contact us directly by sending us an e-mail at: [nurture@ecdpak.com](mailto:nurture@ecdpak.com)



We received the third issue of Nurture. It is an excellent reading material for all caregivers, parents, teachers and doctors. We congratulate the whole team of Nurture on their efforts and hope you attain further success in your endeavors.

*Saadia Haseeb, Chief Editor, Motherhood Magazine*



Your magazine is marvelous! It is very helpful not only for parents and teachers but for families as well. The message that you convey is extremely positive, but it would be helpful if you could introduce the aspects of gender perception. Topics could include Early Childhood Education and its impact on society, and socialization of gender etc.

*Shakeela Wali, AKESP, Chitral*

I was pleased to read a magazine as sensitive, thoughtful and informative as Nuture. I think there is a dearth of information for caregivers and this magazine is a wonderful initiative that helps convey knowledge in such a reader friendly manner.

*Ambreen Mirza, Program Coordinator, Aanganl*

I am delighted to read Nuture and commend your team on the excellent work that you have produced. The magazine has created a remarkable opportunity to learn about early childhood development.

*Mirza Zakiullah Baig*

The content of Nuture magazine is remarkable and some important concepts are touched upon that convey a wealth of knowledge to parents, teachers and caregivers working on Early Childhood Development.

*Nasreen Nisar, Teacher, Mountain Institute of Educational Development*





# What do we believe about LEARNING?

## How much of it is true?

BY SADIYA AZEEM

## What is Learning?

It is quite a task to define learning in a simple sentence. Most of us know that people are not all alike and there cannot be one single definition of learning that could be the perfect explanation for all who read this article. We see the world in a way that makes the most sense to each of us as individuals. You have probably noticed that when you try to learn something new you might prefer to learn it by listening to someone talk to you about the information. Some people prefer to read about a concept to learn it; others need to see a demonstration of the concept. In short learning cannot be described in a line

because different people learn in different ways and the same rule applies for young children. When we approach a learning task or situation, we do not all benefit from the same approach. Each individual has his or her own unique learning styles, strengths and weaknesses.

## How Do We Learn Something?

Think back of the time when you learnt something new. First let's take a generic example like tying your shoelaces. Do you remember who taught you to do that as a child?



If I remember correctly, I learnt this complex task by doing it over and over again, through observation and adult supervision, till I took my own time to master it independently. Think about yourself. Maybe you learnt tying your laces by observing someone else do it for themselves or for you repeatedly, till one day you tried and accomplished the task independently when you felt ready.

Now let's take a more academic example. What about the common task of learning number tables? Most of us should be able to relate to it. I precisely remember my math class when Miss used to come in class and all the students, would chant tables after her... 2 1 za 2. 2 2 za 4 and so on...I think most of us learnt tables by rote learning and constant drill. A lot of our school math-time was spent in learning number tables, as it was such an important task!

It was after a very long time, I think by the time that I was in grade 8 that I was able to make sense that there is no such word as 'za' and that 2 1s are 2 and 2 2s are 4. Much of my school time was spent in memorizing the 12 tables. Even today I only remember the 2 times table by heart and that too because I can mentally calculate it and make sense of it. It is such a shame that I have no clue about the rest of the tables, nor do I remember them by heart.

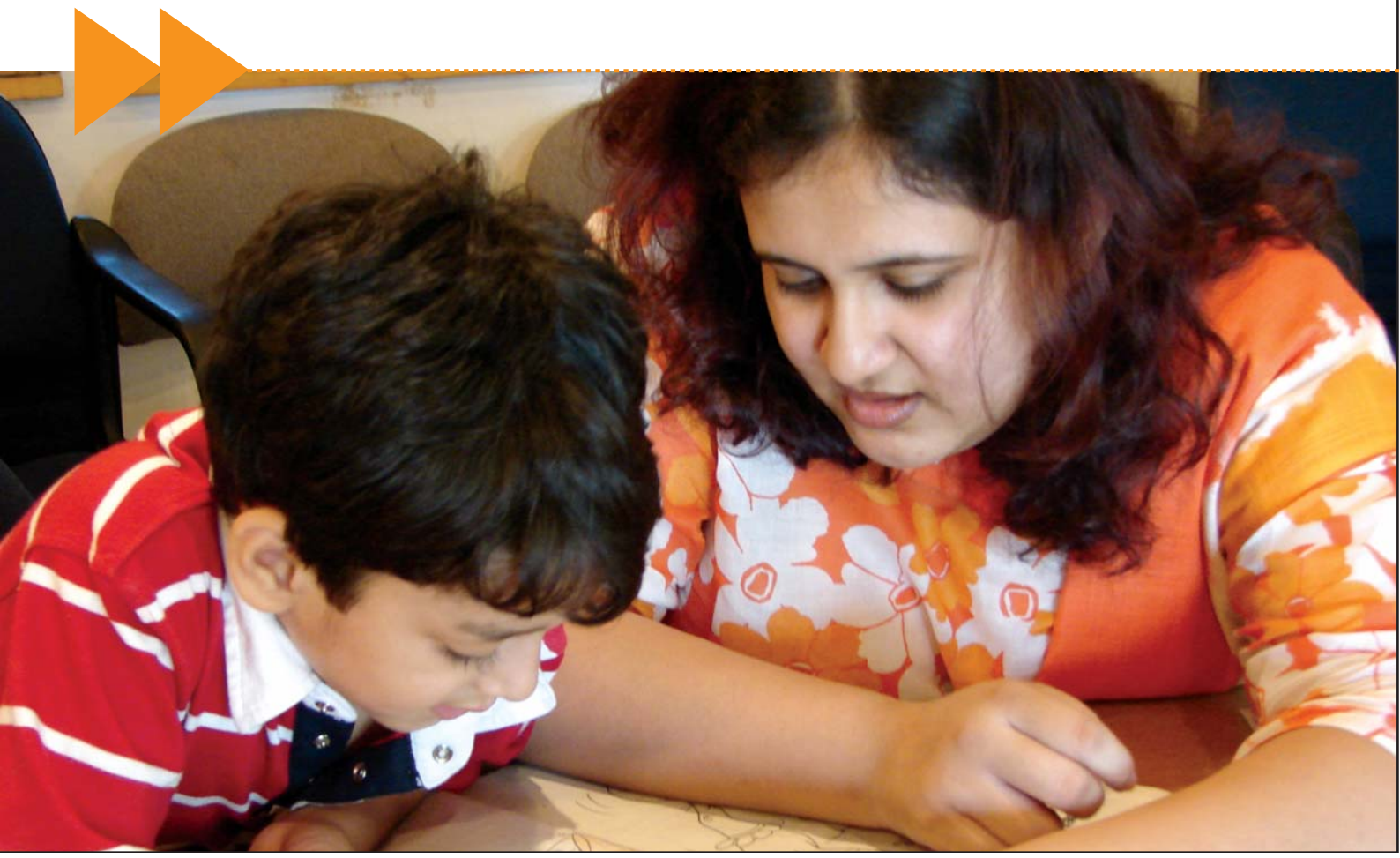
Some readers may remember all their tables and this particular approach of memorizing might have been effective for some of us. But is it true for all of us? I read somewhere and how true I believe it to be ... "memorization is what we resort to when what we are learning makes no sense".

## How Young Children Learn

It is generally perceived and commonly known that children learn through 'active learning'. Young children learn most effectively through 'real' experiences and by using their five senses: sight, taste, smell, hearing and touch. What does this term really mean? We sometimes use this term loosely and think that when we teach children through flashcards or worksheets and props, it is called active learning. Active learning is, infact, the time when children are discovering things, manipulating material and acting independently without adult command and directions. It is the time when the teacher stops 'teaching' and steps back to observe, makes time to encourage conversations and discoveries by children, provides opportunities for uninterrupted play and helps extend children's natural interests.

When learning is strengthened with practical experiences, it lays a strong foundation for later abstract learning. Through their participation in different activities and play, children learn new concepts, develop skills, learn facts and make sense of the world around them. In short, children and even most adults learn best when they are active learners.

In addition to active learning, another effective way to learn is through conversation. Children are usually expected to listen, sit quietly in class and behave themselves. By listening to the teacher most of the time, how will they get the chance to learn language, an





extremely important skill for growing up? How will they learn to talk about, think, reason and solve problems by themselves?

Children also acquire many skills through play. The benefits of play are highlighted in all child development theories and research. Play is an emotional window for a child. Through play children make sense of their world. They become aware of their own and other people's feelings. Real world pain and fear can be diminished through play and it also encourages social interaction. Through these interactions children develop emotionally, socially and physically, which are essential life skills.

## Parents, Schools and Learning

With regard to a child's learning and curriculum requirements, what do parents in our society generally demand of our school system? What does a pre-school cater to? What does real learning or holistic development mean?

In terms of learning, parents generally want their pre-school child to start reading and writing as soon as possible. They compare children in different schools and measure school standards. The general perception is that the more 'intelligent' children and 'good' schools are the ones where children learn to read and write sooner than later. They think highly of children spending school-time working in copies and workbooks. The idea of copies loaded with pages and pages of number, alphabet and

Urdu writing mastered by their child, is much appreciated. On the other hand the schools or teachers want all the children in one class to be on the same level. They do not understand that at this stage children have individual learning patterns, ability levels and exposure to experiences. These differences should be respected and explored by the teacher. Yet all the children are expected to write the same script with similar sized letters/numbers, without any consideration of past experiences and needs assessment. If a child differs in script and ability level the teacher makes sure they help the child by repeatedly erasing the child's work, making them rewrite it and completing their work during music or PE lesson. The teacher in turn gets approval by the head mistress when she sees all the children making perfect little numbers and letters, copied exactly as the teacher writes on the board.

Analyze and ask yourself if children are truly benefiting from such teaching practices. Do you as a teacher need to change your approach towards teaching and learning? Do some children in your class seem withdrawn, upset or do not enjoy coming to school? Think about the reasons. What can you do about them?

Meaningful learning keeps in account the concept of holistic development. It advocates the fact that learning, for the young child should not be compartmentalized into subject areas. When most of the child's day is spent in writing, memorizing and teacher-directed work under specific subject headings, when will they develop holistically?

Holistic development focuses on the 'whole child'. It means the development of all the areas of learning and



development, which alongside cognitive development; also includes social, emotional, physical and language development.

## Important Facts About Learning

While researching on the Internet for this article, I came across a few meaningful thoughts shared by teachers about learning which I would like to pass on to you:

- 1) Learning is social— it benefits from conversations. Learning richness increases as multiple perspectives are described, discussed, challenged and explored.
- 2) We learn in the form of stories. Thought flows in terms of stories- stories about events, stories about people, and stories about intentions and achievements. The best teachers are often the best storytellers.
- 3) We learn best when there is a reason to learn. I think this is an important aspect of sense making. We are awash with experience and information and we only notice things we care about.
- 4) We get better at what we learn through practice.
- 5) We all have different learning preferences and ways of interacting.

Looking back at my own career journey from being a teacher for several years, to a head of a pre-school section, to now being a teacher trainer, I very often think back on my own teaching approach, philosophies, beliefs and practices. I wonder if back then I had the insight to actually know or think about any belief or philosophy at all. Or was I, like so many others, the product of a system that hardly questions, thinks or reasons. Just because that is what all of us have 'learnt' to do since childhood, was I also one who merely followed set systems and rules without personal perceptions and ideas?

Reflections such as these make me wonder how far fact from fiction is, how people generally perceive learning and what true learning actually means. It also makes me question myself if I have been fair to all the children who were in my care and my responsibility for over a number of years? Did they actually learn, really understand and retain information of most of what I 'taught' them in class? Or will they, like me wonder after years what 2 2 'za' meant...?

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Sadiya is part of the Training and Development Team at Teachers' Resource Centre (TRC). She did her post graduation certificate course in Education and has been training pre-primary level teachers since three years.



## ▶▶ True Learning

Learning concepts held by a wider society, common beliefs about learning and learning in the formative years, have briefly been talked about in this article. To summarize it in a nutshell meaningful learning can take place where:

- ▶ Each learner's uniqueness is taken into account.
- ▶ Prior knowledge and influences are considered vital foundations on which to build new learning.
- ▶ Children discover and initiate tasks themselves i.e. through active learning.
- ▶ Children feel valued in a secure and non-threatening environment, and where their emotional and physical needs are taken care of.
- ▶ Essential skills like thinking, challenging, reasoning and questioning, assist in enabling children to become productive life long learners.
- ▶ Time to plan, carry out the plan, and reflection with others is an essential part of a productive learning community.
- ▶ Emotion is considered a critical part of learning as social interaction, interpersonal relationships and communication with others significantly influences learning.
- ▶ The teacher's role is to motivate, stimulate and facilitate student learning.

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# What Teachers Can **STOP** Doing to Facilitate the Nurturing of Children

BY YASMEEN BANO



Early years of children's life are very critical because they undergo a robust natural development process that encompasses all domains including physical, cognitive, social, emotional, psychosexual, spiritual and moral development. Thus, all children are born with an innate potential to learn and develop if properly nurtured, much like intuition, which is present at birth, can unfold to its innate potential over the first 8 years of life through proper care and attention. This critical feature of human development makes early years of life very sensitive for the entire life time. In the absence of an enabling environment for young children, their innate potential starts withering away, and is eventually lost.

In present times, apart from the role of parents, the teachers' role has also become critical in the nurturing of children due to the prevailing fashion of early schooling. However, many a time, teachers do not have even the basic understanding of the innate potential children possess and its natural development process. This lack of understanding and ignorance leads to a creation of an environment which is extremely harmful for the nurturing of children. One of the critical things which teachers can do to facilitate the nurturing of children is to STOP their anti-nurturing practices.

This article highlights some of the key current practices of teachers which need to be stopped. It also maps out essential steps for teachers to become good facilitators.

## **STOP underestimating children; START acknowledging their potential**

The first thing that teachers need to do is to stop underestimating the potential and skills of children. Many teachers believe that children are like empty vessels and do not possess any of their own thoughts, ideas, emotions, skills or observations. Although teachers articulate that children have prior knowledge and skills, the teaching practices reflect this very flawed assumption.

Our careful observations of young children show that each child is born with amazing innate capabilities to learn, explore, observe, feel and respond. Recent findings of Cognitive Neuroscience have also proved that "Babies are not 'blank slates' at birth. They come into the world with all kinds of mental skills and predispositions, abilities suited to the critical needs of early life." First of all teachers have to change





their beliefs about children and need to acknowledge their natural potential to learn and grow. This change in understanding will be essential to bring a change in their practices which will consider children as the active architects of their own learning and growth process.

## STOP teaching; START facilitating a natural learning process

'Teachers have to stop teaching.' This statement may sound outrageous, however, the fact remains that the act of 'teaching' destroys the entire natural learning process. 'Teaching' actually forces children to participate in the activities which are designed to fulfill curricular needs and expectation instead of focusing on children's needs and their interest. This forced, mandatory and externally driven process crushes the natural learning spirit of children which makes them curious, enthusiastic and voluntary learners.

What will teachers do if they do not teach? Many of you may be thinking of this question right now. The answer is that they have to facilitate the natural learning and development process. Teachers need to become 'Gardeners' instead of seeing themselves as 'Potters' who try to shape the soft clay as per their own thoughts only. Gardeners let the plants grow on their own and ensure only that appropriate environment and the conditions for full nurturing are present. They believe that natural growth ability is within the plants and if the environment is nurtured properly then and only then will plants grow by themselves. Just like plants, children are also living beings and have a natural mechanism to grow and develop – a basic fact often defied and ignored by the prevalent educational system.

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Teachers need  
similar beliefs  
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development. Their key role should be to create an environment that allows children to follow their own path instead of forcing them to be passive recipients of teachers' words. If the goal of education is to extend the brain's natural inquisitiveness then young children need an environment that offers them stability, challenge, values and cohesiveness that we attribute to functional loving families. It is through constant support and appropriate stimulation that the learning predispositions of the youngest children are effectively nurtured. These predispositions are so powerful that children, if they are not in degraded environments, will discover things for themselves. Children learn whenever and wherever they are stimulated; just what they learn is problematic.

To move from the role of a 'teacher' to a 'facilitator', teachers have to facilitate children to pursue their own interest and curiosity by creating a flexible and an open environment where children can work in the areas that interest them without interruptions. Children have boundless curiosity and urge to understand the world around them and make sense of it by themselves. Therefore the role of teachers in early years is to engage children in creative tasks that support children to explore various things, converse with one another, think in different dimensions, and use their innate problem solving skills. They can also encourage children to come up with interesting questions and queries to pursue and help them instead of worrying about teaching alphabets and numbers. Nurturing children's curiosity, creativity and thinking skills will help them to acquire literacy and numeracy skills quite quickly at a later stage.

## STOP threatening and bribing; START encouraging

Many teachers use a variety of control techniques such as threatening and bribing children by giving sweets, stars, gifts etc. All this is done to establish their own authority and to get children's attention and make them work as per "lesson" plans! Early nurturing period requires children to have trustful and caring relationships with adults instead of having relationships based on threats, greed and insecurity. An environment where children are under constant threat and insecurity suppresses their creative abilities as well as the urge to know and explore. Teachers need to build personal relationships with them based on genuine affection and care. They need to be good listeners, have patience and a sound understanding of the way children learn, think and work. In the company of caring and affectionate adults children develop a positive self image and confidently work on various tasks. According to Friedman, a child development theorist, "The science of early childhood development has the most to say about the critical importance of mother-child relationships, but increasingly, evidence supports the great value of a youngster's interaction with a wide range



of loving, attentive adults within the family and beyond. When these relationships offer warmth, support, and intellectual stimulation, experts say, children develop greater social competence, fewer behavioral problems, and enhanced thinking and reasoning skills in school, among other benefits."To nurture children's capabilities, teachers need to become caring and affectionate facilitators whose company must not threaten children and make them insecure

## **STOP worrying about future career goals; LET children enjoy their childhood**



Childhood is the period of spurting growth and development with a sense of excitement, enthusiasm, freedom, and relationship building. Children want to explore the world around them using their own senses, experiment with different things, take risks, imagine, feel and create relationships with people, places and nature. Usually they want to be on their own. Unfortunately, children are forced to leave all the enjoyment, excitement and wonders of childhood for the sake of an unknown future career. Their jubilant PRESENT is spoiled for an unpredictable FUTURE through testing, exam, homework, grades, marks, memorization, reinforcement etc. To facilitate children's nurturing, teachers need to stop worrying about the future career of children and need to release them from rigid, mechanical and meaningless processes introduced in the name of teaching and learning. They also need to free children from the worries of testing, grades, competition, home work assignments,

fulfilling teachers' and parents' expectations etc. It is essential for teachers to create an environment where children can enjoy their childhood. The only way to preserve natural creativities, curiosity and happiness alive in children is to provide an environment which is full of exciting possibilities and opportunities to learn, explore, experiment, play, talk, sing, dance and supports children's fascination, imagination and creation.

## **STOP measuring and labeling children; START understanding them as people**

Current practices of teaching and learning, try to measure the learning and development of children with the yardstick of numbers, grades and other rating tools which are quite erroneous and extremely limited. The tyranny of the process is that in spite of using very limited and erroneous tools, results are taken seriously and the children who do not come up to these flawed standards are labeled as 'Slow', 'Underachievers', 'Problematic', 'Lazy', 'Duffer' etc. The reality is that actually teachers have proved themselves 'slow', 'lazy' and 'underachiever' in terms of understanding and knowing children. Labeling at such an early age without understanding the child is a serious crime because it destroys the self image of a child forever. Learning and cognitive development in children occurs at such a fast pace in early years that it cannot be measured fully through any tool and there is no need to measure it in the first place. Teachers need to understand children and their growing abilities with a deeper sense of respect and realization that children learn and develop at their own pace. Their role is to observe them carefully and facilitate them as per their needs and requirement without making any judgments.

## **STOP keeping parents and community away from schools; LET them be your partners**

Many teachers see parents, families and communities of children as their opponents and try to keep them away from schools and classes. At times, they assume that parents and family do not know much about the learning and development of their children and hence may not be able to play an effective role. Yet at other times, there are complaints that parents are not interested in the progress of their children and do not pay regular visits despite various summons sent by the school.

Teachers need to change their assumptions about parents and families as well. Parents, families and communities have a wealth of knowledge and understanding related to their children which is essential for teachers to know and understand. Together they can create a better and consistent framework for the early nurturing of children. It will ensure synergies between school and home environment while helping children to see learning as a natural process and not an isolated activity of schools. Parents and communities can also support schools in creating a better environment and also help teachers in facilitating children for various activities. This will necessitate a change in schools' mechanisms of involving parents such as the parent-teacher meetings. Parent-teacher meetings can become a vibrant forum of sharing and learning from each other about children and planning together for their future.

## STOP competition; PROMOTE collegiality and collaboration



'Competition' is seen as the prime tool for motivating children to learn and get engaged in various activities. It is used as a tool of motivation without realizing that actually it does not generate any real interest for learning but on the contrary it promotes an urge for 'beating' or 'defeating' others based on pure 'self interest'. Those who win the competition develop a false sense of self worth and arrogance and those who lose it, assume a negative self concept. In either case, it has very adverse and dangerous effects for nurturing children. Teachers must stop comparing children and putting them in competition against one another. By nature, children want to work

together and it is essential for teachers to let them work collaboratively and support each other in learning new skills and constructing new knowledge for themselves. In early years, when children are in the process of developing new ideas and learning new skills at their own pace, efforts of all the children in all the areas need to be acknowledged and supported. Early learning environments should be free of any competition and all children and their efforts need to be treated equally. Children need to be inspired from their own efforts, interests and achievements instead of getting motivated by defeating their peers.

Many teachers argue that real life is full of competition and it is important to prepare children to face and be a part of the competitive world. Not questioning the logic of this argument or highlighting social injustices, it is ridiculous to assume that by putting young children in the competitive environment, their capabilities to face the challenges of a competitive world will enhance. An individual can face any competition and the challenges that go with it if they possess patience and tolerance a positive self image, the ability to think, problem solve and resolve conflicts and the capacity to accept critique in a positive manner. It is quite stupid to put children in a competitive environment instead of helping them to build those skills and competencies which are essentials to face a competitive environment.

Young children are born with a brain that learns through a natural process. Every new born baby is equipped with the ability to learn a language, observe, explore and understand the environment, seek patterns, solve problem and build relationships. The adults' role in various capacities is to create a loving and caring environment for children which support them in harnessing their innate potential. They should protect children from the elements which are harmful for their nurturing. Any forced, unnatural and humiliating imposition on children will suppress their innate capabilities. The teachers' key role is to ensure the nurturing of children's potential at their own pace. They can play an effective role if they know and understand how children learn naturally and how the human brain functions. It is also important for teachers to realize that the purpose of early years' schooling is to support children to nurture their innate talent and not to make them memorize and get engaged in the drill and practice of knowing alphabets and numbers.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Yasmeen is associated with the field of education for last 21 years and currently works with the Habib University Foundation

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# Learning in the Early Years

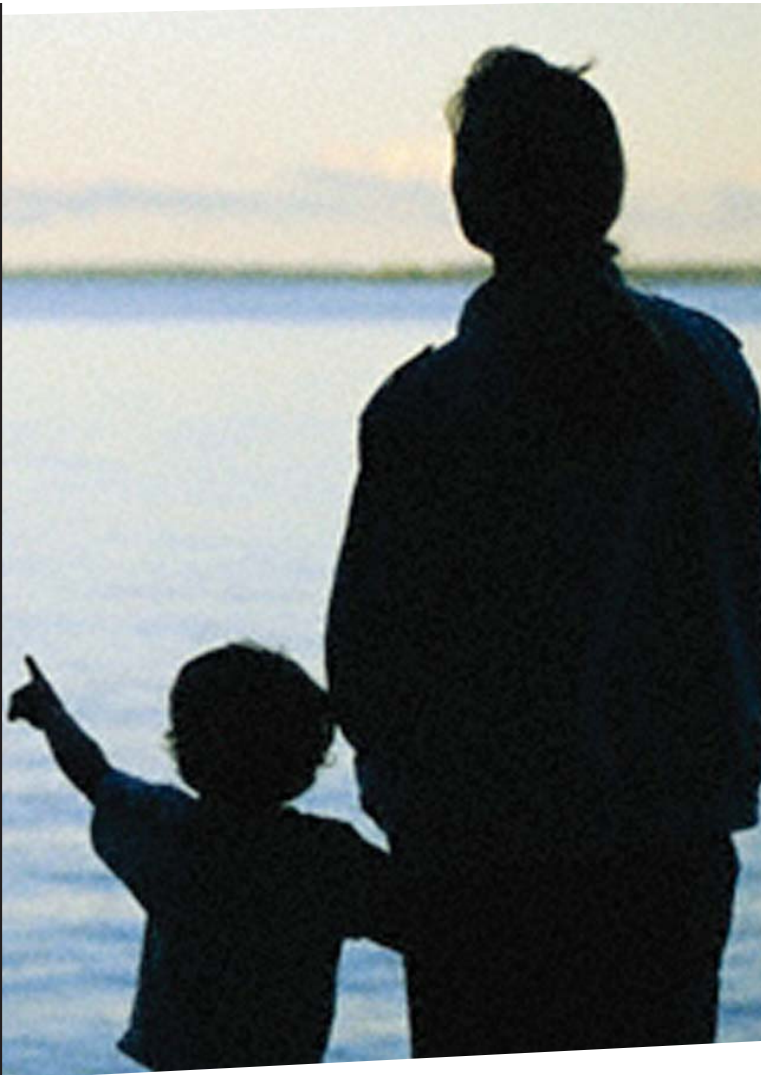
BY SARAH HUSAIN

**T**he most popular discussion these days between parents is how well their child is doing in school. Often we hear parents complaining, that 'my child is not a good student, he always fails a test. What should I do?' We constantly discuss what we want children to learn and more importantly HOW we want them to learn, forgetting the fact that each child is an individual with different learning capacities. In recent years, tuitions have become a fad. Children come back from school; have lunch and half an hour later bundle up again to go to a tuition centre. All because these centres help them 'learn' in a better manner. I have known of children as young as 3.5 and 4 years of age whose parents send them for further tuitions after school hours. However, has any one of us, ever stopped for moment and thought about what exactly is the manner in which children learn? Why do parents, who send their young children for tuition, feel the need even after the children have come back from a full day at school? The reason for this is pure and simple competition between parents, about whose child is a better student, a better learner and more intelligent. What these parents forget is it is actually the competition between themselves that their child is sucked into.

Even within schools, the story is the same. There is immense competition encouraged between students, to

be the best in everything. This is the reason that tests and exams are conducted on such a regular basis and grades and honours' standing awarded to those securing the highest percentages. For all the talk of learning amongst educational policymakers and practitioners, there is a surprising lack of attention to what learning actually entails. For example, theories of learning do not figure strongly in professional education programmes for teachers and those within different areas of informal education. It is almost as if it is something that is unproblematic and can be taken for granted. Get the teaching methodology and the curriculum right, the message seems to be, and learning (as measured by tests and assessments) will follow. This lack of attention to the nature of learning inevitably leads to an impoverishment of education. It isn't simply that the process is less effective as a result, but what passes for education can actually diminish well-being.

Young children learn by doing. The work of Piaget (1950, 1972), Montessori (1964), Erikson (1950), and other child development theorists and researchers (Elkind, 1986; Kamii, 1985) has demonstrated that learning is a complex process that results from the interaction of children's own thinking and their experiences in the external world. Maturation is an important contributor to learning because it provides a framework from which children's



learning proceeds. As children get older, they acquire new skills and experiences that facilitate the learning process. For example, as children grow physically, they are more able to manipulate and explore their own environment. Also, as children mature, they are more able to understand the point of view of other people.

Knowledge is not something that is given to children as though they were empty vessels to be filled. Children acquire knowledge about the physical and social worlds in which they live through playful interaction with objects and people. Children do not need to be forced to learn; they are motivated by their own desire to make sense of their world.

This article discusses the basis of learning. How learning takes place and how it should take place are two different concepts. We all want our children to learn, but when it comes to contributing towards their learning, we teach them what we want them to know and expect them to remember everything. We tend to forget the fact that young children are young explorers and they learn best when exploring, experimenting and experiencing the world around them.

We begin by understanding the four categories of learning that are relevant to the education of young children:

## Knowledge:

In early childhood, knowledge consists of facts, concepts, ideas, vocabulary, and stories. A child acquires knowledge from someone's answers to his questions, explanations, descriptions and accounts of events as well as through observation.

## Skills:

Skills are small units of action which occur in a relatively short period of time and are easily observed or inferred. Physical, social, verbal, counting and drawing skills are among a few of the almost endless number of skills learned in the early years. Skills can be learned from direct instruction and improved with practice and drill.

## Dispositions:

Dispositions can be thought of as habits of mind or tendencies to respond to certain situations in certain ways. Curiosity, friendliness or unfriendliness, bossiness, and creativity are dispositions or sets of dispositions. Dispositions are not learned through instruction or drill. The dispositions that children need to acquire or to strengthen--curiosity, creativity, cooperation, friendliness--are learned primarily from being around people who exhibit them. A child who is to learn a particular disposition must have the opportunity to behave in a manner that is in keeping with the disposition. If that occurs, then the child's behavior can be responded to, and thus strengthened. Teachers can reinforce certain dispositions by setting learning goals rather than performance goals. A teacher who says, "Let's see how much we can find out about something," rather than, "I want to see how well you can do," encourages children to focus on what they are learning rather than on their performance.

## Feelings:

These are subjective emotional states, many of which are innate. Among those that are learned are feelings of competence, belonging, and security. Feelings about school, teachers, learning and other children are also learned in the early years.



## Children Learn Through Interaction

Contemporary research confirms the view that young children learn most efficiently when they are engaged in interaction rather than in merely receptive or passive activities. Young children should be interacting with adults, materials and their surroundings in ways which help them make sense of their own experience and environment. They should be investigating and observing aspects of their environment worth learning about, and recording their findings and observations in discussion, paintings and drawings. Interaction that arises in the course of such activities provides a context for much social and cognitive learning.

## Observing Children's Learning Styles

In your classroom you observe a four-year-old in the block area is creating a house, while his friend carefully balances each addition to The Tallest Building in the World. Or you notice a three-year-old splashing away water at the table; while another child keeps punching dough in the kitchen area to get it into the shape of her choice. Action, reaction, concentration, problem solving, decision making, joy – whether your classroom or your home – the atmosphere is alive with discovery as children approach learning opportunities in countless ways.

Children may be sharing the same class or the same house, they investigate, learn, and process using a combination of several different approaches and learning styles. The learning styles presented here are not measures of intelligence or descriptions of temperament; rather, they are a way of describing children's different approaches to living and learning. One day a child may jump in without hesitation and try something totally new; another time, that same child may hold back just a little, needing to watch what is happening and size things up before getting involved. Both approaches are fine; the child is finding out what works for her/him in a particular situation.

Let's look at some of the different approaches to learning, keeping in mind that this is a time in the lives of young children when they should be encouraged to explore, shift, combine, and enjoy their learning styles and interests.

## Learning through Symbols

Four-year-old Faiza loves writing and inventive spelling. She's comfortable with pencils, paper, pictures, and using words to express herself. She'll sit for quite a while just looking at stories and their illustrations, listening and

playing with new words, drawing and painting. She is learning a lot by working with symbols and through other two-dimensional activities.

Another four-year-old Munim plays vigorously with blocks, cardboard, tape, and wooden figures, creating worlds of imagination. Using blocks, he designs an entire city for his family, including garages, cars and buses. His whole body is involved in his work – clambering, twisting and balancing – as he narrates his own play: "Here's the cat. Watch out. Get the car in the garage. Quick! Bad guy coming." This is three-dimensional activity. Though an entirely different approach than Faiza's, Munim's play tells you that he is learning by working with concrete objects, taking in and making up worlds.

In many ways these two children are not so different from one another, as both enjoy learning and expressing themselves creatively.

Both two-dimensional and three-dimensional activities give children opportunities to express themselves creatively. Taqi may need encouragement to write or draw, and his teacher could suggest that he make up stories, poems, songs, or a painting about his worlds. A child who seems to prefer two-dimensional activities can be encouraged to tell her stories using puppets or creative movement.

## Leaping in or Taking Things a Step at a Time

Do you have children like Reem in your class? At three, she is filled with curiosity about the world and most things in it. Thrilled with her selection of collage materials – cotton balls, glue and pencil sharpenings she is totally absorbed in her art project. Her simultaneous approach to learning is much like the swimmer who jumps right into the pool rather than testing the water or deciding to use the steps. Often risk takers, children involved in a simultaneous approach to learning forge ahead and are sometimes as surprised as they are delighted with their creations.

Fawad, another child in Reem's class, approaches learning in a different way. Making a collage sounds like lots of fun, but rather than jump right in, he looks at the available choices, collects what he thinks he'll need, and may even line up his materials before he begins. Since he's taking a sequential approach to this particular task, Fawad may already have an idea of just what he wants to do with the materials or how he wants the end result to look. When things seem organized and perhaps tested out a bit, he works fairly methodically. However, it is important to remember that this tidy style doesn't mean that he lacks creativity or imagination.

Whether a child chooses to approach learning simultaneously or sequentially can be affected not only

by that child's attitude toward life but also, and more simply, by the mood of the day, the particular circumstances or materials, or even a whim. Both approaches offer children interesting insights and opportunities to learn. Activities where children can express themselves in these ways need to be readily available in early childhood settings. If a child seems to be reluctant to veer from a sequential approach, a few suggestions or open-ended questions may do the trick: "Fawad, what do you think will happen if we take a few of these colors and just mix them up? Let's find out. We can always go back and do it another way later." Offering safe ways to try new methods, such as helping children see that planning doesn't have to inhibit creativity or that discovery can be just as fulfilling as a specific result, can broaden children's involvement in learning.

## Relating Patterns or Separating Categories

Soha a four-year-old is delighted in making connections. Gazing alertly around her world, she discovers patterns everywhere. From her vantage point, she sees and shares similarities and differences, observing comparisons and even making simple analogies. "You know that story we read about two sisters and how one is jealous of the other? I got jealous at my sister's birthday when she got all the presents". The child is connecting her own experiences with literature, other children, and movies.

Both connecting and compartmentalizing contribute to children's insights and understanding of the world around them. Ideally, we would all grow to be adept at both, and certainly early childhood is a great time to begin. For innate connectors, links are irresistible: Single facts or notions spawn webs and networks of thoughts and ideas. This is a delightful learning process to encourage! There may be times when you want to help focus a child immersed in connecting, involving her in sorting by category or discussing how items are similar or different. Choose stories to read together by saying: "What would you like to read about?" As you read - and afterwards - take time to discuss what you've each noticed in the book.

## "Look What I Made!" or "I Can Do That!"

In the art area in your class, one child picks up a sheet of paper and starts drawing Winnie the Pooh from her memory. She draws exactly from memory the Winnie the Pooh cartoon she watched on TV a couple of days ago. On the other hand, another child sits at the table and first thinks through what he wants to draw and then begins by looking at the story in front of him about Peter the Rabbit, reproducing the character how he sees fit. Like many of the other approaches to learning, both



inventing and reproducing are valuable processes to take through life, and both need to be encouraged in early childhood settings. Children who are prone to invent may need help learning how to categorize. You might suggest they start collections -- leaves, labels, or pictures from magazines of pets, clouds, and favorite things.

Encourage the reproducer to stretch this learning style by presenting him with potential inventing situations. Offering a bag of materials - cardboard paper rolls, tape, different-sized tin cans, a bunch of feathers, leaves, gold, silver, and black paint - you might say, "What could we make from these that could help us if we went into space?"

In conclusion, adults need to understand the learning process and be able to identify the patterns children encounter throughout their childhood. A child needs to be understood, both physically and mentally, in order to gain the appropriate tools to succeed as an adult. Theories set guidelines that parents, teachers, etc. can follow in order to achieve that goal. Learning is a difficult thing, but because we have so many ideas and theories as to why children process it is easier to teach the necessary, age appropriate, environmentally correct lessons. Letting children know that you respect their learning approaches will encourage special talents and tendencies to grow. Drawing children into learning opportunities where they feel safe stretching mental muscles in new ways not only broadens their horizons but also helps children feel better about themselves as active, able learners.

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# Learning through Art & Creativity

BY HAFSA MUSTAFA

**T**he learning process of a human child is extensive and complicated where the school course work plays a limited role. Children learn about the world through interaction and their own set of experiences no matter how insignificant these experiences appear to be. Various institutions and researchers have investigated this issue and debunked the myth that fun and serious learning are separate and that art is non productive. In fact art activities are important since they aid human development and lead to creativity, confidence building and self esteem. It also simulates imagination and helps create the ability to organize and process information as well as interpret events. Art also helps develop a shared experience and a chance for interaction and learning through imitation. Therefore parents and teachers must acknowledge the importance of art; furthermore they should attempt to indulge in such creative activities at home and in the classroom.

## What is Art?

There is no one strict definition of art; most definitions describe art as an umbrella term that refers to a range of activities. Art encompasses written text in the form of literature or it can refer to visual art such as painting, sculpture, photography or print making. It also incorporates other forms of art that stimulate other senses such as music and theater performances. Basically it denotes a skill used to produce an aesthetic result which may use any medium of expression.

Before developing complex skills like architecture or calligraphy children start to develop their initial aesthetic sense by scribbling on a paper, splashing paint and playing with different materials like clay, play dough and paint brushes etc. Thus for children art projects are an opportunity to develop new skills. For them art is playing with colors, 'designing' sceneries out of memory or imaginations or folding paper or other materials to recognizable objects like a flower or a tree.



Another important dimension of art for children is the group work experience they are exposed to; therefore they learn how to share crayons when coloring a picture as well as developing a sense of team work by doing an art project together. For young children who cannot express themselves with words, art becomes more than just an aesthetic skill, it is the language they use to communicate with people and reflect their emotional states.

Hence for children, art is more than an activity or entertainment, it is their language and gives them an opportunity for skill building, communication, expression and it lays the foundations of their world view.

## How Art Benefits Children

Art should be part of the school curriculum and a means of teaching children important concepts. Furthermore according to recent studies by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, arts could help children read, write, calculate and understand scientific concepts better. This study also revealed that most researchers who investigate the link between education and academic achievement demonstrate a clear link between education in art form and achievement in non-art and academic areas.

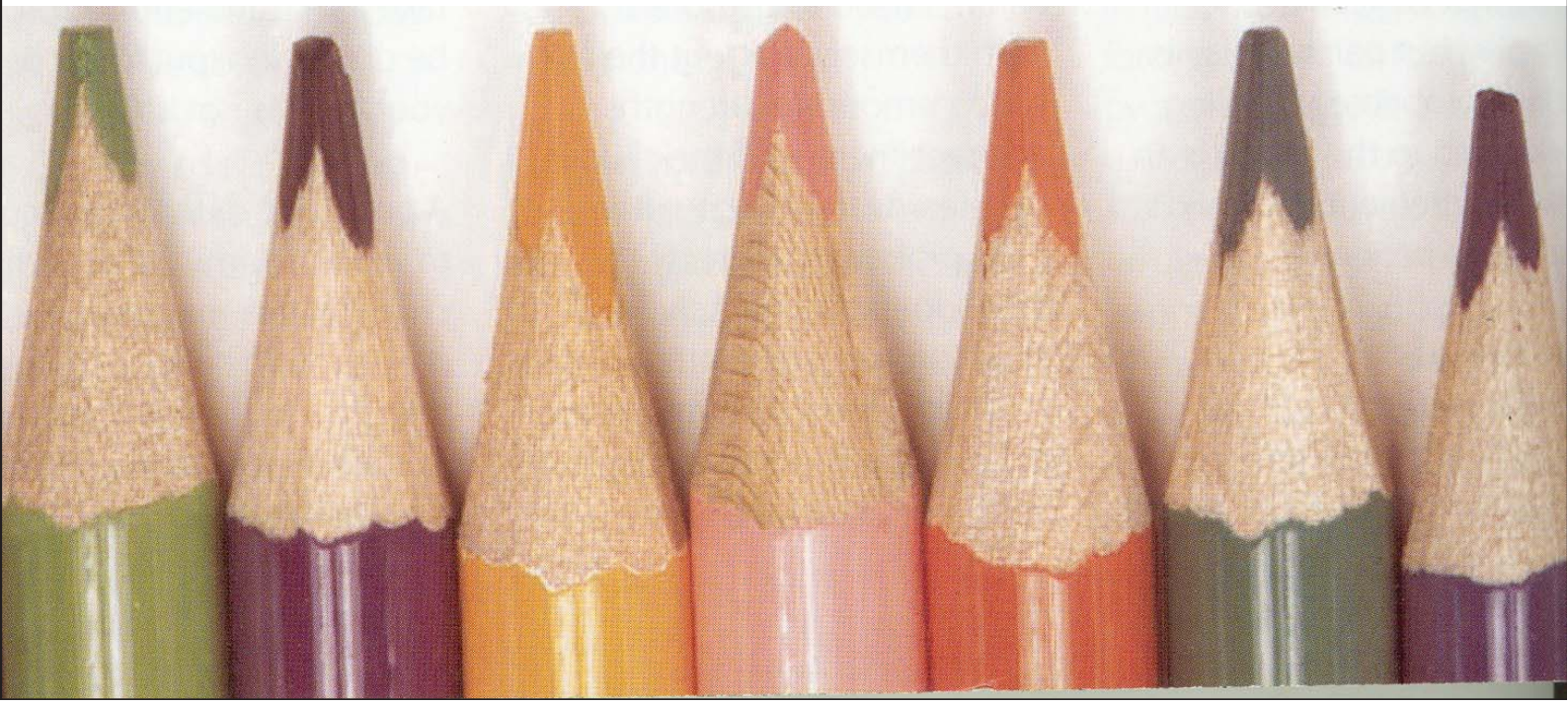
Besides improving academic achievement, art projects are a kind of work and give children a sense of workmanship; also with relatively instant outcomes they feel a sense of achievement on its completion. These features of art projects help develop self confidence and self esteem in a child who feel they are capable individuals.

Art projects teach children basics of color recognition, and help build concentration as they focus on finishing the task given to them. They also learn to absorb and recall images and experiences as they draw and paint.

As mentioned before, art also introduces the child to a form of language that is constructed upon visual images; this is a critical skill where children develop the ability to understand, respond to, and talk about these images. This ability eventually aids the enhancement of their verbal expression and reading. Apart from reading, to be able to describe, analyze, and interpret pictures is an important capability that one makes use of in every stage of life.

Art also acts as a means of exposure for children to society's values and other cultures. Stories and pictures mixed with various art projects teach children how to respect others and most of all they learn how to follow instructions and rules. Yet at the same time it gives children a leeway to experiment and increase their creativity where boundaries set by rules are flexible and not all encompassing. For instance they may have to follow the specific instructions of how to use paint or make cardboard houses but what colors they select or what kind of a house they want to make is up to them. They also get a chance to exercise their own judgment and make their own decisions.

Through art children discover, unlike their curriculum, that there are no correct answers. Art enhances their creativity and imagination, laying foundations of an innovative mind that can generate interesting ideas and thus children learn to interpret the world in a multitude of ways. Moreover art work is also a form of expression for children where they can unleash their emotions where no other source allows children such an outlet.







## Art Activities that can Increase a Child's Creativity

There are numerous art activities that can be used as a means of increasing creativity in a child and drawing and story telling is one of them. A story telling session can be made interactive and exciting by posing questions and elaborating descriptions and pictorial presentation of events; after which children can be told to draw any part of the story. Through story telling children make use of their imagination, learn about different experiences and it also helps increase their vocabulary and improve their expressions. Another form of story telling is drama and role play where children learn to play with each other and imitate and recreate performances. Through these performances children express the way they see the world and the roles and actions they attach to different characters like those of mothers who pose to care for the baby while the fathers goes out to work. These experiences can add maturity in the way children perceive and express themselves in paintings, drawings and other art projects.

Painting can be made interesting and educational by

making use of real life objects, sceneries and events. For instance, children can be asked to identify different fruits, vegetables and places etc, and then asked to draw or paint them. This exercise will increase their knowledge and awareness about the different aspects of life and be entertaining at the same time.

Art activities can make use of building blocks and paper cups where children can be asked to design their own structures and buildings. They can be given pictures of city buildings as well as small village huts to help them reproduce them or create their own designs. Such art projects can be entertaining and useful for children of all ages and can also develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For younger children, just learning how to stack these cups will help them develop hand-eye coordination while older children will be able to learn more advanced skills through matching them up based on symmetry, color or sizes.

For art projects teachers can also make use of other materials like clay or paper and teach children how to create basic objects by following easy instructions. Perhaps they can be asked to create any item of their choice and use their creativity and imagination to come up with their own choice of object. They can also be allowed to decorate what they make with glitter and colors.



Besides experimenting with materials, children should also be given a choice of tools to create their own masterpieces. These can range from crayons, color pencils, paint brushes to scissors, glue, tape and strings. Thus the more materials they are introduced to the more creative the outcome will be. Art activities can include making objects they can hang on walls or float on water.

Another exciting way to learn through art and increase creativity can be done by incorporating educational information in art projects, for instance, discussing history, geography and other subjects, by presenting pictures or giving a short informative presentation on the pyramids, Mughal civilization or river formation. These sessions can be followed by art projects of making objects relevant to the session, which will help increase a child's knowledge and imagination. The whole class can be involved in creating parts or the larger picture like a scene of how the pyramids were built or creating the route of rivers from the mountains to the sea; where every child will be responsible of just a manageable bit of the project.

Overall, art is not a means of distracting a child or passing time; it has a purpose of its own—it plays a vital role especially during the early years of a child. It aids child growth, exposing them to a way of experiencing the world no text book can match. Children learn much faster,

they get a chance to make independent decisions, they learn to work with others and most of all they acquire essential skills of imagination and creativity.

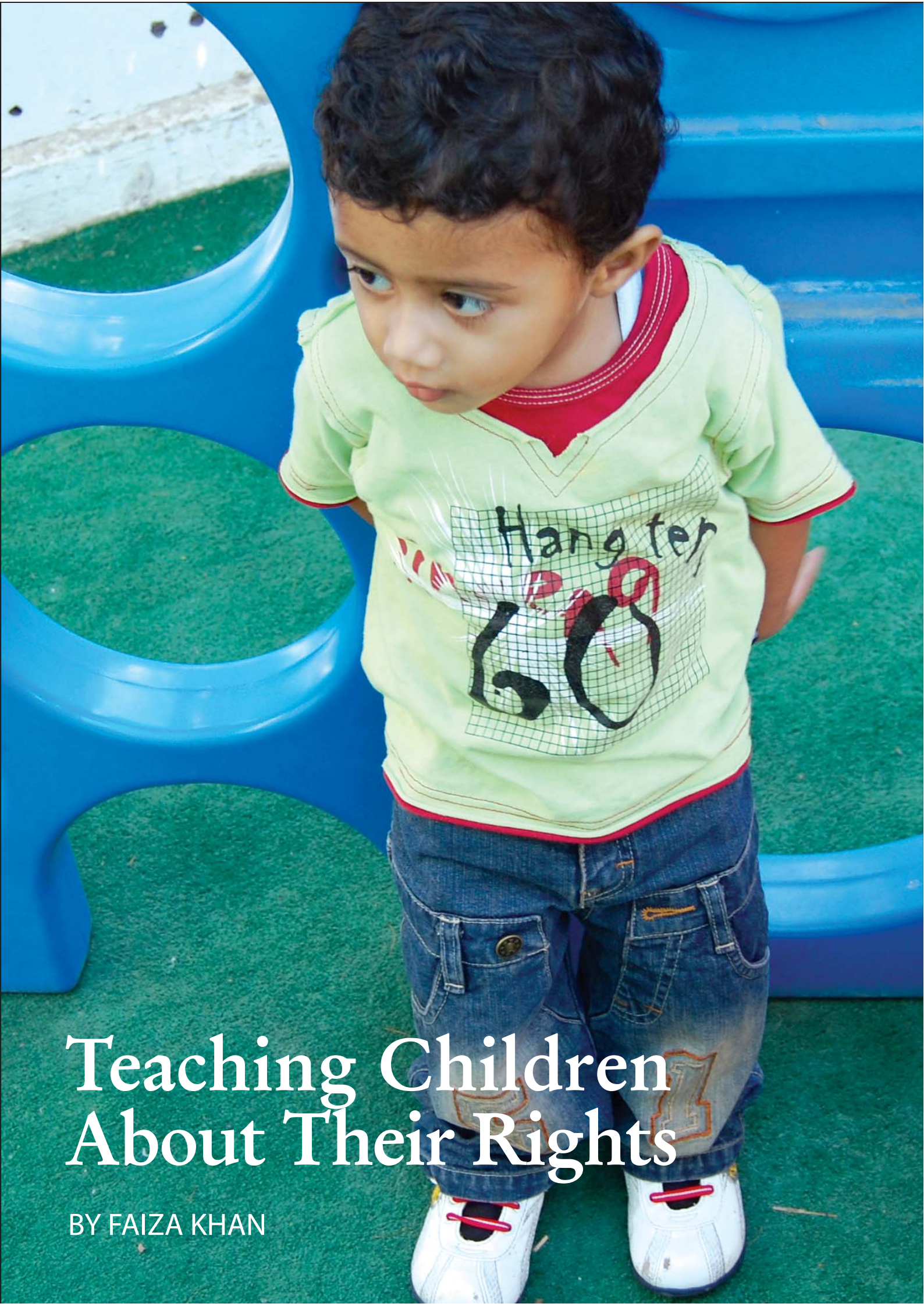
## Did You Know?

- The arts teach children to be more tolerant and open.
- The arts allow children to express themselves creatively.
- The arts promote individuality, bolster self-confidence, and improve overall academic performance.
- The arts can help troubled youth, providing an alternative to delinquent behavior and truancy while providing an improved attitude towards school.

*Source: Americans for Arts, The Ad Council, the NAMM Foundation*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Hafsa is a LUMS graduate and currently works for Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) in the RCC: ECD Programme.





# Teaching Children About Their Rights

BY FAIZA KHAN



There has been much debate about the rights of children, and whether a child's needs and his rights, are one and the same thing. In reality, these two concepts overlap, but a clear distinction between needs and rights still remains. Needs are more encompassing than rights, but rights have the power of obligation attached to them. Therefore, through inference we can say that child rights are those needs that are bound by obligations on the part of both the state and the child's caregivers.

What are these rights then would be the next question?

The United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides a convenient set of guiding principles that fundamentally shapes the way in which we view these rights. Attended and signed by all nations in November 1989 (with the exceptions of Somalia and the United States), the convention had more signatories than any other international convention. It addresses all aspects of a child's life, covering human rights for children in the civil, political, social, and economic realms. It establishes a set of legal norms for the protection and well-being of children and is an integral part of the broader human rights system.

However, while it is most important that these basic human rights, as outlined by the Conference of the Rights of Child are implemented by the state in the form of laws, and the society in the form of altered social norms that overlook the rights of children – it is also important that children be aware of their basic rights, as well as the rights of other children around them. While this can be done at many levels, human rights education can be imparted to the child most effectively in the classroom. The teacher and classroom can become important facilitators and spaces for raising awareness regarding the rights of the child.



## Child Rights: Why and How?

Educating children about their own rights is important in order to provide them with protection; they need to have a sense of what is fair or unfair. Children are not born with this knowledge and like most things that they acquire, an understanding of their rights is an important component of their learning process as well. Also, given the multiple effects that early education has and the wide circle of its influence, it is important that educating children about their rights is done constructively; through gearing the child with knowledge, skills, values and practices that will facilitate for a more just society and these children responsible members of that society.

Raising awareness on the rights of the child in the school is normally done in three distinct forms; education about child rights, education through child rights and education for child rights. Education about child rights entails information on the rights that the child is entitled to and ways in which they are provided or denied. Education through child rights involves learning through active involvement in giving the children their rights and making them respect others' rights. Education for child rights, however, is inclusive of both of the previously mentioned methods, and is the most effective. It not provides children with the required understanding about their own rights, but also offers a set of skills required to be more sensitive and respecting individuals when it comes to the rights of others.



## What are the rights of a child in the classroom?

Young children's dependency on adults makes them very vulnerable. This susceptibility of theirs increases the need of adults ensuring the provision of their rights. So while the classroom is an ideal place for them to learn about human rights, through discussion, practice and activity, what they will learn most from is the teacher setting an example and providing an environment where child rights are implemented. Teacher/student interaction should entail a careful observation of the rights of the children, and the classroom should be a place they learn about both, their own rights and the rights of others around them.

These in class child rights can be categorized into the following broad areas of concern:

### ■ Warmth and responsiveness:

It might be difficult to define what warmth would be, but in all probability, we can tell the difference between a warm and cold response, or a warm and cold learning environment. All children have the right to warmth and responsiveness on part of their teachers, more so at an earlier stage of learning. It is important that a child's individual preoccupations and needs are given attention. Responsiveness itself would be the ability to tune into these individual learning styles and/or disabilities, and respond to them appropriately as well. Even though it might be difficult to respond to all children in the same way, since some children are naturally more engaging than others it is a teacher's responsibility to respond to children who are difficult to handle, just as well as those who are not.

### ■ Self respect and dignity - non violent means of control:

Controlling children's misbehavior is one of the most important areas in which to develop good practice in the classroom. It is crucial in terms of promoting children's welfare and upholding their rights. In dealing with uncalled for behavior, it is usually very easy for teachers to show negative behavior themselves in return – that too at the cost of the child's self-esteem. Hitting or smacking children especially, is a violation of their rights as people. It has been outlawed in educational institutions in most parts of the world. In fact, child-centered approaches to education have ensured that it is considered unacceptable behavior even when laws against violent reprimands do not exist.

### ■ Protection against discrimination and prejudice:

Although discrimination may exist in many different forms; on the basis of gender, race or disability, it is often hard to identify and prove. Discrimination in the classroom is a phenomenon that would be an outright violation of the child's rights, more so when the child is not mature enough to even identify the basis of the discrimination. The effects of discrimination have proven to have a long lasting effect on the child. Countering prejudice in the classroom requires that the teachers foster an attitude that promotes respect for all children, and create a positive environment that can help children learn that differences amongst them are to be accepted and cherished.



## Teaching Child Rights:

In pre-school and lower primary education, teaching for human rights is aimed to foster feelings of confidence and social tolerance –that form the basis for the whole culture of human rights.

Following are some strategies that can be employed in the classroom in order to 'teach' children their rights and inculcate an environment conducive to tolerance and responsibility towards other individuals.

- Role-play is considered as the most effective way of transmitting the significance behind child rights and human rights in general. Making up and enacting real life scenarios, and making children think about how to react to a given situation leaves more of an impact than just telling them what the right thing to do is. If the role-play can be followed up by an interactive discussion on what the children felt or thought while acting out their parts, it will help them retain the lessons learnt even more.

- Close references should be made to the universally recognized United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and the United Nations Conference on the Rights of the Child and the principles and ideas that they contain. A healthy discussion or even an informative lecture on the Rights of Children that this Declaration contains would be a good stimulus. This way, they will be able to recognize the rights that exist, at least on paper, and develop a sense of what their 'rights' are supposed to be.

- Stories are invaluable in teaching any kind of lesson. Young children can learn lessons and morals and remember them vividly if they are associated with a much-loved character in a well-told story. Such stories can be obtained from centers publishing resource material for children, from parents and grandparents or simply by using one's imagination.

- The teacher can carry out a self assessment activity with the students in which they decide whether they are treated fairly or not. This will not just raise self-awareness of rights; it will also work as an evaluative tool of sorts for the school. The teacher can come up with self assessment questions pertaining to the rights of the children as a responsibility of the school, the teachers and other students as well. The questions can then be thrown at the class, and the students asked to think about their responses. Children can be given the option to 'agree' or 'disagree' on whether or not their rights are fulfilled.

Whichever method teachers adopt to inculcate child rights awareness in class, they can only instill the importance of respecting each others differences and basic rights in class when they are not just 'preaching'. If the teacher advocates a set of principles, he or she must be following them as well. Methods of teaching human rights in class might differ, because education systems differ widely. However, lack of hypocrisy in teaching

human rights demands that the teacher upholds the rights of the child, and involves the students in the process of setting rules in the classroom that respect the rights of individuals.

## Convention on the Rights of the Child :

The Convention applies to everyone, whatever their race, religion, abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from.



**1** Children have a right to an education. Discipline in schools should respect children's human dignity.

**2** Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full. It should encourage children to respect their parents, and their own and other cultures.

**3** All children have a right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of activities.

*The above are only few of the rights in the convention.*

**Source:**

"Convention on the Rights of the Child",

Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)

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# Making CLASSROOMS Centres of ACTIVE LEARNING for Children

BY SARAH HUSAIN



Children need an environment conducive to learning, one where active learning is encouraged. The teachers' biggest role is to make school experiences for young children stimulating and one where they can nurture their love for learning. To begin to make classrooms centres of active learning for children, teachers first of all need to understand children as active learners.

## Understanding Children as Active Learners

Active learning has been described as the direct and immediate experiencing of objects, people, ideas, and events. It is a necessary condition for cognitive restructuring and hence for development. Put simply, young children learn concepts, form ideas, and create their own symbols or abstractions through self-initiated activity—moving, listening, searching, feeling and manipulating. Such activity, carried on within a social context in which an alert and sensitive teacher is a participant-observer, makes it possible for the child to be involved in intrinsically interesting experiences that may produce contradictory conclusions and a consequent reorganization of the child's understanding of his/her world. Ideally in active learning classrooms, children are active agents who construct their own knowledge of the world as they transform their ideas and interactions into logical and intuitive sequences of thought and action, work with diverse materials to create personally meaningful experiences and outcomes, and talk about their experiences in their own words.

## What Teachers Should Do to Create An Active Learning Setting?

### Provide a variety of materials for children to work with:

Teachers can provide a variety of materials to assure that there are plentiful opportunities for children to make choices and manipulate materials—key aspects of the active learning process. Materials may include any familiar or unfamiliar objects of interest to young children, except for things that are clearly dangerous or too difficult for this age group.

The following are some general types of materials that are typically offered to stimulate young children's active learning:

**Practical Everyday Objects Useful To Adults.** Children enjoy using the same things that the important people in their lives use—a lunch box like baba's, earrings like ammi's and walking stick like dada jan's.

**Natural And Found Materials.** Natural materials like shells and pebbles and found materials like cardboard boxes and toilet-paper tubes appeal to children because they can be used in many different ways for many different purposes. And they appeal to teachers because they are easily accessible, plentiful, and often free.

**Tools.** Tools are important to children for the same reason they are important to adults—they help "get the job

## Teachers as Supporters of Active Learners

Given that children learn through their own experiences and discoveries, what is the role of teachers in the active learning classroom?

In the broadest sense, teachers are supporters of development, and therefore their primary goal should be to encourage active learning on the part of the child. Teachers should not tell children what to learn or how to learn it—instead, their role is to empower children to take control of their own learning. In carrying out this role, teachers then not only become active and participatory but also observational and reflective; they are conscious participant-observers. While children interact with materials, people, ideas, and events to construct their own understanding of reality, the teacher's role is to observe and interact with children to discover how each child thinks and reasons. Teachers strive to recognize each child's particular interests and abilities, and to offer the child appropriate support and challenges. This role is complex and develops gradually as the teacher becomes more adept at recognizing and meeting each child's developmental needs.

Basically, a teacher can support children by:

- Organizing classrooms and routines for active learning
- Establishing a climate for positive social interactions
- Encouraging children's intentional actions, problem solving, and verbal reflection
- Observing and interpreting the actions of each child in terms of the developmental principles
- Planning experiences that build on the child's actions and interests



done.” Therefore, provide real tools—scissors, hole punches, construction tools like hammers and screwdrivers. (It is important that tools be in good condition and that safety procedures be followed consistently by both children and teachers.)

**Messy, Sticky, Goopy, Drippy, Squishy Materials.** Touchable materials like sand, water, paint, and plasticine appeal strongly to many children because of the interesting sensory experiences they provide.

**Heavy, Large Materials.** Children use their whole bodies, exercise their muscles, and gain a sense of their physical capacities when using large wooden blocks, shovels, wheeled toys, and other sturdy, heavy materials.

**Easy-to-handle Materials.** Materials that fit in their hands—buttons, toy figures, blocks and clothes pins—give children a sense of control because they can use such small objects successfully without adult assistance.

**Improvise with materials.** Teachers must not restrict themselves based on availability of specific materials to play and teach children. They must demonstrate their creativity and improvise with the use of materials; such as using recycled paper for origami or going out in the play ground and draw sketches on mud with a stick.

## Provide space and time for children



### to use materials:

To take full advantage of the materials in the classroom, children need an organized environment. A few key elements of the classroom and routine are: Firstly teachers should divide the class into distinct spaces organized around specific kinds of experiences, for example, house, art, block, toy, and sand and water areas. Each space should be stocked with abundant materials related to that type of play. Secondly, teachers can plan a consistent daily routine so children have opportunities for many different kinds of interactions with people and materials.

A well planned daily routine should consist of:

**Plan-work-recall Time:** A lengthy segment of the day allotted for children to work throughout the classroom with materials of their own choosing.

**Small-group Time:** The segment of the day in which children can work in groups of six to eight in one location with similar sets of materials.

**Large-group Time:** A segment of the day in which the whole group could come together for songs, movement activities, and other large group experiences.

**Outside Time:** Usually the segment of the day allotted for children to play outside with swings, wheeled toys, outdoor art materials, materials from nature, and so forth.

By choosing materials, planning the arrangement of space, and offering a consistent daily routine, teachers will able to set the stage for children’s active learning. Once the stage is set, teachers can continue to be active and involved—observing children and supporting their initiatives throughout the day.

## Seek out children’s intentions:



Teachers should believe that understanding children’s intentions and encouraging children to follow through on them is essential to the learning process. By seeking out children’s intentions, teachers strengthen their sense of initiative and control. They are careful to acknowledge children’s choices and actions. This lets children know that what they are doing is valued. Teachers should often let themselves be guided by the child’s example, thereby demonstrating the importance they place on their intentions.

To ascertain the intentions behind children’s actions, teachers should watch what children do with materials without preconceptions, because children often use materials in unexpected ways.

In addition to seeking out children’s intentions through observation, teachers should also ask children about their intentions. This gives children the opportunity to put their intentions into words and reflect on them. Children’s reflections on their actions are a fundamental part of the

learning process. Listening for and encouraging each child's particular way of thinking strengthens the child's emerging thinking and reasoning abilities. Teachers should listen to children as they work and play so they can understand from their spontaneous comments how they are thinking about what they are doing.

Another way that teachers can encourage children to reflect is to converse with them about what they are doing and thinking. As they converse with children, teachers should be able to focus on the child's actions rather than introduce unrelated topics. Instead of lecturing children or asking a lot of questions, teachers should make frequent comments that repeat, amplify, and build on what the child says. In the course of these conversations, teachers can pause frequently to give children ample time to think and gather their thoughts into words.

### Encourage children to do things for themselves:



Teachers should be guided by a belief that encouraging children to solve the problems they encounter offers them more learning opportunities than doing things for them or attempting to provide a problem-free environment. Therefore, they should stand by patiently and wait while children take care of things independently.

Adults can do most things far more easily and efficiently than children can, but by waiting for children to do these things for themselves, teachers allow children to think of and practice ways of solving the everyday problems they encounter. In an active learning classroom, where children are constantly involved with materials and are encouraged to do things for themselves, spills and messes are inevitable and are actually important opportunities for learning. Teachers should show an understanding of such mishaps because these can be viewed by them as opportunities for children to gain the satisfaction of solving their own problems.

Another way that children can be encouraged to solve their own problems is by referring them to one another for ideas, assistance, and conversation so that they come

to rely on one another, rather than always turning to adults for assistance. Children should also be encouraged to ask and answer their own questions. Generally, if a child knows enough to ask a particular question, if provided the right guidance and cues, he/she will be able to come up with an answer to their own questions.

Teachers can go a long way in providing enriching experiences for young children in their classroom. This article touches about only a few of the things that can be done by teachers. Providing a variety of materials, planning the play space and routine, seeking out children's intentions, listening for and encouraging children's thinking, and encouraging children to do things for themselves are key elements of the teachers' role in active learning programs.



**Source:**  
Educating Young Children: Active Learning Practices for  
Preschool and Child Care Programs, A curriculum guide from High/Scope  
Educational Research Foundation





# Learning Language...

BY MARYAM HASSAN

**While An Apple A Day Keeps The Doctor Away,  
Talking Forever Makes Your Child Clever!**

## When and How Language is Learned

Young children who are learning to speak a new language (or their native language) are often referred to as 'sponges' due to the extent of their ability to learn through play and the world around. Almost all children learn the rules of their language at an early age through use, and over time, without formal instruction. Studies indicate that children who learn their Native language well experience an increase in their ability to learn other languages as well. Thus the process of learning the first language positively impacts the capacity of children to communicate better in other

languages. Furthermore, biological makeup also plays an important role in developing language learning capacity; in fact a well developed language organ also increases the general learning capacity in children. Human beings are born to speak; they have an innate gift for figuring out the rules of the language used in their environment. The environment itself is also a significant factor which supports language development in children. Children learn specific variety of language (dialect) that important people around them speak. Children do not, however, learn only by imitating those around them. We know that children work through linguistic rules on their own because they use forms that adults never use, such as "I goed there before" or "I see your feets." Children eventually

learn the conventional forms, "went" and "feet", as they sort out for themselves the exceptions to the rules of English grammar. As with learning to walk, learning to talk requires time for development and practice in everyday situations. **Constant correction of a child's speech is usually unproductive.**

Children are born not just to speak, but also to interact socially. Even before they use words, they use cries and gestures to convey meaning; they often understand the meanings that others convey. The point of learning language and interacting socially, then, is not to master rules, but to make connections with other people and to make sense of experiences (Wells, 1986).

When do children develop language abilities is always a difficult question to answer. In general, children say their first words between 12 and 18 months of age. They begin to use complex sentences by the age of 4 to 4 1/2 years. By pre-primary, children know most of the fundamentals of their language, and they are able to converse easily with someone who speaks as they do (that is, in their dialect). As with other aspects of development, language acquisition is not predictable. One child may say his/her first word at 10 months, another at 20 months. One child may use complex sentences at 5 1/2 years while another as early as 3 years.

## Nurturing Language Development

Parents and caregivers need to remember that language in the great majority of children develops very efficiently. They should try NOT to focus on "problems," such as the inability to pronounce words as adults do.

Most children naturally outgrow such things, which are a tiny segment of the child's total repertoire of language. However, if a child appears not to hear what others say, if family members and those closest to the child find it difficult to understand what the child utters, or if the child is noticeably different in communicative abilities from those in the same age range, adults may want to seek advice from specialists in children's speech, language and hearing.

### **GUIDELINES FOR NURTURING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT:**

Teachers can help sustain natural language development by providing environments full of language development opportunities. Following are some general guidelines for teachers, parents, and other caregivers.

Teachers, parents and caregivers should:

- Understand that every child's language or dialect is worthy of respect as a valid system for communication. It reflects the identities, values, and experiences of the child's family and community.

- Treat children as if they are conversationalists, even if they are not yet talking. Children learn very early about

how conversations work (taking turns, looking attentively, using facial expressions, etc.) as long as they have experiences with conversing adults.

- Encourage interaction among children. Peer learning is an important part of language development, especially in mixed-age groups. Creating a balance between individual activities and those that nurture collaboration and discussion, such as dramatic play, block-building, book-sharing.

Remember that parents, caregivers, teachers, and guardians are the chief resources in language development. Children learn a lot from each other, but adults are the main conversationalists, questioners, listeners, responders, and sustainers of language development and growth at home or in the classroom.

Continue to encourage interaction as children come to understand written language. Children in the primary grades can keep developing oral abilities and skills by consulting each other, raising questions, and providing information in varied situations. Every area of the curriculum is enhanced through language, so that classrooms full of active learners are hardly ever silent.



## The Secret of Reading to your Child

Adults should read to children as often as possible. The secret, however, which will lead to optimal language development, is to read the SAME stories over and over and over.

In the "good old days" there was not the abundance of storybooks that there is today. It was also part of the child-rearing traditions - to narrate again and again to their children few stories that they knew. Parents also spent a lot of time teaching their children traditional rhymes and songs.

This action not only supports in sustaining oral literature but also as research shows today, it helps increase the learning level.

**Source:**

<http://www.community.com>

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

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# Resources for PARENTS

Creating a Learning Culture within the  
Family

Nurturing Children's Natural Love of  
Learning

Our Experience with Home Schooling







# Creating a LEARNING CULTURE within the Family

BY FAIZA KHAN

**T**he involvement of parents in their child's emotional and cognitive development has long been established as an important aspect of a child's development. However, most parents still don't understand the impact that they can have on their child's attitude towards learning – and restrict their efforts to the child's learning routines in general. Most involved parents try to play an active role to ensure that their child learns, but what they miss out on is the fact that their contributions to general studying routines or the school curriculum is not enough for the child to acquire a positive approach towards learning.

Children at an early age have an absorbent mind that learns much more than what books have to offer, even though the knowledge they attain from books will always be important. However, the child's perception about learning, either from books, learning tools or everyday life, is something a parent has great influence over. This is because children from the very start learn in the context of important relationships. They are influenced by what their parents, siblings or other care-givers do as part of their own daily routines, preferences and practices. They learn from the environment around them, and unlike school where they have to share the teacher's attention, at home the child gets more personalised concern. This puts parents in a unique position to help their children develop learning and thinking skills and shape their

perceptions towards these skills as well.

## WHAT CAN YOU AS PARENTS DO?

### 1 Realize your impact

The most important thing a parent can do to foster a learning environment is realise the impact that their attitude can have on their children. Children develop thinking and reasoning skills when parents engage with them on different levels. If you seek out answers to problems and questions with your child, the probability of him/her hesitating less to ask those questions increases. However, the emphasis should be on the process of searching for an answer rather than the product, because the most important thing you can teach children, no matter what their age, is that their views and opinions are valued. It would be implausible to expect them to be confident about taking problem solving head-on, if they lack in basic self-esteem. Equipped with it however, they are more likely to feel capable and in control.

### 2 Provide personalised learning experiences

Every child's emotional, cognitive and physical development is unique and complex. Although children develop through a generally predictable sequence of steps and milestones, they may not proceed through these steps in the same way. At the same time, one cannot deny the fact that a child's development is greatly influenced by factors in his/her environment and the experiences s/he has. At school, even though they might be provided with some personalised attention, the environment is pretty much generic. That obviously leaves a lot of room for the parent to compensate where the

*“Parents can inspire children to grow up to love learning and do well in school, by paying less attention to the actual specifics of the homework, but instead by creating learning-rich environments in and outside of the home.”*

**Michael Thompson, Ph.D.,**  
Author, *The Pressured Child*



school cannot. One of the most important things a parent can do is notice their child's strengths and weaknesses and focus on methods from which he/she learns the most. Every child has their own preferences. Some learn faster from pictures and some retain more of what they hear. Some children prefer drawing over building blocks, while others still prefer storybooks or nursery rhymes. The key is to find out what interests them and help them explore it.

### 3 Involve both parents

Because early childhood educators tend to engage more with mothers than with fathers, the study of fathers' involvement in children's development has been neglected. However, enough research has been done to suggest that children receiving attention from both parents at an earlier age are more responsive to external stimuli. When they move beyond toddler level, children, according to one study, display a positive correlation between academic performance and high-level participation of the father in their learning processes. Even when this correlation does not necessarily exist, it is generally better for the child to receive encouragement from both parents about inculcating a better approach towards learning.

### 4 Connect learning to everyday life

Learning should not be perceived by the parent as something children do in an allotted time. It is actually part of every day life experiences, and that is how it should be perceived by parents as well. This will help them make every small experience a learning stimulus – especially by responding to the child's natural questions. Learning experiences can include everything; be it measuring while cooking or reading license plates while driving or walking along the road. Keeping your children connected to what's happening in the community and world around them is an important way to foster a learning environment as well. Start by asking questions. For instance, you could ask a 7 year old what they've heard about a recent event,

and follow it up with a question on how they could help. In any case, listen to your child's ideas, rather than feeding him/her with information all the time. This will help him/her become a caring and connected learner.

### 5 Create a print-rich environment

Like most parents teach their children how to speak by constantly talking to them when they are infants or encouraging their words when they are learning to speak or listening to what they have to say once they can talk – reading and writing skills can also be fostered to a great extent in the same way. Even though parents cannot read to the children at the same frequency as talking, providing children with multiple sources of written information, be it story books or magazines or the newspaper is a good way of inculcating reading habits. Reading these sources themselves and providing their children with opportunities to share what they have read can help reinforce reading as a valuable habit.

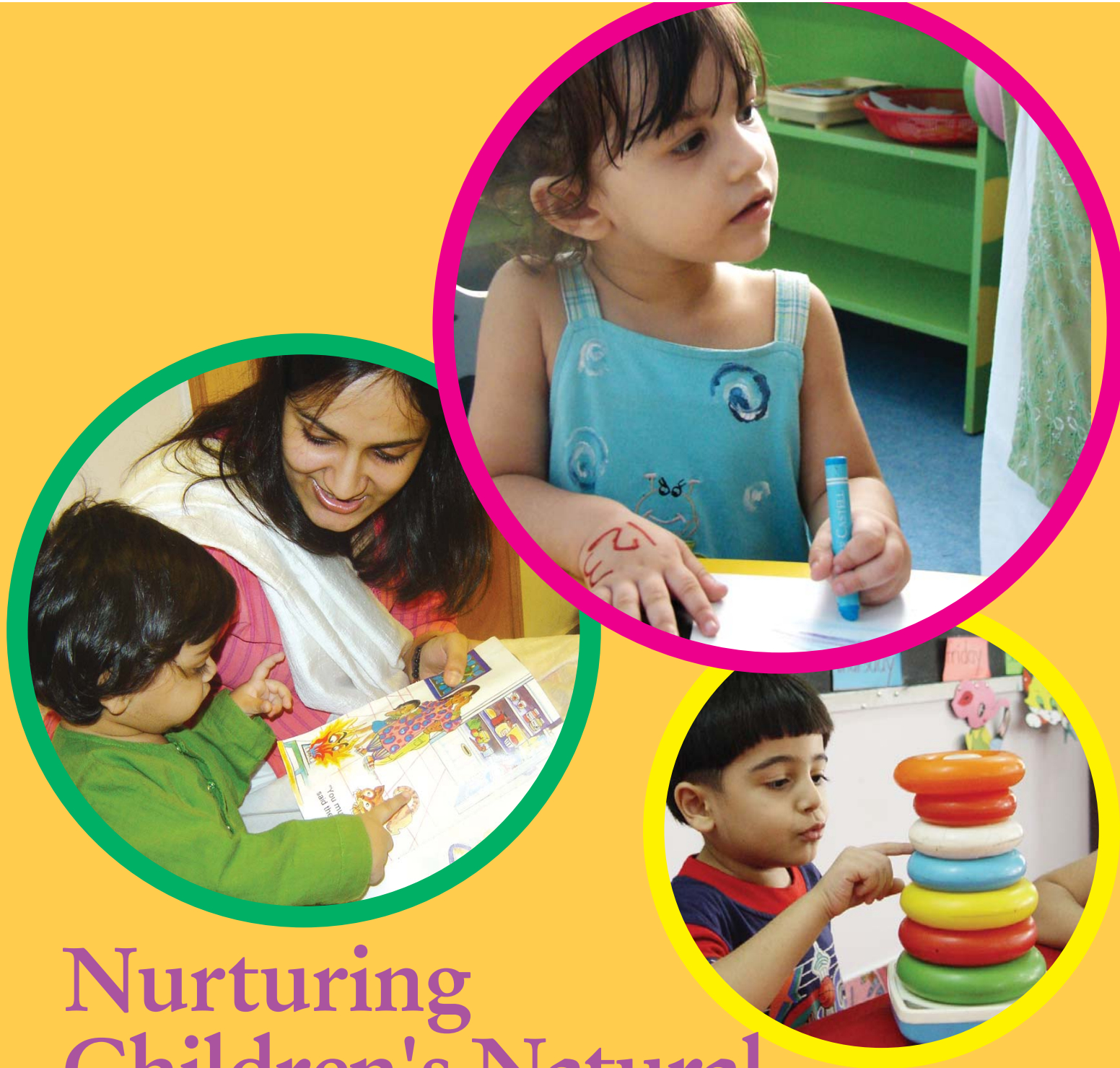
### 6 Be open to learning yourself

Parents should realise that they will always be role models for their children, and that if they are open to learning at any age in life themselves, they set a positive example for their children. Learning something new, whether a craft, language or skill, or even reading up on an unfamiliar topic is one of several ways a parent can learn something new. If you share the information with your child, or let him or her know that even you can struggle while learning would help reassure your child about his own learning processes. Parents should be open to the possibility of learning from their children as well, be it learning how to operate the computer or something new that their child learnt at school. It boosts a child's confidence to reverse the role and be the teacher for a change.

Source:

Vivian Gadsden and Aisha Ray, "Fathers' Role in Children's Academic Achievement and Early Literacy" (Nov, 2003) [www.ericdigests.org](http://www.ericdigests.org)  
 'Supporting your Child: The Role of Parents' [www.pbs.org/parents](http://www.pbs.org/parents)  
 'The Role of Parents in Literacy, Mary E. Barr, ASED 530 September 30, 1997' [www.buddies.org](http://www.buddies.org)





# Nurturing Children's Natural Love of Learning

BY JAN HUNT

As home-schooling parents, my husband and I sometimes wonder who is learning more in our family, the parents or the child. The topic we seem to be learning the most about is the nature of learning itself. The term "home-schooling", however, has proven to be misleading. Home-schooling children do not spend all of their time at home, nor is their learning approached in the same way that it would be in school. In fact, many of the assumptions about learning found in public school teaching are reversed in home-schooling.

The main element in successful home-schooling is trust. We trust the children to know when they are ready to learn and what they are interested in learning. We trust them to know how to go about learning. While this may seem to be an astonishing way of looking at children, parents commonly take this view of learning during the child's first two years, when he is learning to stand, walk, talk, and to perform many other important and difficult things, with little help from anyone.

No one worries that a baby will be too lazy, uncooperative, or unmotivated to learn these things; it is simply assumed that every baby is born wanting to learn the things he needs to know in order to understand and to participate in the world around him. These one- and two-year-old experts teach us several principles of learning:

### Children are naturally curious and have a built-in desire to learn first-hand about the world around them

John Holt, in his book, "How Children Learn", describes the natural learning style of young children:

The child is curious. He wants to make sense out of things, find out how things work, gain competence and control over himself and his environment, and do what he can see other people doing. He is open, perceptive, and experimental. He does not merely observe the world around him; He does not shut himself off from the strange, complicated world around him, but tastes it, touches it, bends it and breaks it. To find out how reality works, he works on it. He is bold. He is not afraid of making mistakes. And he is patient. He can tolerate an extraordinary amount of uncertainty, confusion, ignorance, and suspense... School is not a place that gives much time, or opportunity, or reward, for this kind of thinking and learning.

### Children know best how to go about learning something

If left alone, they will know instinctively what method is best for them. Caring and observant parents soon learn that it is safe and appropriate to trust this knowledge. Such parents say to their baby, "Oh, that's interesting! You're learning how to crawl downstairs by facing backwards!" They do not say, "That's the wrong way." Perceptive parents are aware that there are many different ways to learn something, and they trust their children to know which ways are best for them.

### Children need plentiful amounts of quiet time to think

Research shows that children who are good at fantasizing are better learners and cope better with disappointment than those who have lost this ability. But fantasy requires time, and time is the most endangered commodity in our lives. Fully-scheduled school hours and extracurricular activities leave little time for children to dream, to think, to invent solutions to problems, to cope with stressful experiences, and simply to fulfill the universal need for solitude and privacy.

### Children are not afraid to admit ignorance and to make mistakes

When Holt invited toddlers to play his cello, they would eagerly attempt to do so; school children and adults would invariably decline.

Home-schooling children, free from the intimidation of public embarrassment and failing marks, retain their openness to new exploration. Children learn by asking questions, not by answering them. Toddlers ask many questions, and so do school children - until about grade three. By that time, many of them have learned an unfortunate fact, that in school, it can be more important for self-protection to hide one's ignorance about a subject than to learn more about it, regardless of one's curiosity.

### Children take joy in the intrinsic values of whatever they are learning

There is no need to motivate children through the use of extrinsic rewards, such as high grades or stars, which suggest to the child that the activity itself must be difficult or unpleasant (otherwise, why is a reward, which has nothing to do with the matter at hand, being offered?) The wise parent says, "You're really enjoying that book!" not "If you read this book, you'll get a cookie."

Research shows that children who are good at fantasizing are better learners and cope better with disappointment than those who have lost this ability. But fantasy requires time, and time is the most endangered commodity in our lives.







## Stress interferes with learning

Einstein wrote, "It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion." When a one-year-old falls down while learning to walk, we say, "Good try! You'll catch on soon!" No caring parent would say, "Every baby your age should be walking. You'd better be walking by Friday!"

Most parents understand how difficult it is for their children to learn something when they are rushed, threatened, or given failing grades. John Holt warned that "we think badly, and even perceive badly, or not at all, when we are anxious or afraid... when we make children afraid we stop learning dead in its tracks."

While infants and toddlers teach us many principles of learning, schools have adopted quite different principles, due to the difficulties inherent in teaching a large number of same-age children in a compulsory setting. The structure of school (required attendance, school-selected topics and books, and constant checking of the child's progress) assumes that children are not natural learners, but must be compelled to learn through the efforts of others.

Natural learners do not need such a structure. The success of self-directed learning (home-schoolers regularly outperform their schooled peers on measures of academic achievement, socialization, confidence, and self-esteem) strongly suggests that structured approaches inhibit both learning and personal development.

Home-schooling is one attempt to follow the principles of natural learning, and to help children retain the curiosity, enthusiasm, and love of learning that every child has at birth.

Home-schooling, as Holt writes, is a matter of faith. "This faith is that by nature people are learning animals. Birds fly; fish swim; humans think and learn. Therefore, we do

not need to motivate children into learning by wheedling, bribing, or bullying. We do not need to keep picking away at their minds to make sure they are learning. What we need to do - and all we need to do - is to give children as much help and guidance as they need and ask for, listen respectfully when they feel like talking, and then get out of the way. We can trust them to do the rest.

## Children learn best about getting along with other people through interaction with those of all ages

No parents would tell their baby, "You may only spend time with those children whose birthdays fall within six months of your own. Here's another two-year-old to play with. You can look at each other, but no talking!"

John Taylor Gatto, New York State Teacher of the Year, contends, "It is absurd to sit in confinement with people of exactly the same age and social class. That system effectively cuts you off from the immense diversity of life."

## A child learns best about the world through first-hand experience

No parent would tell her toddler, "Let's put that caterpillar down and get back to your book about caterpillars." Home-schoolers learn directly about the world. Our son describes home-schooling as "learning by doing instead of being taught." Ironically, the most common objection about home-schooling is that children are "being deprived of the real world."

## Children need and deserve ample time with their family

Gatto warns us, "Between schooling and television, all the time children have is eaten up. That's what has destroyed the American family." Many home-schoolers feel that family cohesiveness is perhaps the most meaningful benefit of the experience. Just as I saw his first step and heard his first word, I have the honor and privilege of sharing my son's world and thoughts. Over the years, I have discovered more from him about life, learning, and love, than from any other source. Home-schooling is always a two-way street.

Extracted from:  
[www.naturalchild.com](http://www.naturalchild.com)



## RCC: Early Childhood Development Programme

BY SARAH HUSAIN

# Making Learning Fun

The Releasing Confidence and Creativity: Early Childhood Development Programme in Pakistan (RCC: ECD programme) is the work of a team of hundreds of talented, imaginative and dedicated people who have come together to work on facilitating and implementing a holistic approach to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the targeted communities. The RCC: ECD programme works to influence the environments affecting the child, family, community, school and policy, so that they are supportive of young children's overall development.

The idea of RCC: ECD programme was initiated by the Aga Khan Foundation, Pakistan [AKF(P)] in 2002, when it was observed that the kachi (pre-primary class) had become mere child minding space for young children and their younger siblings, rather than a place for learning. The RCC: ECD programme began as a way to initiate efforts on ECD that focuses on children from 0-8 age group. The RCC: ECD programme, with the financial aid and support of the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE), currently has seven partner organizations. RNE continues to facilitate and expand the work on ECD with three implementing partners and works directly in schools and communities in the targeted districts, while the rest provide technical support in the form of teachers' training, curriculum and material development, health and nutrition, community participation in education as well as overall development of a child, dissemination component (including Pakistan's first ECD magazine and on-line resources), research into the various dimensions of ECD, and assistance to diverse needs of the programme as and when required. Each partner works towards a common goal. The distinct responsibilities of each organization help ensure that the partnerships stay strong and focused.

The family seems to be the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child's development initiatives therefore, RCC: ECD programme also aims to work with parents/care-givers to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in their abilities to support their children's development in the critical early years period from pre-conception to three years. Moreover RCC also focuses on the health and nutrition of young children along with their mothers either through

awareness raising sessions for parents or activities such as regular growth monitoring and health camps activities within the schools and communities.

Seeing an RCC classroom in progress is really interesting as the government teacher and an RCC community teacher work together to bring about an innovative change within their classroom. The teaching techniques adopted by them are developmentally appropriate for enhanced learning; gone are the desks, rote learning and the threats of physical punishment. Instead, the focus is on active learning, encouragement, learning corners, attention to diverse learning styles of the children, large and small group work along with independent work. Each classroom has designated learning areas that include language, home, math, life skills, arts, book corners and more. The daily routine has been divided in such a manner that each day children can participate in planning for their work and also in carrying out their plans. Children then sit with the teacher and recall what tasks they had decided to do and why. During such discussions, conflicts do arise at times between them, but this gives children the opportunities to solve conflicts amongst one another with little teacher intervention. During review time, children recall where they spent their work time, in what corners and the kind of materials that they played with. This helps generate discussions amongst the children as well and helps them become focused on tasks that they have accomplished.

The RCC: ECD programme reaches out to more than 250 schools and thousands of children and community members. The benefits of the programme span the entire community: Children touched by the programme are healthy and excited about their learning while teachers enthuse about new ways of teaching, fathers are proud and happy with the progress of their children and mothers knowing about their health and nutrition participate in classrooms and awareness sessions. In the wider communities, government education officers take pride in bringing in visitors to see the RCC classroom in action. The programme continues its efforts to live up to its name of Releasing Confidence and Creativity within everyone who is a part of the programme.



# PARENTS CORNER

## A Parent's Alphabet for BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Extracted from: [www.ops.org/reading](http://www.ops.org/reading)

A

is for **ACCEPTANCE** of your child as s/he is, good or bad, successful or unsuccessful, an "A" or "C" student. An individual's worth is in being a person and cannot be measured by what he/she can or cannot do. *emine."*

B

is for **BUILDING** on your child's strengths. It is okay if your child changes his mind and starts over with something new, but by pointing out your child's traits that are most appreciated and by observing your child's real skills, positive feelings can be built.

C

is for sincere **COMPLIMENTS** which provide positive feedback, recognizing your child's strengths and demonstrating love and acceptance, for these will help your child to build the ability to assess his/her own strengths and weaknesses.

D

is for **DECISIONS** -- Considering your child's age and level of maturity, practice in making decisions helps your child learn good judgment.

E

is for your **EXPECTATIONS** which must be reasonable so that your child can achieve success.

F

is for **FORGIVING** mistakes, especially your own. Let your child see that you too make mistakes and can learn from them.

G

is for **GOALS**. Help your child to set goals, advising him/her on how to meet them, and rewarding and praising him for doing so.

H

is for **HOME**, where warmth and empathy foster positive feelings of personal worth and self-acceptance; and for Humor, which helps to keep things in perspective.

I

is for your child's **INTERESTS** and activities. Show him/her that what s/he does is important to you by attending games, school programs, recitals and ceremonies.

J

is for meaningful, **"DO-ABLE" JOBS** for which your child is accountable. Praise him/her when he carries them out, for this makes your child feel useful and valued.

K

is for **KEEPING YOUR WORD**. Make sure your child can trust you to follow through.

L

is for treating your child **LOVINGLY**, with respect and courtesy, for in this way your child learns that s/he is important and worthwhile.

M

is for providing a role **MODEL**. Let your child know that you feel good about yourself.

N

is for **NURTURING** your child's trust. It begins with parents, widens to playmates, and later extends to friends at school. As these stages are established in childhood, s/he will then begin to transfer the same feeling toward himself.

O

is for **OTHER PEOPLE** with different backgrounds and norms. Help your child to develop tolerance and to look for strengths in others.

P

is for **PRAISE**, which should be frequent and sincere.

Q

is for **QUESTIONS**, which along with your child's ideas, emotions and feelings should be taken seriously.

R

is for the family **RULES** and well defined limits that are fairly and consistently enforced. The purpose of discipline, in addition to giving your child a sense of security should be to teach your child to make good decisions.

S

is for **STROKING AND COMPLIMENTING** your child, for example: "You're neat. I'm glad you're mine."

T

is for **TIME** spent working and playing together as a family. Sharing fun and learning activities makes your child feel accepted within your family.

U

is for **USING PHRASES** to build self-esteem, such as: "Thank you for helping," or "That was an excellent choice." Avoid messages that hurt self-esteem, for example: "I can't trust you with your bike, how will I trust you with the car?"

V

is for teaching your child **VALUES**: honesty, integrity, love of fellow man and religious beliefs.

W

is for the **WISDOM** you show in giving your child the gift of self-esteem, a foundation on which to build the rest of his/her life.

X

is for the **EXTRA LOVE** that you demonstrate with a touch, a kiss or a hug.

Y

is for **YOUNG**, because your child will only be young for a few short years.

Z

is for the End of the alphabet, but it is also for the beginning of better communication with your child, and the nurturing of self-esteem, the key to success in school and in life.





# Resources for TEACHERS

Child-Friendly Assessment Techniques

Motivating learning in  
Young children







# Child-Friendly Assessments

BY GHAZANFAR SHAHZAD

**B**efore we delve into what Child-Friendly Assessments are, let's first look at the concept of assessment. Assessment in simple terms is *studying someone for a period of time and then deriving an inference about them, their behaviour patterns or their skills*. We do it everyday starting with when we meet someone for the first time to someone we have known for years. We are continuously involved in this process and are unconsciously conducting assessments in our daily lives. This article will try to explain how as a teacher you can conduct assessments consciously and make them work as a professional teaching tool in an early childhood setting.

Consider yourself in an ECE classroom of 3 to 5 year old children. You have been asked to conduct a professional assessment. In order to do this you need to know what to assess, how to assess, and what to do with the assessment?

To start the assessment process you have to have focus. Focus is achieved by gaining knowledge about all domains of a child's development: physical, cognitive, emotional and social. This knowledge makes you conscious while

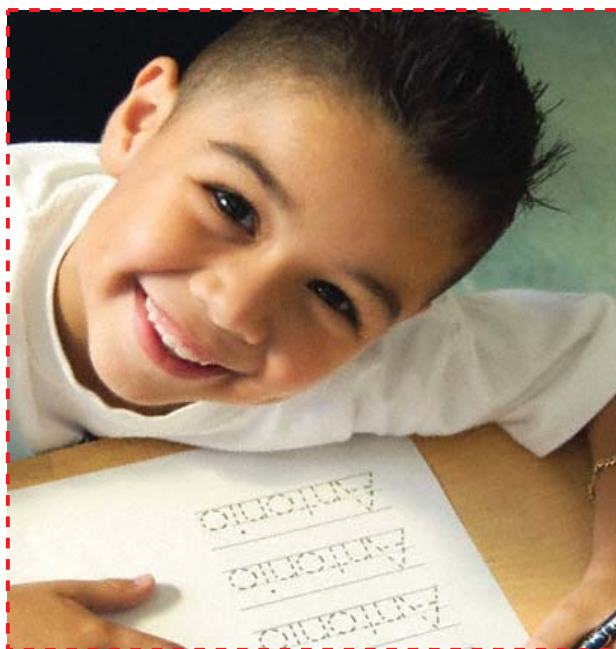
you are observing the child, i.e. you only observe and record facts about the child's actual developmental abilities and avoid recording your personal point of view. It also helps you develop fair expectations from each child, knowing that all children are unique and develop at their own individual pace.

Now that you have focus in your observations you need to know what methods are available to you, so you can professionally assess the information you have gathered. Traditionally there are three types of assessments: Diagnostic, Formative and Summative. All three types should ideally be employed together but that is not always possible, due to the constraints of a teacher's other professional responsibilities.

The first of these, Diagnostic Assessment is the conscious assessment that you usually perform when you meet the child for the first time, like your first impressions about the child's potential. This type of assessment helps in forming a baseline assessment of the child when s/he first comes to you at the beginning of the school year. In practice diagnostic assessments can be done in the form of initial screening interviews with parents, observations and in some cases entrance tests. Diagnostic assessments

can also be utilised during the school year as an analytical tool to help pinpoint a specific delay in a child's academic performance or development. In this way diagnostic assessments help compliment and support formative assessments.

Through out the rest of the year you conduct ongoing assessments and these are known as Formative assessments. Formative assessments are used as an ongoing evaluation tool. They are an essential component of the assessment process, as they help you gather valuable information about the child's continuing academic performance and development. Formative assessments assist teachers in adapting their learning environments, teaching strategies and practices to better match the child's dynamic developmental needs.



Black writes about summative assessment (Brookhart, 1999), "When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative assessment; when the customer tastes the soup, that's summative assessment". Summative assessment is a test, usually given at the end of a term, semester, year, or the like. The purpose of this assessment type is again evaluative, but as the analogy states it happens when little or nothing can be done to change or modify the soup's taste. In our case, as teachers we would be hard pressed to help the child if some developmental shortcoming is identified in the end of term summative assessment.

As you might have noticed by now that there is a fair amount of observation that is involved in the assessment process. So the question that comes to mind is how can a teacher observe and record everything that happens in a classroom? Because the teacher doesn't always have the luxury to step back, s/he has to be an active player in the classroom setting and has to actively engage with children and take part in their activities. This is a skill you have to develop, to be actively involved, picking up cues from the children and at the same time observing each individual child. By recording observations regularly and

efficiently, you will build up comprehensive academic and developmental evidence for each child. This will help you to be aware of all areas of the child's learning and development. The methods of assessment and record-keeping for you to follow are given below:

## Checklist of Children's Progress

In a register, you should maintain a monthly checklist for each child, using the knowledge of the child's developmental domains and curricular goals. You can record any special comments you may want to remember about a child, in this register. In the last week of each month, as you carry out your daily routine, keep your register handy to observe the children in your class. If you record your observations of five to six children a day, you will easily cover the entire class each month. It may seem difficult at first, but with a little practice you will see the value of the information you have at hand and it will not seem difficult anymore.

## Portfolio of Children's Work

At the beginning of the academic year get a file or folder for each child. Write the child's full name, parents' name, address, date of birth, date of admission and any other relevant information on the cover.

In this portfolio you should maintain each child's art work and other worksheets. Each sheet should have the child's name and complete date on which the work was done, written clearly on it. The portfolio will help you assess the progress children have made in their art work, writing and understanding of maths related concepts. At the end of the academic year, before they take their portfolios home, let the children decorate their folders by colouring or pasting pictures on it.

## Progress Report for Parents

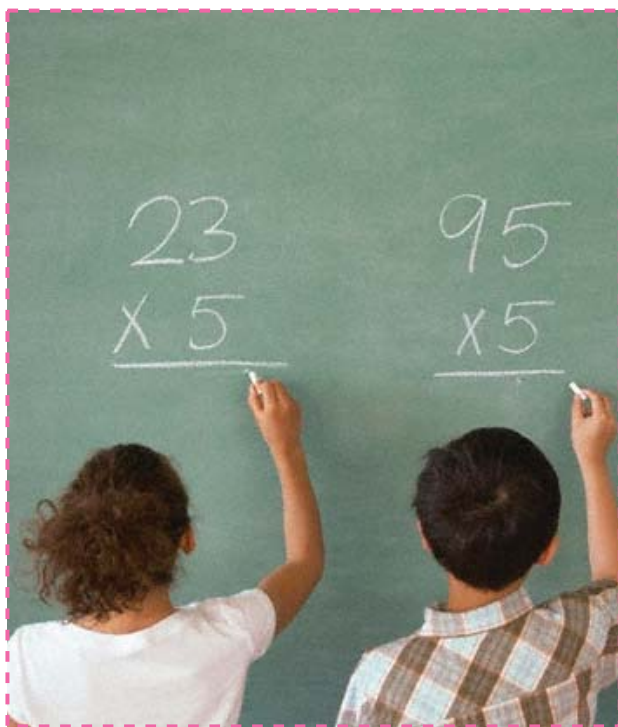
At the end of each term invite the parents to a meeting to your classroom, to discuss their child's progress. You can show them what their child has learnt and share his/her portfolio with them. Twice a year you should complete and share with parents a progress report of their child. This report will be based on his/her developmental domains and curricular goals. To make judgements about the progress of the child and to support your evaluations, use your observations, monthly checklists and the work in the portfolio.



This was half the pie of Child Friendly Assessments. Now let's look at the other equally important half. How can you make your assessments child friendly? Inherently when you employ assessment techniques in their traditional form they are child friendly, as they assess children's individual abilities, behaviour patterns and skills. They provide you with real-time data about the child's development and academic progress. This helps modify your teaching practices and lesson plans so as to match the needs of the child. In reality though, knowledge of assessment and its techniques alone is not enough to make its application child friendly. To achieve this we need to try and practice the principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), sensitivity and confidentiality while conducting assessments. These principles act as guiding ethical standards that help protect and safeguard the child's rights.

DAP lends itself to the process of assessment by providing teachers with guidelines that help them understand each child's uniqueness and individuality through age appropriateness.

This means that while assessing you remember that every two year old can't do things a three year old child can do, although there are always some exceptions. But keeping this concept in mind will let you assess the age appropriateness of the task or activity the child is engaged in, as it would not be a just assessment if a three year old is observed while s/he was given a task which is age appropriate for a four year old child.



DAP helps you develop a fair expectation in the abilities of each individual child in group-care by relating assessments to Developmental Appropriateness. For instance, Aslam and Hadia, are both three years old, born in the same month, joined school at the same time and have had more or less the same experiences at school.

Does this mean that both of them will develop at the same developmental pace? No, and this is what developmental appropriateness encourages you to think about. In doing so, it prevents you not only from having unfair expectations but also stops you from comparing the children and their abilities against each other, thereby making them equals and not 'one better than the other'.

DAP also allows you to take account of each child's distinctive family and community backgrounds while passing inferences about their development, thus making their assessment process culturally appropriate.

DAP makes you receptive to the child's developmental needs. However while assessing you also have to look after the child's right to feel safe and protected while being observed. Sensitivity in assessment refers to guidelines by way of which you prevent yourself from:

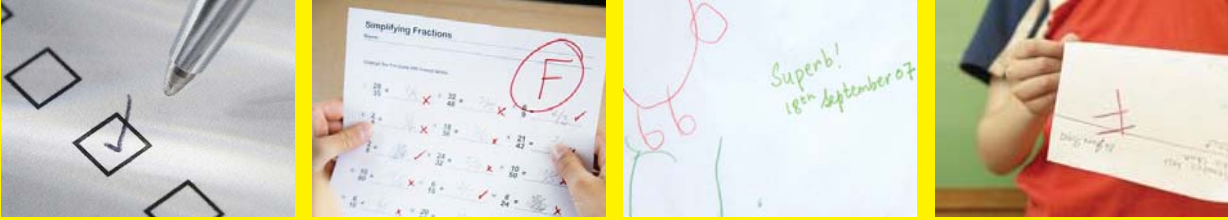
- Forcing the child to continue with an activity if they don't want to, even if it is an activity for which you want to assess that child's ability.
- Conducting an assessment which does not benefit the child and is being done just for the sake of assessment

Now that you are aware of the child's needs (DAP) and his/her right to feel safe (sensitivity) you also have to provide the child, his/her right to protection in order for your assessment practices to be truly child friendly. This we achieve by practicing the concept of confidentiality. It simply means that you treat all the information you have gathered about the child through observations, checklists, child portfolios and parent meetings as a secret. A secret kept from other school teachers and your friends/families. The only people who can have access to the child's information are the class teacher, other school assigned assessor/s, school administration and the child's parents. This practice helps protect the child from being labeled as a genius or a lazy and dull child by allowing others to form their own fresh impressions of the child and his abilities, providing all children an equal opportunity to progress without being treated with too much special attention or none at all.

If now after reading this article you feel that conducting professional assessments will not be as easy an undertaking as you had first thought, just remind yourself of the many times you too could have personally benefited in your own childhood, if someone was conducting a child friendly assessment on you in your school setting. An assessment that could have helped you not only understand your own individual abilities and skills, but also provide you with the means; a receptive teacher, a dynamic learning environment and an adaptive curriculum to help you develop holistically.

## A Checklist for Teachers

Assessment of individual children's development and learning is essential for planning and implementing appropriate curriculum. In developmentally appropriate programmes, assessment and curriculum are integrated, with teachers continually engaging in observational assessment for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. To carry out assessments in a child friendly manner, teachers should keep certain guidelines in mind. These have been summarized below in the form of a checklist.

		
Details	Yes	No
Assessment of young children's progress and achievements is ongoing, strategic, and purposeful.		
The content of assessments reflects progress toward important learning and developmental goals.		
Assessments are tailored to a specific purpose and used only for the purpose for which they have been demonstrated to produce reliable, valid information.		
Decisions that have a major impact on children, such as enrollment or placement, are never made on the basis of a single developmental assessment or screening device but are based on multiple sources of relevant information, particularly observations by teachers and parents.		
To identify children who have special learning or developmental needs and to plan appropriate curriculum and teaching for them, developmental assessments and observations are used.		
Assessment recognizes individual variation in learners and allows for differences in styles and rates of learning.		

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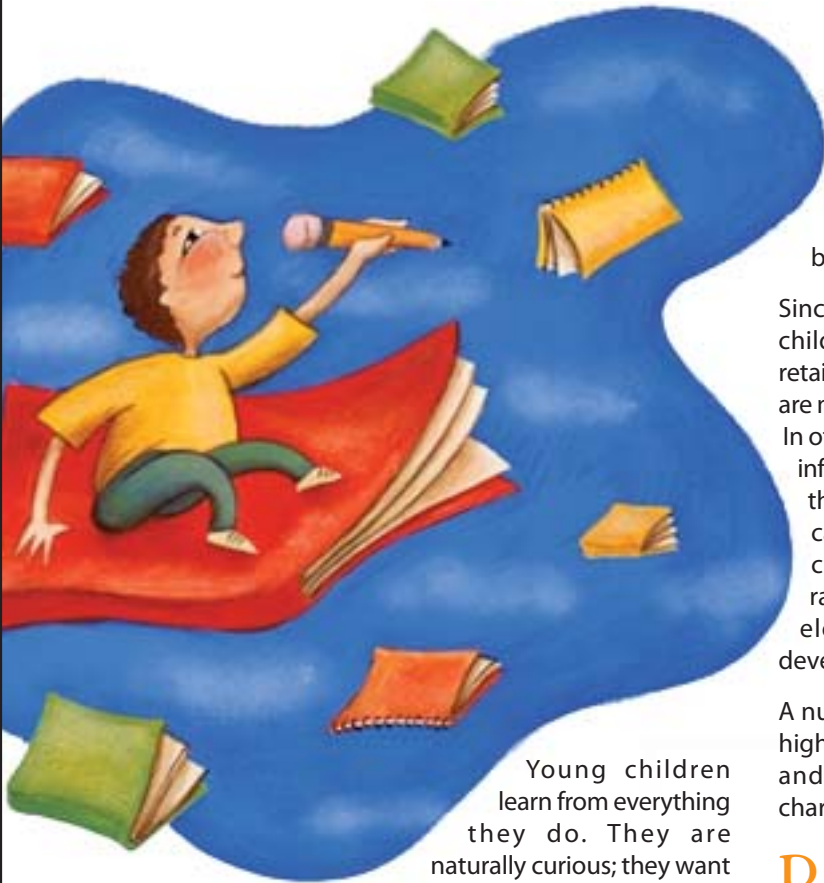
(For a more complete discussion of principles of appropriate assessment, see the position statement *Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment for Children Ages 3 through 8* [NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 1992]; see also Shepard 1994.)

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# Motivating Children to Learn

BY MARYAM HASSAN



Young children learn from everything they do. They are naturally curious; they want to explore and discover. If their explorations bring pleasure or success, they want to learn more. During the early years, children form attitudes about learning that last a lifetime. Children who receive the right sort of support and encouragement during these years will be creative and adventurous learners throughout their lives. Children who do not receive this sort of support and interaction are likely to have a much different attitude about learning later in life.

## Characteristics of Motivation in Young Children

Children do many things simply because they want to do them. Selecting a toy or a shirt to wear is the result of "intrinsic motivation." The child makes his/her own choice and achieves satisfaction from both the act of choosing and from the opportunity to wear the shirt. Since the activity is generating motivation, it is mostly self-sustaining for as long as the child wants to continue the activity. Children also engage in some activities because adults tell them to, or in an effort to please another party. These activities are "extrinsically motivated." When a child is extrinsically motivated, the reward comes from outside the child—it has to be provided by someone else, and has to be continually given for the child to remain motivated enough to continue the activity. It is more difficult for a

child to sustain and extrinsically motivated activity because of this reliance upon some outside force.

Since intrinsically motivated activity is more rewarding, children learn more from this sort of activity, and they retain that learning better. Intrinsically motivated children are more involved in their own learning and development. In other words, children are more likely to learn and retain information when they are intrinsically motivated - when they believe that they are pleasing themselves. Parents can build on this sense of confidence by guiding their child's play and activities while still giving the child a range of options. This unstructured play is an essential element of the child's motivation, learning, and development.

A number of behavioral characteristics are indicators of high motivation. Here are some of the important factors and some ways to help your child develop these characteristics.

## Dependency on Adults

The amount of dependency on adults is another indicator of motivation. Children with strong intrinsic motivation do not need an adult constantly watching and helping with activities. Children who have a lower level of motivation or are extrinsically motivated need constant attention from adults and cannot function independently. Since independence is an important aspect of quality learning, this dependence on adults will greatly limit children's ability to succeed in school. Parents can increase the likelihood of their child's building independent motivation by providing toys and activities that play to the child's natural creativity and curiosity.

## Emotion

Another indicator of motivational level is emotion. Children who are clearly motivated will have a positive display of emotion. They are satisfied with their work and show more enjoyment in the activity.

Children without appropriate motivation will appear quiet, sullen and bored. They will not take any apparent pleasure in their activity and will often complain. As a parent, you are probably the best judge of your child's moods. That cranky, whiny voice is usually a good indicator that a child doesn't feel very good about herself and needs a new adventure of some sort.

## Persistence

Persistence is the ability to stay with a task for a reasonably long period of time. While very young children cannot concentrate on one activity for an hour, there are still measurable differences in the length of time that young children will engage in an activity. A highly motivated child will stay involved for a long period of time, whereas an unmotivated child will give up very easily when not instantly successful. Children learn persistence when they are successful at a challenging task. The art of building persistence is in offering a task that is just challenging enough, but not overwhelming.

## Choice of Challenge

Choice of challenge is another characteristic of motivation. Children who experience success in meeting one challenge will become motivated and welcome another. These motivated learners will choose an activity that is slightly difficult for them, but provides an appropriate challenge. Unmotivated children (those who have not experienced early success) will pick something that is very easy and ensures an instant success. The challenge for parents is helping their child find an appropriate challenge while still allowing the choice to be the child's.

## Developing Motivation

Newborn infants are born with a tremendous amount of intrinsic motivation. This motivation is aimed toward having some visible effect on the environment. When infants can actually see the results of their actions as a reward, they are motivated to continue those actions. These attempts toward control are limited within the young child and include crying, vocalizations, facial expressions and small body movements.

As infants grow and continue to mature (9-24 months), more voluntary, purposeful movements are possible. This gives them more control of their environment. This wider range of control allows children to feel that they are successful. Success leads to higher self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, which leads to strengthened motivation. This success is not based upon adult standards, but totally upon the child's ability to accomplish the goals that s/he has set out.

By two years of age, children are developing the ability to execute a sequence of events in order to achieve a goal. They also have an appreciation for standards and begin to evaluate their efforts. By three years of age, children become interested in doing things well, as opposed to just doing them. They have an idea of various levels of competency in performance and judge their success by their own internal standards. Therefore they have much less need for adult feedback about the quality of their efforts.

Preschoolers (age 3-5 years) become more involved with verbal problem solving skills. They direct their own

learning through speech and use vocal communication to direct their own behavior to solve problems. Young children are often heard talking amongst themselves through a series of actions that lead to the solution of a problem. As children get older, this "talking out loud" become an internal monologue. This newly developed ability to problem solve is the basis for motivation at this stage. Having the self confidence to know that one can solve a problem motivates the learner to accept other new and challenging situations, which in turn lead to greater learning.

**There are several strategies parents can use to help children remain more fully intrinsically motivated.**

- Provide an environment that allows children to freely explore and to see the effect of their actions (i.e., toys that have visible or tangible changes when moved).
- Allow children ample time when working to allow for persistence. When children are deeply involved with an activity, make sure that they can finish without interruption.
- Respond to children's needs in a consistent, predictable manner, but allow them to be as independent as possible. This does NOT mean ceding all control to your child. All children need clearly defined limits. Playtime, however, need not be structured and organized.
- Provide many opportunities for children and adults to explore together and interact directly. It is important for both children and adults to work together on an activity.
- Provide situations that give children an acceptable challenge. Activities that are slightly difficult for the child will be more motivating and provide for stronger feelings of success when accomplished. This may take some trial and error at first.
- Give children opportunities to evaluate their own accomplishments. Rather than stating that you think they have done a good job, ask them what they think of their work. You'll never go wrong by asking the question, "What do YOU think?"
- Do not use excessive rewards. Praise and rewards should be based upon children's effort and persistence, rather than on the actual accomplishment. Children reliant on rewards grow up to be adults with low self esteem and they become dependent on approval and attention.

The world through a child's eyes is an awesome place. Allow children to explore and discover their world. Around every corner is an experience just waiting to surprise and excite young growing minds; all they need is a small amount of direction and a large amount of freedom. It is not necessary to praise and reward children for their own actions as they attempt to control their environment. The feelings of accomplishment they gain from results of those actions will be reward enough. Remember, the habits and attitudes toward learning that are formed in these early years set the mood for all future learning.





# Interview with ABBAS HUSAIN

*Abbas Husain, Director, Teachers' Development Centre has been involved in teaching and training teachers for more than two decades. His extensive teaching experience and the training he has received as well as conducted, makes him an expert on teaching and learning methodologies. His focus has been on training teachers since he feels that it is the most effective way to enhance the learning process of students.*

BY FAIZA KHAN

**Q: What made you enter the field of teaching? And from a university professor, how did you come about to training teachers?**

**A:** I belonged to a middle class family and I did not have a role model of teaching in the family. None of my father's side of the family or my mother's side of the family went into teaching. So it is sometimes hard to explain where this impulse came from, but I knew at the age of nine that I wanted to be a university professor. And in that sense I have been singularly focused in getting all the skills that I would need to make me a university professor, and keeping away from all the things that would take me away from becoming one. So that single minded focus has guided me all my life.

As far as training teachers is concerned, I benefited from a University's Grants Commission Diploma course that was called 'Teaching English as an International Language', in 1983. This was run by the Ministry of Education, Allama Iqbal University and the University of Manchester. The course opened up my mind to what can be done with teachers so that they become 'effective teachers' and learning from foreign professors as well as our own stalwarts, was an excellent experience. It brought about a major change in my perception. As a result of that course and my performance in it, I earned a British Council Scholarship to go to Manchester for a year. So I have an M Ed. in English as a foreign language. Of course that gave me a whole bag of tools and strategies of what to do. So when I came back from Manchester in 1986, I realized

that I can teach students all I want but I won't change the education scenario of the country. It is only when I train teachers that each teacher will go on to teach 30 students and there will be a multiplier effect. Once a penny dropped into that slot, I decided to move on to full time teacher training.

**Q: So in light of all these educational development programs that you have attended and training workshops you have conducted for various organisations in Pakistan, how would you say adult learning is different from the way children learn?**

**A:** There are categorical differences. Adult learning and children learning are two different dynamics. I believe that very many teacher trainers are not effective when they infantilize teachers. You can say to a little child "learn" this it will do you good' - you can not do that to an adult. An adult needs to be shown the relevance of things straight away. Adults have a set of habits, mindsets, experiences and prejudices. These are not a burden for a trainer but a resource to tap into. By taking care of adult learners' needs, we can enhance their learning capabilities.

**Q: Do you honestly believe that learning is a life long process?**

**A:** I believe that as we grow older, (because of our experiences) we create clustered networks of ideas. We have an increasing impatience with 'smooth' talk. We understand the complexities of life and we know that



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things are not simple. That cynicism others consider as an aversion to learning. That is not true. That is actually an aversion to the hocus-pocus passed off as learning. True learning continues. I believe that learning is also connected to personality types. I have met 65 year olds that are more open to learning than 29 year olds. Curiosity as a ‘state’ and ‘trait’ are very different things. Curiosity for a momentary thing is a state, but a relentless quest for asking questions and a desire to know, is a trait. I believe that people with ‘trait curiosity’ will remain young in their approach to learning forever. Sadly parts of our education system turns off this trait very early. It needs to be fostered in schools, and if it’s switched off there, we lose the child’s approach to learning as a person.

### **Q: What is the impact of learning on young children?**

**A:** Our research and observation tells us that as life becomes more complex in the modern world, children need to start off with a certain set of skills that need to be developed at school. There is a whole critique of this approach as well, that believes that schools are repressive. They do have a valid point. Schools can change their approach to learning from being tedious and boring to joyful and encouraging. However, there are a set of competencies that a child can acquire only in his growing age from 0-15, and not beyond that. So learning at a young age is important.

Also, if you read Steven Pinker’s research, it shows that a human being is hard wired for learning. Children as young as a few weeks old respond to patterns of sounds and smells. That is how early our learning begins! So we can safely say that a child comes to school with his/her desire to learn intact – it is the school that switches it off.

### **Q: Do you believe that there are different learning styles for each individual? Could you tell our readers about some of them, and whether these styles can be incorporated into our classrooms?**

**A:** Indeed we all have human modalities of learning and preferences and these preferences can be put

under three broad categories; bodily kinesthetic, audio and visual. With the theory of multiple intelligences we have added some more. I believe that even when these differences in learning styles exist, we should be careful in making them so individual and unique that children cannot be grouped together and put under one room. If that becomes the case there will be no learning because there will never be enough teachers. At the same time, I also believe that the teacher should open up possibilities to allow for different modalities of learning in the same classroom rather than the insistence that everyone should do the same thing at the same time. There is space and time available in the class for children to explore different modalities even when the same thing is being taught. When one child might prefer writing an essay answer, another might prefer making a flowchart to explain what he is trying to say, and another still might prefer a drawing, and all of these should be acceptable.

### **Q: What are your comments on the national curriculum and its exclusion of social ethics as a subject? Should it incorporate social values and norms?**

**A:** One of the oddest things about our system is that in theory it is immaculate, but when it comes down to implementation there are major problems. You have to understand that the education system in any country is broken down into different aspects; there is the policy level where the curriculum is decided as a set of competencies that is required, and then the syllabus which is a broad outline of how much of each subject is to be taught at each level of education. To support the syllabus we have the textbooks and teacher training. I don’t think changes are required in the curriculum documents or at the policy level. It’s when you come down to teacher training and textbooks that you see a big gap. Teacher training I believe is the lynchpin. This is because you can have a horrible text book, but if you have a trained teacher s/he will know what to do with it. But if you have a great textbook and an untrained teacher, you will still not get the same results.

The problem with the system also is that we have



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discarded "civics" as a subject and it is not incorporated into the system through enough textbooks. The syllabus is overshadowed by history as a subject and simple day to day things like traffic management and road safety are left out.

**Q: How should learning and teaching take place between a student and a teacher? Do you think it's possible for a teacher to learn from his or her students?**

**A:** I marvel at the fact that my students are grateful to me when I am in fact grateful to them. To be a teacher you have to be a learner; the day you stop learning you are out. To be a teacher you have to learn new and new methods to 'connect' and 'correct' students. Children need to be shown connections between ideas and for that the teachers need to see the connections themselves. They must also be able to make corrections very deftly. Moreover, if the teacher cannot make connections of the present world to the child's life, the learning will be hampered. For the child to enter class and realise that his/her own life, culture and language is of no consequence in the classroom, where s/he is only being demanded to write things which are of no consequence to him/her in copies, it will be difficult to retain things. And then we expect the child to remain interested! Teachers should accept that they are apprentices to any body of knowledge that they are teaching to the learner. Teachers should have the 'lets learn together' approach, and should admit that they are also students of the same subject, only they learnt some of it a few years earlier than the students. Teachers should be open to the idea that there yet might be a better way of doing things. When the learner sees this approach of the teacher, a whole new dynamics emerges and a new relationship takes place between the teacher and learner.

**Q: We've spoken about students and we've spoken about teachers, lets now come to parents. How can parents facilitate learning at home? What should parents keep in mind when creating a learning environment at home for their children?**

**A:** Many parents ask me about which school to put their children and I tell them, "please don't worry about the reputation of the school. The distance is a bigger problem." Don't make your children leave the house at

6:30 in the morning for school starting at 8:00 AM and make them come back home at 3:30 PM for classes finishing at 1:00 PM. That will make a child hate learning for the rest of his/her life no matter what you do. You pack off a child to school, cold tired, and possibly hungry so early in the morning and make him/her come

back so late in the afternoon, and you expect him not to have a lack of concentration or problems such as anemia? Put the child in a school closer to home, regardless of its reputation or lack of - that should not be the issue.

The issue is creating an atmosphere at home where a child can learn. People say, "my child doesn't read." My reply to them is "when do they see you read?" Children imitate. When they don't see a parent read, why do you expect them to pick up a book? Any house which has 50 books in it will have children which go to university. This might be a categorical statement, but it is a fact! And by books I mean any kind of informative reading material. If there is DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time at home, times of silences when the TV is switched off and everyone reads - there will be learning.



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# Focusing on the Early Years

## Status of Young Children Around the World

Learning begins before a child walks through the classroom door. From the earliest age, children's development and learning are fostered through their interactions with caring human beings in secure, nurturing and stimulating environments. Young children's experiences in the first years of life - well before they begin school - create the foundation for subsequent learning. Although early childhood is a period of great potential for human growth and development, it is also a time when children are especially fragile and vulnerable.

Today, despite considerable progress, the status of young children remains disturbing, particularly in the poorest countries. A child born in the developing world has a four out of ten chance of living in extreme poverty, defined as living on less than US\$1 a day. An estimated 10.5 million children died in 2005 before they reached age 5, most from preventable diseases and in countries that have experienced major armed conflict since 1999. AIDS has orphaned more than 15 million children under age 18, 80% of them in sub-Saharan Africa. The rights of millions of children are violated by trafficking, labour, abuse and neglect. Finally, many of the 50 million children whose births are not registered each year are unable to access basic services or schooling as a result.

For all these reasons early intervention is crucial: it is far more challenging and costly to compensate for educational and social disadvantage among older children and adults than it is to provide preventive measures and support in early childhood. Good-quality early childhood care and education programmes - including immunization, parenting education, home-based activities and kindergartens, pre-schools or nurseries - provide health, nutrition, hygiene, stimulation and social interaction that support children's development and learning. Participation of young children in such programmes can lead to a more equitable society.

## ECCE: a right in itself

Developing country governments thus far have generally given less policy attention to early childhood (and to literacy) than to primary education and gender parity. For vulnerable and disadvantaged children, the lack of a national ECCE policy truly represents a missed opportunity. Where ECCE does get attention, it is usually geared towards ages 3 and up, and focused on the years before primary school entry, leaving opportunities for younger children overlooked,

ECCE is both a right and a major contributor to development and poverty reduction. Fortunately, international commitment to early childhood is growing. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed



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ECD

by 192 nations, focuses on guaranteeing the rights of young children to survive, develop and be protected. The 1990 World Declaration on Education for ALL states that 'learning begins at birth' and encourages the development of ECCE. The World Education Forum at Dakar in 2000 reaffirmed the importance of ECCE in reaching basic education goals, as did the UN Special Session on Children in 2002. These ground-breaking legal and political commitments all recognize that children are born with the right to have their learning needs met through approaches that promote their holistic development. To date, however, these rights are far from the reality for many children.

Recent demographic, economic, social and political trends around have increased the need for comprehensive ECCE policies and programmes. Urbanization and the resulting changes to household structures have reduced the role of extended family members as care givers. Growing numbers of working mothers with young children have increased the demand for non-parental child care. Pressures to increase competitiveness in a world economy that is increasingly knowledge-based have led to calls for improving children's school readiness. World health crises (particularly HIV/AIDS) and other emergencies (e.g. famine, natural disaster and war) require responses to protect the safety and well-being of young children. These contextual trends have influenced the types and coverage of ECCE programmes as well as the extent to which nations have made progress towards achieving EFA goals.

The situation as described above reminds us that there is no place for complacency. We have a collective responsibility to ensure quality education for all, a responsibility that begins by providing strong foundations for children in the first eight years of their life and continues through adulthood.

Source:

EFA: Global Monitoring Report 2007, Strong Foundations, ECCE

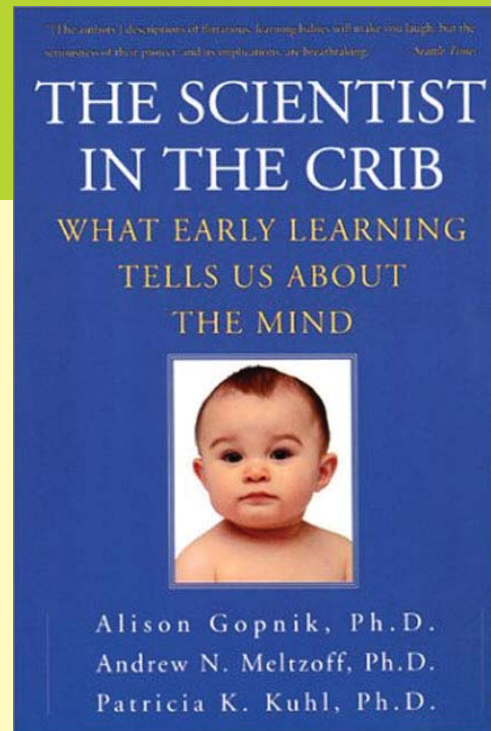


# BOOK Review

## 'The Scientist in the Crib'

by Alison Gopnik, Ph.D., Andrew N. Meltzoff, Ph.D.  
Patricia K. Kuhl, Ph.D.

REVIEWED BY: SARAH HUSAIN



This exciting book by three pioneers in the new field of cognitive science discusses important discoveries about how much babies and young children know and learn, and how much parents naturally teach them. It argues that evolution designed us both to teach and learn, and that the drive to learn is our most important instinct. It also reveals fascinating insights about our adult capacities and how even young children -- as well as adults -- use some of the same methods that allow scientists to learn so much about the world. Filled with surprise at every turn, this vivid, lucid, and often funny book gives us a new view of the inner life of children and the mysteries of the mind.

### Excerpt:

Studying babies is full of fascination in its own right. But developmental research also helps answer a more general, deep, and ancient question, not just about babies but about us. We human beings, no more than a few pounds of protein and water, have come to understand the origins of the universe, the nature of life, and even a few things about ourselves. No other animal, and not even the most sophisticated computer, knows as much. And yet every one of us started out as the helpless creature in the crib. Only a few tiny flickers of information from the outside world reach that creature--a few photons hitting its retinas, some sound waves vibrating at its eardrums--and yet we end up knowing how the world works. How do we do it? How did we get here from there?

questions, too. It turns out that the capacities that allow us to learn about the world and ourselves have their origins in infancy. We are born with the ability to discover the secrets of the universe and of our own minds, and with the drive to explore and experiment until we do. Science isn't just the specialized province of a chilly elite; instead, it's continuous with the kind of learning every one of us does when we're very small.

Trying to understand human nature is part of human nature. Developmental scientists are themselves engaged in the same enterprise and use the same cognitive tools as the babies they study. The scientist peering into the crib, looking for answers to some of the deepest questions about how minds and the world and language work, sees the scientist peering out of the crib, who, it turns out, is doing much the same thing. No wonder they both smile.

The new research about babies holds answers to those

# WEBSITE Review

## The Natural Child Project

www.naturalchild.org

### The Natural Child Project™

Children reflect the treatment they receive.

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#### Welcome to The Natural Child Project

Our vision is a world in which all children are treated with dignity, respect, understanding, and compassion. In such a world, every child can grow into adulthood with a generous capacity for love and trust. Our society has no more urgent task.

♥ Donate

#### Quote of the Month

"The child must know that he is a miracle, that since the beginning of the world there hasn't been, and until the end of the world there will not be, another child like him."

Pablo Casals

[Read more quotes](#)

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Amy Scott

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#### Featured Gift Shop Items

We came across 'The Natural Child Project' website by chance when we were looking for some good reading material on learning. Just a slight skim of the website and we felt we had struck gold. This website is truly a treasure chest of some wonderful information on "attachment parenting" (raising children with respect and trust), un-schooling (trusting the child to set the "curriculum"), and child advocacy.

The purpose of the website is clearly defined on the home page. "Our vision is a world in which all children are treated with dignity, respect, understanding and compassion," states the website. "In such a world, every child can grow into adulthood with a generous capacity for love and trust. Our society has no more urgent tasks."

One of the features that impressed us was the section that had in it an endless list of articles on parenting and ECD – all of them by distinguished writers and educationists. Some of the titles include very interesting and informative pieces such as "10 Tips for Shopping with Children", "Attachment Parenting and Nonviolent Communication", "The Biological Roots of Love", "Pre-Birth Communication" and so many more.

There is so much more on this website to enjoy and learn from. You can find one of the best children's art gallery's on this website. The Global Children's Art Gallery features 1,050 pictures by children from 67 countries. You can view all the pictures, and order prints and posters to support the work of the team behind the website. This section is also part of the Natural Child Project's fundraising parenting gift shop where you can also find clothes, books and greeting cards. The website welcomes donations and don't forget to subscribe to their free monthly email newsletter.

REVIEWED BY:  
YOUSHEY ZAKIUDDIN

The website is being maintained by a psychologist from Canada – Ms. Jan Hunt. Ms. Hunt is also a family counselor specializing in attachment parenting (even at the prenatal stage), and the editorial assistant for Empathic Parenting magazine. She has published site reviews in Mothering magazine and articles in Natural Life, the Times-Colonist, the Sunriver Sun, and other periodicals. Strengthening the website's utility as a information resource for parents, Ms. Hunt also offers telephone counseling worldwide on attachment parenting and unschooling. Another very educational section is the 'Parenting Advice Column Archive', which has advice for parents on children's learning.

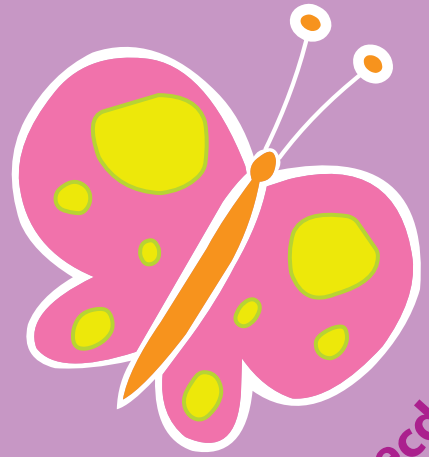
The website has received numerous official accolades, from the Exploratorium's 10 Cool Sites list and USA Today's Hot Site to the latest one - the April '98 Childfun Award. It was also featured on CNN Headline News and Canada AM TV programs.

**According to Ms. Jan Hunt, Project Director,  
www.naturalchild.org**

"Our objective is to help parents understand the critical importance of the earliest years of childhood, and to provide the kinds of information and encouraging support they need to treat their children with unconditional love and respect."

"Every child has a built-in clock and timetable, and we need to respect that," Jan says. "Children are not trains. If a train is late at its first five stops, it will likely be late arriving at its final destination. But a child can be late at all the stops and then suddenly be ahead of everyone else," she says.





[www.ecdpak.com](http://www.ecdpak.com)

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- Resources for Teachers
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