From the editor - Learning Curve Issue XXII

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The Editorial from Issue XXII of the Learning Curve on the theme of ‘Early Childhood Education’.

From the Editor

This Issue of the Learning Curve focuses on one of the most important periods in any individual’s life – early childhood. Whatever differences there may be on any other aspect of education, this is one area on which everyone agrees: that the years between birth and eight are the most significant and can make or break a life. So universal is this that it is equally true in all cultures.

This subject is of such importance and magnitude that all of us were unanimous in our decision to devote a whole Issue to the subject. Why educationists and psychologists consider this to be a prime time, when interventions should take place, how they should happen if they are to achieve optimum long-term results: these are all important and on-going concerns of anyone who has anything to do with children. In the first place are parents, who are the first organisers of an infant’s life. Every thing is an opportunity for learning because everything is so wondrously new. Whether it is language acquisition, motor skills, skills for life, such as human interaction, learning how to learn: all of it occurs every moment in these vital first years.

Government as well as private schools are very aware of this and want to provide the very best kindergarten and primary education that is possible. However, does that happen? In the case of private schools, there is no controlling body, which makes sure that basic standards are being kept up. In the case of government schools, teachers are so busy with administrative details that they are unable to do what is required. Space is an issue in both cases and lack of infrastructure is another impediment. In the home - the first school that a child is in, albeit informally - the pressures of everyday life do not allow interactions that were common place 30 years ago. Add to this the inert influence of the computer, ipad, mobile phone and TV, none of which require active language skills and the stage is set for wasted opportunity, because all the time, precious time ticks away.

This Issue has focus articles by some of the most well-known and much respected educationists in the country, followed by very practical and hands-on approaches to Early Childhood Education (ECE). As a sample, here are some of the issues dealt with. There are articles describing a successful experiment to include age and ability levels, an outline of the importance of creativity and the arts in early childhood. Gender rights in early childhood and new light on teaching reading skills, something every child should have the opportunity to learn, have also found a place in the Issue. Two other very important aspects - the role of a teacher as a researcher and the way forward for ECE have been discussed.

Other contributors have shared invaluable practical experiences. For instance a very important aspect, which we may not always consider - readiness for the schooling - experience is the topic of a separate article, as is the examination of the ticklish issue of the mother tongue versus English in ECE. The way to learning being a unique process, and a case for early intervention have been made out. Another thought-provoking aspect is the executive summary of the Azim Premji Foundation’s project in Medak, Andhra Pradesh.

This is by no means an exhaustive list – it is a sampling of the diversity of this issue. We think that it is a comprehensive examination of a topic of immense magnitude, affecting not only the individual child but also the country and the world. Put simply, the future of our planet depends on the way we handle our young children.

Before I close, our thanks for this Issue go to Jigisha Shastri and Kinnari Pandya. They very kindly agreed to be advisors to the Issue and without their help and close involvement at every stage – from helping us decide on relevant topics to suggesting names and contacting other experts - this would not have been possible. Thank you both.

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