Planning and Management of Early Childhood Education

A Case of Himachal Pradesh - India

NEELAM SOOD

National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
17-B, Sri Aurobindo Marg,
New Delhi, INDIA

January 2003

CONTENTS

Abstract

This paper is based on a study that attempted to examine the current provision of early childhood education and primary education in the State of Himachal Pradesh and the existing pattern of linkage between the two. The study specifically looked into several aspects, such as: provision of ECE, type of services available, villages served, the scatter of available services, facilities available, profile of children benefiting from these services, contribution of ECE to primary education, quality of education in the initial grades of primary school, teachers' profile, children's readiness at school entry, progress through early grades, administrative and academic linkage and continuity from ECE to primary stage, etc. This paper examines only the issues relating to the provision of ECE in the State.

The investigation was done in two phases. In the first phase, an exhaustive picture was drawn of the two blocks, namely Nahan and Sarahan in Sirmour district of Himachal Pradesh. The second phase was a more detailed assessment conducted on a smaller sample of students, teachers and institutions. The sample included 30 institutions/schools each at the pre-primary and primary stage.

Of the 86 and 67 existing institutions at the pre-primary level in Nahan and Sarahan respectively, a large majority were Anganwadis (the child development centers) operating under the centrally sponsored scheme called Integrated Child Development Services. The pre-primary sections attached to government primary schools were negligible in number.

The other type available was the nursery class of the schools run by private agencies. These were found to be more in number in Nahan, which is a partly urban area. Interestingly, the private institutions were mostly concentrated in the central part of the block whereas the ICDS centers were located in the periphery. Altogether these institutions served a population of 1145 and 983 children in the age-group of 3-6 years in Nahan and Sarahan, leaving about 80 per cent of children of this age group outside the system. The study also revealed that 69 per cent of total villages in Nahan and 82 per cent in Sarahan remained unserved by any kind of pre-primary facility.

Infrastructure available at pre-primary institutions was far from satisfactory. About one-third of these institutions were functioning in rooms/buildings that could best be described as poor. Non-availability of safe drinking water, electricity, lack of sanitation facilities, inadequate seating arrangement, unattractive classrooms, etc., did not quite add up to make the atmosphere child-friendly. These facilities were found to be somewhat better in primary schools.

Teachers had relevant qualifications, training and experience. Above all, they were available and seemed motivated. On an average, there were 10-12 children per teacher in a class which gave them an advantage that could be used by teachers to move beyond a routinized methods of teaching where children listened passively. Classroom observations however did not corroborate this. Teaching-learning process was not found to be 'child focused'. The study clearly showed that the present arrangement of pre-primary and primary education did not provide any mechanism for linkage between the two types of system – neither administrative nor academic.

Recasting of provision of education for the age-group say, 3/4 through 8/9 years, has been recommended. The present overlap between ICDS and education targeting the age- group of 5-6 years needs to be rectified. The State needs to formulate a policy note for provision of ECE, defining the age-group to be covered, allowing space for multiple approaches and involvement of other groups in expanding the outreach of ECE. Apart from the policy and cost implications, such an arrangement has other implications with regard to curriculum planning, curriculum transaction and teacher training.

Planning and Management of Early Childhood Education** A Case of Himachal Pradesh - India

Neelam Sood*

Section I

THE CONTEXT : STATE OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

Himachal Pradesh is a hill state of western Himalayas lying tucked away towards the northern corner of India. On its north lies Jammu and Kashmir and itssouthern side is bound by the States of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. On the eastern side, the State touches the international boundary with China (Tibet). Punjab lies adjacent to it in the west and south-west.

Himachal Pradesh is a small State. With an area of 55,673 square kilometers, it occupies only 1.9 per cent land of the country. According to the 2001 census its population stands at 6.07 million. The State, formed in 1948 with the merger of thirty princely States, initially had only four districts at that time. After several re-organizations, it attained its full Statehood in 1971 and at present has twelve administrative districts.

The State is predominantly rural, with 91 per cent of its population being in rural areas. Scheduled Caste population in the State is about 25 per cent and the Scheduled Tribes form only 4 per cent. The sex ratio of 970 (females per 1000 males) compares well with the national average of 933.

Education Scenario

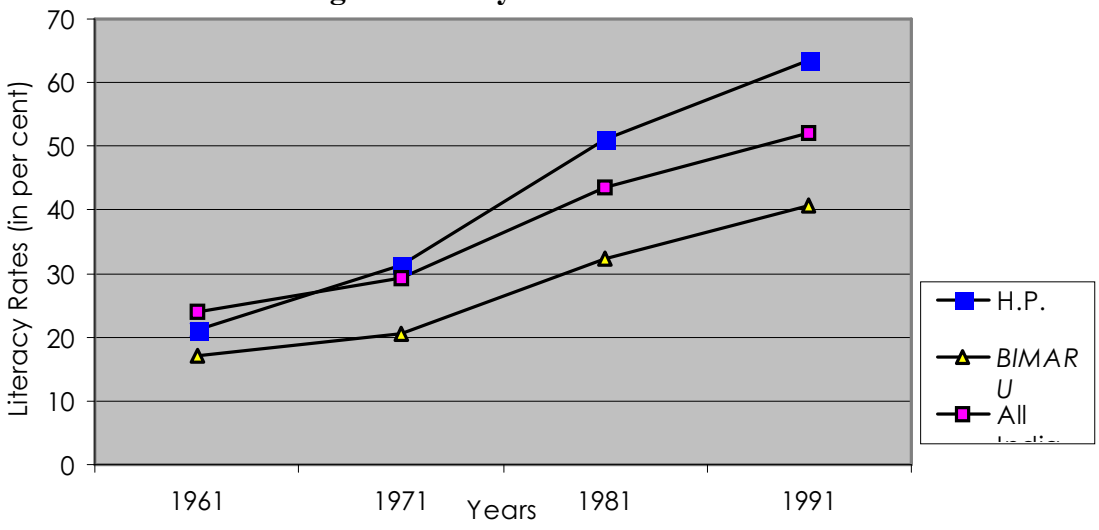
* Fellow, School and Non-Formal Education Unit, NIEPA

** This paper is based on part findings of a research investigation conducted in the State of Himachal Pradesh. The able assistance provided by project assistants – Ms Rashmi Malhotra and Ms Ruchi Bhatnager in conducting the study is gratefully acknowledged.

The State follows the national pattern of structuring education system, i.e. 5+3+2+2 years at the primary, upper primary, secondary and senior secondary levels beginning at age 5. The Himachal Pradesh Act stresses compulsory education for the 6-11 age- group.

Himachal's march towards literacy has been relatively faster. At the time of Independence, the State had the lowest literacy rate of 7.1 per cent in the country (Sinha, Tyagi & Thakur, 1997). On comparing the progress of the State with other States in the country that were almost at the same level of literacy in 1961, one finds that Himachal has made a greater progress. (Fig.1).

Fig 1: Literacy Rates* 1961-1991



*Literacy rates for 1961 and 1971 represent population aged five years and above and those of 1981 and 1991 relate to the age group of seven years and above..

Figure 1 compares the successive literacy rates of Himachal Pradesh, national average and the average for *BIMARU* States. *BIMARU* is an acronym popularly used to refer to some of the worst performing States of India i. e. Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Female Literacy

The differential of literacy rates between men and women in Himachal is more favourable when compared to the national figures(Table 1).

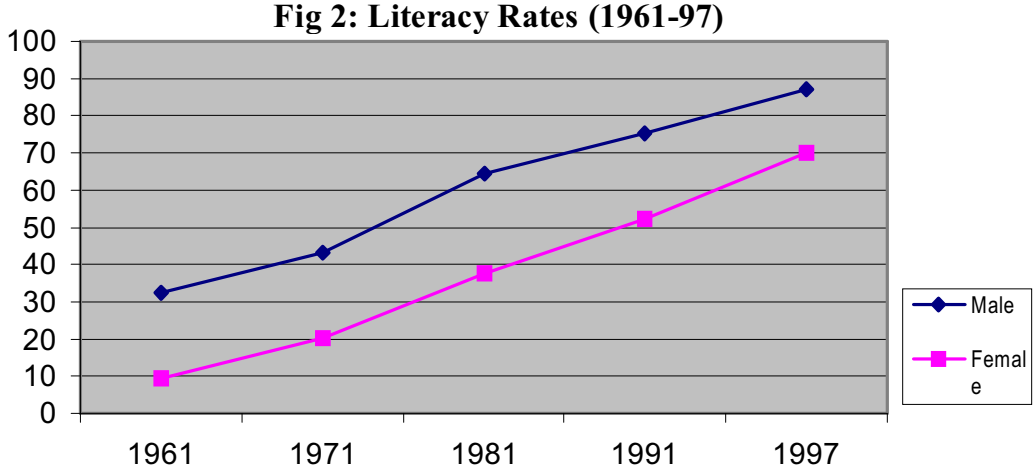
Table 1: Literacy Rates

	Men	Women
Himachal	87	70
India	74	51

Source: 53rd Round of NSSO, 1997

As evident from Fig. 2, women have made a better progress on literacy, specially during the last two decades.

Fig 2: Literacy Rates (1961-97)



Himachal Pradesh also enjoys a better status with regard to gross enrolment at the primary level, retention at the primary stage, proportion of women teachers and teacher- pupil ratio (Table 2).

Table 2: Enrolment, Retention and Teachers at Primary Stage

	Gross Enrolment Ratio		Drop-out Rate		Teachers		Teacher - Pupil Ratio
	Children	Girls	Children	Girls	Men	Women	
BIMARU States	88	71	47	52	73.8	26.1	1:48
India	92.14	82.85	42.39	44.66	65.4	35	1:42
HP	92.10	88.29	33.72 27.45*	31.22 23.99*	60	40	1:30

**Annual Report, 2001-02,* Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India.
Source: Selected Educational Statistics-1998-99.

The gross enrolment ratios in Table 2 indicate that Himachal Pradesh fared better as compared to *BIMARU* States and the country as a whole, specially with regard to girls' enrolment. Himachal's drop-out rates are also relatively lower at the primary stage. Here, the retention of girls is better compared to boys, whereas reverse is true in other cases. Proportion of women teachers at the primary level being 40 per cent, compares well with the country's average of 35. Similarly, availability of a teacher for every 30 students at the primary level is also a positive feature.

The estimates suggest that 75.97 per cent of the population in the State is served by a primary school within a distance of one kilometer. However, this estimate hides more than it reveals. It compares poorly with the national average of 93.7 per cent. To understand this disparity, one has to understand the topography of the place. Here the population is very thinly spread, the population density being 93 persons per square kilometer against the national average of 274.

The relative progress of the State in primary education was examined in detail in a recent study entitled the "Public Report On Basic Education in India", (popularly

known as the PROBE report). The study was conducted in the States of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh whichaccount for 40 per cent of India's population and more than half of all 'out of school' children. This does not, however, mean that these States represent India. In fact, except for Himachal Pradesh, the other four States are among the worst performing States in terms of elementary education. The data put together in this Study exclude Himachal Pradesh and apply to the other four States (referred to as PROBE States).

PROBE shows the remarkable progress in basic education that Himachal Pradesh has made, looks at some of the features that distinguish this State from others, analyses some of the deterrents and offers possible explanation for such a progress.

Distinctive Features

- Striking progress in rural literacy rate.

  Among the seventeen most populated States in the country, Himachal Pradesh with a rural literacy rate of 61.9 per cent (1991), ranks the second highest.

- No district in the low literacy category.

  Three districts in the State, namely Hamirpur, Una and Kangra are in the high- literacy category, i.e. above 70 per cent literacy and the remaining nine, namely Bilaspur, Shimla, Solan, Mandi, Kinnaur, Lahaul & Spiti, Kullu, Sirmaur and Chamba are in the medium-literacy category. None of the districts are in the low-literacy category.

- Highest per cent decrease in illiteracy rate in the 10-14 year age group from 1951-1991 as seen in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Decrease in Illiteracy Rates (10-14 Year Age Group) 1951-1991

	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991
Himachal	81	63	35	22	10
PROBE States	86	69	63	57	43

- Greater increase in female literacy from 1961-1991.
- Ninety-seven per cent boys and 95 per cent girls in the age group of 6-14 years are currently enrolled.
- High net attendance ratio in primary schools of 85 (national average 66).
- Higher proportion of female teachers in the State as compared to PROBE States.
- Better TPR of 1:30 (national average 1:42).

Deterrents

- Difficult terrain.
- Primary education costs more.
- Infrastructure in primary schools is just modest.

The study also points towards some of the difficulties that children and parents in Himachal Pradesh experience, such as a difficult terrain, higher expenditure on education, etc. Parents have to incur a higher expenditure of Rs.532 on primary education as against an average amount of Rs.318 which is spent byparents in the PROBE States. Further, most of the primary schools have only moderate physical facilities. Despite these factors, the schooling status of children in Himachal Pradesh has been observed to be far better than PROBE States.

Possible Explanation:

- At least one educated person in 93 per cent households.
- Para teachers inducted as Voluntary Teachers.
- Teachers are hard working, 40 per cent are women.
- Cooperation between parents and teachers.
- Children have textbooks and enough teachers.
- A functional schooling system.
- Confident and involved children.
- Retention rate of 11 per cent (no automatic promotion).
- Better implementation of Central initiatives, like Operation Blackboard.
- State infrastructure, like roads etc., is better.
- Gender bias is lesser. Female participation in labour force is higher. Motivation for girls' education is higher.
- Community is involved.

As indicated above, the PROBE study shows that the State has made a spectacular progress in improving literacy levels and a kind of schooling revolution has taken place in spite of several deterrents, like difficult access and high cost etc.

Several factors may have contributed towards achieving this status. There are many conditions in the State that have led to the positive developments, for example., good infrastructure, economic security enjoyed by the people due to the produce from their orchards, untouched hill culture, pro-education ideology of people, and hardworking motivated people, etc.

Secondly, the State's own positive orientation towards education has also played a significant role. It may be noted here that the educational expansion in Himachal

has been based almost entirely on government schools with relatively little contribution from private institutions. After the National Policy of Education, 1986, many new colleges were opened which led to creation of jobs. The State followed a policy of promoting its own people who were preferred for jobs in education to those coming from other States. Malpractices at all levels were discouraged. Active involvement of local level bodies like Mahila Mandals and Yuvak Mandals, in primary education also played a positive role. Community involvement in primary education has been fairly high. People in the State demand schools and demonstrate their concern for education by contributing money for opening a new school even in an area where the number of children is very small and the government expresses its inability to open a new school because of population being less than the admissible size of 200. There are many schools in the State having only ten children.

In other words, the State seems to have benefited from a virtuous cycle of high parental interest, motivated teachers and active State intervention. One may conclude that this State has done well with regard to universalizing elementary education. It was for this reason that the State was identified for the present investigation in view of the State's heightened concern for improving quality of primary education.

Section II

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Education is basic to development of any society - be it economic or social development. It is the principal means, or perhaps the only means, for building human resource in a society. Initial education generally referred to as 'basic education', extending in principal, from 3 to 12 years, is of particular significance. It serves a dual purpose. One is to produce a literate population and the other is to lay a ground for later learning.

Education at the initial stage is indeed basic to future learning. It is here that the attitudes towards learning that will continue throughout one's life are formed. Scientific evidence points out that the pace of development is very high during the first say 6 to 8 years of life when much of the potential for adult level intelligence is realized. Therefore, the environment in which children are placed during this period impacts the process of development very heavily. Children growing up in a rich and stimulating environment tend to gain a lot. They learn to be creative and inquisitive about the world around them and cultivate a love for learning that stays with them for the lifetime.

The Concept

Education of the children prior to entry into the primary level, i. e. at the pre-primary stage that generally caters to children in the age-group of 3 – 6 years, is denoted by using various terms. Over the years, the most acceptable and widely used term that has come to be is 'Early Childhood Education'. The terms have been changing over the years as the perspectives changed. It was CE (Child Education), ECE (Early Childhood Education), then ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education), and then ECD, where D stands for development

encompassing both care and education. ECD refers to the holistic development of the young children up to 7/8 years of age, and to the variety of approaches that can be used singly or in combination, to meet the needs of children for development. The latest in vogue is ECCD that denotes Early Childhood Care and Development. The 'care' bit is customarily used for children in the age-group of 0-3 years while, ECE/pre-school education/pre-primary education – all refer to the activities / experiences that are offered to children in the age- group of 3-6 years.

In essence, early childhood education would encompass a set of goals, attitudes and practices that are aimed at the total all-round development of the young child, inclusive of physical, cognitive, social and emotional dimensions.

The Indian National Policy of Education – (Review, 1990) looks at the concept as…

'The activities which foster and promote the balanced development of the child in the age group of 0-6 years in all dimensions – physical, mental, social, emotional, and moral- have been collectively described ... as Early Childhood Care and Education'.

Historical Context

ECCE policies and programmes have evolved in most of the developed countries largely out of such concerns as child protection, services for children in special needs, or to facilitate mother's labour force participation, or provision of early childhood education.. In developing countries too, mostly similar concerns have led to the emergence of programmes for young children. In general, the movement has been from private charity towards more of public responsibility. The extent of public responsibility, however, varies among the developed as well as the developing countries.

Tracing the origin of ECCE in India, one finds that the first formal institutions called Kindergarten schools were set up towards the end of the nineteenth century

by the Scottish missionaries. Indian pioneers in the field- Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modak – were influenced by the ideas of Montessori, Froebel and other Western thinkers, but more importantly, by the great Indian thinkers of that period – Gandhi, Tagore and Aurobindo. The focus was on nurturing and developing the abilities of children aged 3-5/6 years with a view to preparing them to enter formal system of education. The term 'child education' was commonly used, in all Indian languages, and later, pre-primary education, while Kindergarten or Montessori were used to describe different approaches and schools of thought. In the pre-independence years, the focus was on education or the 'child education', as it was then called. Early Childhood Education as an expression came into vogue much later.

After the country became independent in 1947, a concern for the 'less privileged' sections of the society became apparent and 'balwadis' were set up in rural areas. Central Social Welfare Board was set up in 1953 for providing grants-in-aid to NGOs. Thereafter, in the 1960s, the impact of new knowledge about possible effects of nutritional deprivation on the development of the child or his health became visible in the form of emergence of Supplementary Nutrition Programme and Mid-day Meal Programme etc. Around mid 70s, the launching of 'Integrated Child Development Services' (ICDS) brought the focus on holistic development of the child.

Early Childhood Care and Education, as an expression, found a mention in the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) when for the first time a shift in approach from welfare to development became apparent. Pursuant to the formulation of the National Policy on Children in 1974, a perspective of integrated care and education led to the forming of a centrally sponsored ICDS, being implemented in the country since 1975.

Significance of ECCE

The importance of the first few years in the development of a child and his learning cannot be overstated. Research in the field of neurobiology provides evidence that there are certain critical periods for some aspects of brain development. For instance, language development can best happen during the first four year. This is not to say that language development does not take place in later years, but certainly the critical period wanes after that (Doherty, 1997).

Many children in developing countries do not have access to basic health and nutritional facilities. A large number of children in the age-group of 0-6 years in India live in economic and social environments, which impede their physical and mental development. These conditions include poverty, poor environmental sanitation, disease, infection, inadequate access to primary health care, inappropriate child caring and feeding practices (Government of India, Department of Women and Child Development, Annual Report, 1998-99). These children are more vulnerable to the effects of poverty as compared to those who live in economically better off homes.

Available evidence suggests that living in conditions of poverty during early years certainly affects the cognitive development and behaviour of children. Investigating the effect of economic deprivation on child development, using logitudinal data, Duncan et al. showed that economic disadvantage not only has a tangible adverse effect on children through the provision of educational resources available to them, but through the detrimental psychological effect it exerts on their parents (Duncan, 1994). Need to enroll children from low income families in ECCE programmes, thus, assumes a greater significance under these conditions.

Interventions during early years have demonstrated several benefits for children. An experimental study of early childhood education intervention for children from poor families in poverty, clearly shows that the positive effects of pre-school

treatment (given from infancy to age 5) on intellectual development and academic achievement were maintained through age 12. School age treatment that was given at age 5-8 was found to be less effective (Campbell, F & Ramey, C, 1994).

Summarizing evidence from the developing countries' studies reviewed some years back, Halpern and Myers found that relatively more deprived children benefited more cognitively and socially than their less deprived peers (1985). The most obvious role of early childhood programmes in the context of developing countries, the authors' conclusion was to improve poor children's skills and energy to cope with the cognitive and social demands of formal schooling as a developmental setting.

A follow up of cohorts (31,483 children) from eight States in India also revealed a significant contribution of ECCE in enhancing retention of children in primary grades by about 20 per cent (Kaul, et al.,1993).

The issue of how early childhood interventions impact on the primary school performance is a very complex one. The net effects will hinge on several conditions related to the kind of intervention, the family environment and many school-related factors. Nonetheless it is more than clear from several researches that an initial positive introduction to a learning experience does certainly enhance a child's capacity to meet the subsequent schooling demands. Enhanced capacity resulting in better progress through school in turn is likely to lead to higher self-esteem and self-confidence in children.

Goals and Administrative Arrangements

Policy perspectives in most countries have evolved along the continued confusion about where should the primary responsibility about child rearing/ child development/ child education during early years/ socializing children etc. lie.

Should it be with education, health, social welfare or a combination of some of these? Essentially, this stems from the way ECCE is perceived in a given context.

Is ECCE:

- A concern for well-being of the children?
- or socializing them into the society's values?
- or preparing them for formal schooling?
- Or facilitating / increasing women's participation in labour force / girls' participation in schools?
- or is it all of these?
- or a combination of some of these?

Depending upon the perspective, the administrative arrangements vary in different countries. In many countries, ECE is managed by the Ministry of Education, for example, in Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland. In Finland, Norway and Sweden, the administrative control lies with the Ministry of Social Affairs. The dominant pattern in European countries is the one in which programmes concerning children between 2/3 up to 5/6 years of age (whenever compulsory education begins) are under educational auspices while the children below 2/3 years are looked after by health or social welfare sectors.

In India, the responsibility for children under 6 years at present lies with the Department of Women and Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The responsibilities also shift sometimes from one ministry to another as the perspectives change over a period of time.

Another issue is about the level at which policies are made. For example, in France, ECCE policy is made nationally, whereas in others, a national framework is established within which major policy decisions are made at the State level. In some other countries, the policy is made at the local level, e. g. in Denmark and Sweden.

Access and coverage of children in ECCE programmes are important dimensions of the policy. In many of these developed countries, the coverage is universal e.g., Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, New Zealand and Sweden. Most of the developing countries have a long way to go before achieving universal coverage. It is important for developing countries, more so for India, to make efforts to enhance the outreach of ECCE to the children in the age group of 3-6 years.

Programmes

Some of the important current government programmes/ schemes in India include: Early Childhood Education Scheme; Crèches and Day Care Centres Scheme; and ECCE under District Primary Education Programme.

Early Childhood Education Scheme was launched during the Sixth Five-Year Plan. This scheme seeks to reduce the drop-out rate and improve the retention of children in primary schools. Another scheme, called Crèches and Day Care Centres Scheme, started in 1975, provides day care services mainly to under five children of migrant, agricultural and construction labourers. ECCE started in 1984 is organized under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) with the aim to augment the existing provisions under ICDS and set up new ECE centres in areas not covered by ICDS. The programme also seeks to improve ECE-primary school linkage.

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

Apart from various small-scale efforts, the major government programme that is in operation at present is the ICDS that currently covers about 13,383,000 beneficiaries.

Started as an innovative experiment initially in 33 projects in 1975, ICDS is the largest programme for early childhood care and education in the country and now covers 4200 projects. The Indian Government stands committed to cover 5320

Community Development Blocks and 310 major urban slums in the country. It is estimated that about 12.45 million children in the age-group 3-6 years from the disadvantaged section of the society have been able to make use of facilty for pre-school education.

Under this programme, a comprehensive package of health and nutrition services is delivered for children of 0-6 years, and expectant and nursing mothers from the under-privileged areas. Six components of the Programme include:Supplementary Nutrition; Immunization; Health Check-up; Referral Services; Non-formal Pre-school Education; and Nutrition and Health Education. Services are delivered at the local level through 'Anganwadi', meaning a center in the courtyard, implying that the service inputs are made available at the doorsteps of those who need the same.

Child Development Project Officer is responsible for overall management at the project level. He is assisted by 4-5 supervisors, one each for 25 centers, who are responsible for guiding the 'Anganwadi' workers at the village level and for maintaining link between the project and the village.

The Department of Women and Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development is responsible for overall administration and monitoring. National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) plays the advisory role to the government and organizes training of project officers and trainers of middle level functionaries.

ICDS has now been in operation for over a period of twenty-five years. Efforts have been made to assess the effect this programme has had on the lives of young children and mothers. Results obtained through research studies have indicated that there is a lot of scope for improvement in the ddivery of services to enhance the quality (NIPCCD, 1987).

Evaluation of non-formal pre-school education component of this programme meant for offering educational stimulation to children in the age group of 3-6 years, revealed that only 'Anganwadis' of 'high quality' could make any difference to the child's development. The quality of inputs and the interaction between the staff and children were seen as the most important variables for making any impact on the development of children (Sood, 1987; 1992).

The evaluations clearly bring out the following:

- The issue of access has not yet been addressed adequately in India and there is a need for expanding the outreach of early childhood education, particularly to those who need it the most.
- Single channel through ICDS does not seem to be enough.
- Concerted efforts are needed to improve the quality of early childhood education.

Reviewing the coverage and quality of ECE programmes of some of the developing countries, a UNICEF report writes thus about the ICDS "After more than a decade of experience characterized by the rapid expansion of services, the constraints inhibiting the programme's optimal functioning are fully recognized. The major areas requiring further attention include innovative strategies to reach mothers and children under age of three, enhanced programme integration at the operational level, increased community and parent participation and the need to maintain quality in spite of rapid growth and inadequate financial resources" (UNICEF, 1993).

The Study

Against the backdrop of positive features of the State of Himachal Pradesh and its near complete status with regard to participation in primary education; and significance of ECE for later development of children, a study was planned with a broad goal of making an assessment of ECE and its current pattern of relationship

with primary education in the State. The study touched upon several aspects, such as provision of ECE, type and spread of services available, the number of villages served, profile of the children benefiting from these services, facilities available, contribution of ECE to primary education, quality of education in the initial grades of primary school, teachers' profile, children's readiness at school entry, progress through early grades, administrative and academic linkage and continuity from ECE to primary stage, etc. However, this paper examines only the issues relating to the provision of ECE in the State. The quality of classroom interactions has also been looked at.

The study was conducted in two blocks of district Sirmaur, namely Nahan and Sarahan. A detailed profile of the district and that of selected blocks has been appended at Annexure I.

The investigation was done in two phases. In the first phase, an attempt was made to draw an exhaustive picture of both the blocks with regard to educational system at the pre-primary and primary levels. In the second phase, a more detailed investigation was conducted on an approximate sample of 10-20 per cent of students, teachers and institutions.

A sample of 30 institutions, each at the pre-primary and primary stage, was drawn randomly. A teacher and one parent each from these 30 institutions were included in the sample.

Besides collecting data from secondary sources, primary data were gathered through discussions and observation method. Informal discussions were held with the education officers, ICDS and DPEP representatives, DIET faculty, teachers, school heads and parents. One typical working day of each institution was also observed for classroom interaction between teachers and children.

Section III

THE CURRENT SCENARIO

In this section, findings of the study with regard to the following dimensions have been reported:

- Existing institutions
- Infrastructure
- Teachers
- Proportion of children enrolled
- Classroom interaction

Existing Institutions

A. Pre-primary Level

There are three types of institutions at the pre-primary level in both the blocks.

1. *Pre-primary sections attached to the Government Primary Schools*

   These are the facilities available within the premises of government- run primary schools for enrolling children in the age-group of 3-6 years. In most of the schools, only one or two sections are found.

2. *Anganwadis*

   These are child development centres created under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Programme, which is run by the Department of Women and Child Development of the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

3. *Nursery classes in private schools*

The schools are run by private agencies and mostly begin with the nursery class wherein children are enrolled at the age of three. These schools cater up to primary/upper primary levels.

The total number of these three types of institutions in both the blocks is shown in Table 4. In Nahan there are 71 'Anganwadis', 13 private schools and two government schools having a pre-primary section each.

Against this, in Sarahan, there are 64 'Anganwadis', only one of the government schools with a pre-primary section attached to it, and two private schools beginning with the nursery class.

Table 4: Number of Pre-primary Institutions

Block	Anganwadi	Government*	Private	Total
Nahan	71	2	13	86
Sarahan	64	1	2	67

* Pre-primary sections attached to Govt. primary schools.
Source: District Primary Education Office, Nahan.

Nahan being a partly urban area has a higher number of private schools. English is the medium of instruction in these private schools. Therefore, a higher number of these schools may be indicative of a greater demand for English medium institutions in Nahan.

Pooled together, there are 86 pre-primary institutions in Nahan and 67 in Sarahan. These serve a total population of 1145 and 983 children in the age group of 3-6 years in these blocks respectively.

Location

An attempt was made to locate these institutions in the administrative maps of Nahan and Sarahan to see the spread across the area. In Nahan, all the 13 private institutions are concentrated in the central part of the block while the government institutions, particularly the 'Anganwadis', are located in the peripheral areas. In Sarahan, private institutions (two only) are located in the south central part. Interestingly, 'Anganwadis' are seen to be evenly spread across the area in both blocks, catering to remote parts as well. ICDS aims at serving the families with low income; therefore 'Anganwadis ' are opened in areas with greater concentration of low income families. Private institutions working with profit motive naturally tend to concentrate in the central areas.

Unserved Villages

Through this study, an attempt was also made to ascertain the number of villages, which do not have any type of pre-primary institutions. Table 5 below gives an idea about these villages.

Table 5: Proportion of Villages Served by Pre-primary Institutions

Block	Total No. of Villages	Villages with Pre-primary Facilities	Villages without Pre-primary Facilities	Per cent of Villages Unserved
Nahan	152	47	105	69
Sarahan	261	48	213	82

As seen above, out of a total of 152 villages in Nahan, only 47 have a facility of pre-primary institutions of either type (government/private). This means that 69 per cent villages in the block remain unserved by any type of pre-primary institution. In Sarahan, the availability is still lower. Here, 82 per cent villages do not have any kind of pre-primary facility. As indicated earlier, Sarahan is largely

rural and has a difficult terrain which may be one of the reasons for such a situation., though, need may be greater in such a situation.

B. Primary Level

The primary schools in both the blocks, Nahan and Sarahan, are shown in Table 6. It was found that in all, there are 133 government schools in Nahan and 132 in Sarahan. Of these, 32 and 51 respectively have been opened by the government under the District Primary Education Programme since 1997. A larger number of schools opened under DPEP in Sarahan reflects the greater need of the area. Despite this, there are pockets that have difficult terrains and are unserved so far by the government schools.

Of the 13 private schools in Nahan, 10 are unaided, and three are partly funded by the government.

Table 6: Number of Primary Institutions

Block	Government	Private Aided	Private Unaided	Total
Nahan	133 (32*)	3	10	146
Sarahan	132 (51*)	1	1	134

*Indicates schools opened by DPEP since 1997.
Source: DPEP, Nahan.

Infrastructure

A. Pre-primary

Table 7 below indiates that almost all of the pre-primary institutions were running in pucca buildings. Three 'Anganwadis' were being run in kutcha huts. These were in very remote areas and were set up in rooms rented from the villagers. About two-thirds of the government pre-primary institutions had 'poor' buildings implying that these buildings were in need of major repairs. For example, government pre-primary classroom in Sarahan was in a bad shape, the plaster on the walls was chipping off, the room was not properly lit and had poor ventilation.

Since most of these places did not have an electric supply, bare minimum needs of children for natural light and air also remained unfulfilled

Table 7: Building and Ancillary Facilities

Type of Pre-primary	Pucca	Kutcha Huts	Good	Poor	Drinking Water	Toilets	Separate Toilets for Girls	Mid Day Meal	Play ground	*Electricity*
Government **(N=3)**	**3**	**-**	**2**	1	3	-	-	1	3	1
Anganwadi **(N=25)**	**22**	**3**	**17**	8	25	-	-	25	11	12
Private (N=2)	**2**	**-**	**2**	-	2	2	1	-	2	2

Though drinking water was available in all of the institutions studied, but whether the same is potable or not is not known. Institutions which are located in rural/remote areas have to rely on stored water which is fetched from a nearby pond. It was observed that in many places, children used to fetch water from far off distances and the utensils used for the same were not very clean. Children surely deserve better than this.

Toilets were available only in the two private pre-primary institutions included in the sample. 'Anganwadis' and pre-primary sections attached to government schools did not have this facility let alone having separate toilets for girls. Lack of such basic facilities also posed problems for the teachers/workers.

In the government pre-primary institutions mid-day meal is given to children. Supplementary nutrition is also given to children in the 'Anganwadis' in the form of some gruel made of rice/wheat with pulses / jaggery, etc.

B. Primary

All the primary schools studied were functioning in 'pucca' buildings which were observed to be in 'good' condition (Table 8). Drinking water was available in eighty per cent of the government primary schools and all the private schools.

Table 8: Building and Ancillary Facilities (in per cent)

Type of Management	Pucca	Good	Poor	Drinking Water	Toilets	Separate Toilets for Girls	Mid Day Meal	Play ground	Electricity
Government (N=26)	100	92.30	7.69	84.6	61.50	-	38.4	76.92	61.53
Private (N=4)	100	100	-	100	100	25	-	75	100

Toilets were available in 62 per cent of government schools and all the private schools. None of the government schools had provision for separate toilets for girls, and only one private school had this facility. Playground facilities were available in 75 per cent of both government and private schools. However, majority of them were not well maintained and were used mainly for organizing morning assembly and other functions such as annual day/ independence day, etc. In winters, some classes were held outside in the open.

In all the private schools, tables/chairs etc. were available for teachers and some sort of seating facility for children, such as chairs/benches, mats, etc. was also available. Twenty seven per cent of the government schools did not have any seating provision – not even mats etc. In other government schools, the condition of furniture available was very poor. Though classroom furniture was available in majority of the private schools, the condition of the same was notsatisfactory.

Teachers

As stated earlier, a total of 30 teachers each at the pre-primary and primary levels were included in the sample.

Pre-primary.

Of these 30 teachers, 29 were women. The only male teacher was a graduate who was running one of the two private schools in Nahan. Interestingly, he did not have any formal training in school teaching.

It is a common practice to have women teachers at the pre-primary stage. In 'Anganwadis' also, mostly women are employed as 'Anganwadi' workers.

Except one, all teachers were below 45 years of age. Eighteen were aged between 20 to 35 years, and 11 were between 36 to 45 years. Of these, 'Anganwadi' workers in both the groups were 16 and 8 respectively.

About 2/3rd of these teachers were educated up to 10th grade, and six had education up to 12th grade. There were four graduate/ post-graduate teachers.

There were three teachers in all who did not have any formal training. Two teachers each had JBT and Nursery Teachers' Training. The other twenty-three teachers who were running 'Anganwadis' had attended the nine-month long 'Anganwadi' training programme organized by the designated Anganwadi Worker Training Institution under the ICDS programme of the Government of India.

Most of the teachers had worked up to ten years but eight of them had been teaching for more than ten years.

Primary

At the primary stage, one-third of the teachers were men. Sixteen teachers were below 35 years, nine were between 36-45 years and five were more than 46 years.

The number of teachers with education up to 10th grade was lower as compared to the primary teachers. Eight teachers had education up to 12th grade. Graduates and post-graduates formed about one-third of the total number of teachers. These were mainly in government primary schools (two were in private schools and rest in government primary schools).

Five teachers of these 30 primary teachers had no training, one was a voluntary teacher, 16 had received Junior Basic Training, and only seven (all in government schools) had a B.Ed degree, the mandatory training to be a teacher at the primary stage.

About two-third teachers had experience up to ten years. Nine of them had been teaching for more than twenty years.

Teacher-Pupil Ratio (TPR)

The teacher-pupil ratio in the various pre-primary institutions varied from 1:5 to 1:30. In 'Anganwadis', the average number of children who had regular attendance was 10. The number in government pre-primary sections was higher, thus explaining the high TPR of 1:30.

Table 9 below shows the block-wise number of schools with the number of children per teacher as indicated against these.

Table 9: Teacher-Pupil Ratio: Pre-primary

Nahan		Sarahan	
No. of Schools	**TPR**	**No. of Schools**	**TPR**

4	5	1	5
2	6	2	6
2	7	2	7
2	8	4	8
1	12	1	10
1	14	3	12
1	15	1	14
1	18	1	30
1	21	-	-

As seen in Table 9, the average number of children per teacher is 10-12. Out of three government pre-primary schools, TPR is very high in two schools (1:30 & 1:18). In private schools, the TPR is much lower (1:6 or 5). 'Anganwadis' generally have a TPR of 1: 10, except for one that had 21 children.

Table 10 gives the teacher-pupil ratio at the primary level in the two blocks.

Table 10: Teacher-Pupil Ratio – Primary

Nahan		**Sarahan**	
No. of Schools	**TPR**	**No. of Schools**	**TPR**
1	3	1	4
1	4	1	5
1	6	1	6
1	7	1	7
1	8	1	9
1	10	2	11
1	13	2	12
1	15	1	13
1	16	2	14
1	23	1	22
1	24	1	23
1	26	1	35
1	30	-	-
1	32	-	-
1	42	-	-

In Nahan, the two private primary schools that are there in the block have a TPR of 1:24 and 1:7. The average TPR in government primary schools in Nahan is 1:18. In one government school, the ratio was as high as 1:42 and there was another one with only 3 children per teacher.

In case of Sarahan, the average TPR is 1:15 for all the government primary schools. Here too, one government school has a high ratio of 1:35 and another one has as low a figure as 4.

Overall TPR at pre- primary and primary levels is 1:10 and 1:15 respectively.

Proportion of Children Enrolled at Pre-primary Level

Population

To find out the proportion of children of age-group 3-6 years enrolled in all types of institutions, viz., government, 'Anganwadis, and private in both the blocks of Nahan and Sarahan, it was necessary to know the total population of this age-group. However, one could obtain block-wise information about the child population in the age group of 0-6 years from the District Information Centre Nahan, but the disaggregated population figure for single year age returns were not available. Hence the population for the age-group 3-6 could not be obtained from the district level authorities.

Census 1991 gives population details by single year age returns for all the States. For Himachal Pradesh, the population for the age-group 0-6 years adds up to 8,40,421 and for 3-6 years group, the figure works out to be 5,00,027 which is about 60 per cent of the former. Assuming that the same proportion would also apply at the block level, a crude estimate of child population in the age-group 3-6 years was therefore made.

The population estimated in this manner for the age-group of 3-6 years for both the blocks of Nahan and Sarahan is shown in the Table 11.

Table 11: Child Population – Crude Estimate

Age-Group	Nahan			Sarahan		
	Boys	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**
0-6 years	4442	4239	8681	3238	3176	6414
3-6 years	2665	2544	5209	1969	1879	3848

Enrolment

Table 12 gives the enrolment figures for children aged 3-6 years in 'Anganwadis', government schools with pre-primary section and in private schools for both the blocks.

It may be recalled that there were 71 and 64 'Anganwadis' in Nahan and Sarahan respectively. The enrolment in these 'Anganwadis' stands at 744 and 906 respectively, which gives an average of 10-11 children per 'Anganwadi' in Nahan and 14 children per 'Anganwadi' in Sarahan.

Table 12: Enrolment of Children Aged 3-6 Years in Pre-primary Institutions

	Anganwadi			**Government***			**Private**			**Total**		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Nahan	376	368	744	64	50	114	153	134	287	593	552	1145
Sarahan	472	434	906	13	12	25	30	22	52	518	465	983

* Pre-primary sections attached to government primary schools.

The number of children enrolled per class in government pre-primary institutions is much larger, e.g., in Nahan, where there are two sections, there were 114 children giving an average of 57 children per class. This is an unduly large class size, specially for this age-group. The class size of 25 in Sarahan government schools is more reasonable. In private pre-schools too, the class size ranges between 22-26.

From the above, it may be noted that in Nahan, about 65 per cent of the enrolment is in ICDS, 10 per cent in government schools pre-primary sections and 25 per cent are in the private schools, whereas relatively larger proportion (92 per cent) of the enrolment is in ICDS in Sarahan block (Table 12).

Proportion Enrolled

As evident from Table 13, altogether 21.98 per cent children are enrolled in Nahan and 25.54 per cent in Sarahan. In other words, a vast majority is outside the system, government or private. The proportion of girls who are out of the system is still larger both in Nahan and Sarahan.

Table 13: Proportion Enrolled

	Population			**Enrolment**			**Per cent**		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Nahan	2665	2544	5209	593	552	1145	22.25	21.70	21.98
Sarahan	1969	1879	3848	518	465	983	26.31	24.75	25.54

Profile of Children Enrolled in Pre-primary Institutions

Data on family background on a sample of children (N= 259) who were attending pre-primary institutions was also collected. Of the 259 children, 140 were boys, and 119 were girls. Table 14 shows the distribution of these children according to the pre- primary institution they were enrolled in.

Table 14: No. of Children Enrolled in Selected Pre-primary Institutions

	Anganwadi	**Government***	**Private**	**Total**
Boys	111	15	14	140
Girls	96	16	7	119
Total	207	31	21	259

** Pre-primary sections attached to Govt. primary schools.*

A majority of these children belonged to the families where fathers were employed as agricultural labourers or had their own business through small shops. Twenty-

eight per cent were working as teachers. The rest were employed as assistants in shops/offices. Mothers were not employed in most cases except for 15 per cent who were working either as teachers or as 'Anganwadi', workers or as agricultural labourers, etc.

Most of the fathers had only school level education. About 10 per cent were those who did not have any formal education. About 20 per cent of them had college level education. Amongst mothers, about one-third had received no formal education; the rest had studied up to grades VIII/X/XII. Only eight of them had obtained college level education. Average number of children per family was three.

Primary School Children with Exposure to ECE

To find out the proportion of children presently studying in Grades I-III in primary schools and who had a prior experience of attending any pre-primary facillity, we tried to gather information through our discussions with the teachers. Except for the current Grade I enrolment, teachers were not able to recall this information. In the current Grade I, we found that out of 232 children, 95 had attended some type of pre-schools. That makes it 40.95 per cent. Table 15 gives the number of children enrolled in Grade I in the two blocks studied.

Table 15: Number of Children Enrolled in Grade I in Nahan and Sarahan (With Pre-primary Experience)

Block	Boys	Girls	Total
Nahan	25 (n=75)	16 (39)	41(114)
Sarahan	29 (n=71)	25(47)	54(118)
Total	54 (146)	41 (86)	95(232)

Most of these children had attended the pre-school for a period of 2 years before entering a primary school. Among the children who have had a pre-school experience, the number of girls in both the blocks was lower as compared to boys. Even though in Nahan the number of institutions was higher, the proportion in pre-primary, specially of girls, was found to be lower.

Classroom Interaction

A. Pre-primary Level

To get a first hand information about the teaching-learning process/classroom activities, a sample of pre-primary institutions (all the three types) were observed by the investigators for a day. The materials available in all the institutions included charts, books, pictures with alphabets and flashcards. The Table 16 below shows the availability of teaching-learning material in all the three types of institutions.

Table 16: Availability of Material

Type of Material	Government Pre-primary School (N=3)	Anganwadi (N=25)	Private (N=2)
Charts	3	25	2
Building Blocks	2	0	0
Books	3	16	2
Toys	3	25	0
Pictures	3	25	2
Flashcards	3	0	0

Building blocks and flashcards were not seen in 'Anganwadis' and private nursery schools and no toys were found in private schools. Most of the materials available were not in good condition. Charts were almost torn which might, in a way, be an indication of their frequent use. At the same time, it appears that the workers were not able to replenish these materials or make new materials for use. In fact, during

our observations, we found that there was very heavy emphasis on learning from charts. By and large, the whole teaching method was almost through charts that were on numbers, alphabets for names of fruits, vegetables, birds, animals etc. Reading through charts was the only common method. After the teacher labels the item in the chart, the whole class would simply repeat. Thus a monotonous rote method was followed day after day. Rote learning was emphasized. Children were asked to recite numbers, alphabets and poems after the teacher. We observed that children could recite and also write numbers up to 20 but had little idea of concept of each number or its value. We found that the children just followed learning through charts and simply repeated what the teachers would say. No amount of questioning or exploring was seen in children. Children simply appeared to be passively participating in the learning process.

Private schools were seen to be somewhat better equipped with regard to TLM, though there was not much difference in the teaching method followed here by them. During our discussions, we found that 'Anganwadi' workers could list out various activities for different domains of child development. They had probably learnt well during their training, but discussion with parents and observation of children did not show any evidence of these activities taking place.

A typical day's plan of the Anganwadi includes a mix of activities for gross-motor development, fine-muscle coordination, and social and emotional development of the children. This plan was, however, not followed regularly. Some 'Anganwadi' workers informed that they would generally think of activities for the day spontaneously and try to ensure a mix of indoor with outdoor, group with solitary and active/passive activities.

Replenishment of teaching material was apparently not done regularly. Private school teachers mentioned that they frequently replenished all TLM but our observations did not corroborate the same.

The commonly available teaching-learning materials that were seen in the pre-primary institutions, as mentioned earlier, included charts, books, toys, pictures with alphabets and flashcards. When asked about the utilization of these materials, the teacher/worker usually responded that they 'frequently' used these in their interaction with children. The observations on the day of visit to these institutions, however, revealed that mostly rote learning was emphasized.

When asked about the replenishment of the TLM, teachers responded that they regularly prepared new charts and flashcards. Government pre-primary schools were regularly supplied with new books under the DPEP scheme. Some materials such as toys, were 'sparingly' replenished. Private schools mentioned that they 'frequently' replenished the TLM.

B. *Primary Level*

In all of the government primary schools, teaching-learning material was provided under the DPEP scheme. Primary school teachers were trained in the preparation of TLMs and were also given Rs.500 per annum for preparing teaching aids, such as charts, flashcards, models etc. that they were supposed to utilize in their teaching process. It was observed that most classrooms displayed charts depicting numbers, alphabets, parts of the body etc. Other aids, such as blocks, toys, books, were also readily available in majority of the schools (Table 17). The government primary school in *Janot* even had a library room which was well equipped with books provided by DPEP. One day per week was allotted in all the schools for library work. Books were distributed to the children and they spent the day reading them.

Table 17: Availability of Teaching-Learning Material

Type of TLM Available	Government Schools (N=26)	Private Schools (N=4)

Charts	26	4
Blocks	16	4
Books	26	4
Toys	-	1
Pictures with alphabets and numbers	26	4
Flashcards	21	4
Blackboards	26	4
Chalks and duster	26	4

Most of these materials were reported to be 'frequently' used in the classroom (Table 18). In some schools it was seen that most of the TLM that was available was either displayed in the staff room or was kept under lock and key, thus suggesting that it was not being used daily in classroom interactions. In some schools, globes had been supplied by DPEP but these were mainly serving a decorative purpose rather than being put to any educational use by the teachers. The blackboard was the most frequently used teaching aid in all the institutions studied. The teacher wrote the day's lesson (mostly counting/ alphabets) on the blackboard and children were expected to copy in their notebooks and write the same a couple of times.

Table 18: Utilisation of Teaching-Learning Material by Type of Management

Type of Teaching-Learning Material	**Government**			**Private**		
	Never Used	Sparingly Used	Frequently Used	Never Used	Sparingly Used	Frequently Used
Charts	-	2	24	-	2	2
Blocks	2	15	-	-	4	-
Books	-	-	26	-	-	4
Toys	-	-	-	-	-	1
Pictures	-	-	26	-	-	4
Flashcards	-	21	-	-	-	4
Blackboards	-	-	26	-	-	4
Chalks and duster	-	-	26	-	-	4

As mentioned earlier, the TLMs were replenished by school teachers under the District Primary Education Programme.

Section IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the current provision of ECE in the State of Himachal Pradesh in terms of facilities available for pre-primary level by type, the coverage achieved under the existing institutions, the proportion still remaining to be covered, the quality of the available services, profile of the teachers handling children and the classroom interactions.

In terms of the institutions at the pre-primary stage, we find that altogether; there are 86 and 67 institutions in Nahan and Sarahan blocks respectively. Of these, a large majority are 'Anganwadis' (the child care centres under the scheme 'Integrated Child Development Services' run by the Department of Women and Child Development of the Ministry of Human Resource Development). Nahan, being an urban area has a higher number of private institutions that emphasize learning in English medium. These institutions altogether cover only 1145 children in Nahan and 983 children in Sarahan in the age group of 3-6 years, leaving about 80 per cent of the population of this age group outside the system. Our estimates suggest that there are 69 and 82 per cent villages that remain uncovered in Nahan and Sarahan respectively. In other words, majority of children in the age group of 3-6 years are not enrolled in any type of ECE service.

Location-wise, the ICDS institutions are quite spread out, but the private institutions tend to be concentrated in central area. Private institutions operating with a profit making motive apparently serve the populated areas, while ICDS has spread out to remote areas with a view to cover the children living below the poverty line. These are the children who need these services more than others.

Including the new schools that have been opened under the District Primary Education Programme, there are 146 and 134 primary schools in Nahan and Sarahan blocks respectively. Whether these schools have covered the children

from difficult, inaccessible area is not known. There are areas in this State that become inaccessible for many months in a year due to heavy rains and snow.

The number of primary schools is far higher than the number of ECE centers, primarily because the population norms for opening the two types of institutions are different. While an 'Anganwadi' can be opened for an urban population of 1000, a primary school is provided for a population size of 200. Under DPEP, a new primary school is opened in hill areas for a far smaller size of population also.

In general, the State has made a good progress in ensuring for children a greater access to primary schools. New schools have come up in pockets that had earlier remained unserved, but the coverage of 3 - 6 year olds continues to be quite low.

Quality of facilities available is far from satisfactory. About 30 per cent 'Anganwadis' were functioning in rooms/buildings that could best be described as 'poor'. Non-availability of safe drinking water and electricity, lack of sanitation facilities, inadequate seating arrangement, unattractive classrooms etc. do not quite add up to make the atmosphere child-friendly. Private schools were better so far as these facilities are concerned. There is therefore an urgent need to improve infrastructure for children for primary as well as ECE. Not only should the basic minimum facilities be ensured, the school atmosphere must be child-friendly and attractive for children. Aim is not to just provide a modest facility but the best that we can do because the children deserve the best that we can ever give.

It is interesting to note that despite poor facilities, children do still come to schools quite religiously. Parents do want their children to attend schools regularly irrespective of the condition of schools, as they seem highly motivated to educate their children. Civil society can play a role in improving and maintaining school infrastructure. This certainly seems like a possibility, especially in Himachal Pradesh.

Teachers at the pre-primary level are mostly young women, below 35 years of age. Most of them have education up to X grade and about 8–10 years of experience. Majority has received the nine months training designed for 'Anganwadi workers'. At the primary level, one-third teachers are men. About half of them are below 35 years of age, the rest are older. One-fifth of them do have a post graduate qualification, the rest are graduates or below. Most of them have a Junior Basic Training and some of them have obtained B. Ed degree. One-sixth teachers in the sample had no training. Most of them are experienced teachers, having served for a period of ten years or more.

Apart from their educational qualifications and experience etc. what struck us was the fact that the teachers were available in the schools. They do come on duty in time despite long distances, and are fairly motivated to perform. They did what they thought was their duty quite sincerely. What was missing, however was that they could not go beyond the routine mechanized teaching. There was no mechanism to encourage them or to serve as an incentive to think beyond.

Qualified, trained teachers who are willing to travel long distances and are motivated to perform is another strength available in the State. What is required is proper orientation of these teachers about how children develop, why is this stage critical for learning, what are they capable of learning, what makes it an interesting learning experience for a child, how to get them involved, that they can learn from each other, learn through activities- individually and in groups etc. Teachers need to be shown how they can break the traditional rote learning practice.

The teacher-pupil ratios of 1: 10 and 1:15 at pre-primary and primary levels were quite good, much better than many other States. This gives the teachers a very manageable size of the class, where they could make their classroom interactions much more 'child-focused', if oriented properly.

Classroom interactions as we observed at both the levels, were quite similar. Children were 'taught', where they listened passively and repeated what they saw or heard through a rote method. They did not seem to ask any questions or want to know beyond what was taught. Except for some difference in the classroom environment where children could move a bit without much of restrictions at the pre-primary level, there was no major difference between the two settings. In primary schools, they were 'controlled' more strictly and not much movement was allowed.

Our discussions with teacher educators also corroborated the concern regarding monotonous classroom interactions. In their opinion, "teachers seldom provided space for *self-activities* by children; 'story telling' and 'role play' techniques were rarely used; and educational games were seldom played". These were some of the reasons, they attributed as causes for 'low learning achievement', 'indifference towards school' and drop out.

Section V

FUTURE PLAN

What is being suggested here is based on an understanding derived from the findings of the study, observations made in the field and several informal discussions held with representatives of different organizations concerned with primary education and ECE in the State of Himachal Pradesh.

What Can be Done

An Integrated Perspective

Education provision for children of age 3 onwards up to say 7or 8 years may be replanned or recreated. For this a conceptual understanding of the process of child development of this age group is necessary. Learning needs of this age group must form the basis for such an understanding.

In the initial years, when the pace of development is at its highest, real value addition can be made through creating environments that 'nurture' and 'assist' the child in creating his own learning. Formal instructions have no place here Children at this stage learn through play and gradually move from the 'free' atmosphere of home to group learning situations. During the process, they gain emotional maturity and learn social skills. Through their interactions with the staff, they master pre-learning skills that include pre-number and pre-writing abilities and get prepared for semi-learning situations. The most important aspect here is to allow them to learn at their 'own pace', as each child is different. The learning process itself may be such that the child enjoys being an active partner and it gives him a sense of mastery and leads to high self-esteem. This basically sets him on a road, where learning is always an enjoyable process.

However, older children around the age of 6 or 7 are capable of processing information mentally in a logical manner. Therefore, during the first two grades at the primary school, they could perform arithmetical operations very well, but they are not ready as yet for abstract thinking. The curriculum and its transaction must be planned for this stage accordingly. The learning at this stage has to be homogenized with the earlier stage and should be on a continuum. Curriculum here may not be built around any subject and imposed by the teachers, but to be planned around 'children as learners' to continue what they have been doing at the prior stage. Gradually the child can move to more adult like learning situations towards the end of primary stage of education.

Apart from integrating learning for this age-group (3- 7/ 8) and creating a continuity within, there is also a need for a holistic view of the multiple needs of the child across all domains, including physical, mental, and psycho-social aspects.

The State may chalk out a policy note for defining the age-group to be covered, allowing space for multiple approaches and involvement of other groups in expanding the outreach of ECE and allocating appropriate budgets.

Access

It is evident from the data collected for this study that ICDS alone does not suffice to take care of the entire child population of 3-6 years. Multiple approaches have to be devised. Local initiatives are necessary. Groups like MTA (Mother-Teacher Associations) or NGOs in the field can supplement the efforts of ICDS to expand the outreach for this age-group. Whatever is feasible and appropriate can be tried on experimental basis.

Defining Age-Group

This brings us to another important question about the age-group to be covered. In the current system, the age group of 3-6 years is covered for ICDS services whereas the school entry age is 5 years. Therefore, there is an overlap for the age-group of 5-6 years. This needs to be rectified.

Various strategies can be worked out. Locating ECE services in the close proximity of the primary school for the younger age-group and/or managing the educational inputs through the primary school teachers or any other method that is feasible can be adopted.

A word of caution here will not be out of place. The planned change should not just amount to being a downward extension of schooling for the children in the age-group of 5-6 years.

Nonetheless, maintaining an organic linkage with primary school is very important for facilitating easy transition of children from one system to another.

Framing Curriculum

Curriculum for this group needs to be planned keeping in view the development of children and allowing space for children to learn at their own pace. Each child is different.

While defining what should be covered in the two-three years under ECE and later in early grades of primary school needs to be defined. Expected outcome for the first 2-3 years can be planned. Achievement levels for primary education also need to be delineated. For the purpose, guidelines can be prepared consolidating the earlier work done by Govt. organisations, private sectors and the individual researchers. Department of Education, Women & Child Development and Health may jointly plan the curriculum. Guidelines may be shared with private sector schools also to streamline what is being taught there and also to ensure that

learning during the first 2-3 years is not simply a downward extension of primary school curriculum.

The 'Right' Teacher

Curriculum transaction is very important and the teacher holds the key to this aspect. Having the 'right' kind of teacher for handling children during early stages is very important. The qualification and orientation required for teachers must be defined - whether 10+2 qualification +2 years specialised training (nursery teacher's training) would be adequate or not. This kind of change can be brought about gradually. Long term planning is needed for phase wise progress in this regard.

Changing the Character of Classroom Interactions

With right teacher in place, and proper guidelines being available where content of education is defined, it is possible to bring about a change in the nature of classroom interactions. An understanding on the part of teacher about how children develop and learn, what makes learning an interesting and exciting experience for them, and good inter-personal relationships can be useful. The present drab and monotonous classroom interaction needs to be changed.

Role of Private Sector

While planning for the age-group of 3-8 years, role of private sector must be considered. Department of Education, Department of Women and Child Development and schools in the primary sector work together complementing each other's efforts. One possibility may be to make use of the infrastructure available in private schools and the supplementary nutrition by the Department of Women & Child Development. Similarly, task of training of teachers including

those from private schools can be handled by the Education Department. In other words, wherever feasible efforts can be complemented.

Entitlements of children are same whether they are in government schools or in private sector schools. All children, irrespective of the type of system of schooling they are enrolled in, should get the basic inputs of health, nutrition and education. Ways and means can be worked out to provide *all services* for *all children.*

Private sector, the government, and community– all have a role to play in primary education. The present thinking of government *versus* private should be replaced by a plan of partnership. There is need to plan how best can private sector participate in the primary education. Similarly, the role of community is also very important. One such example would be to make use of the existing mother-teacher associations. These associations are very active in the State. MTAs may be entrusted with the task of running ECE centres in conjunction with ICDS. All the three, the government, the private sector and the community should collaborate for provision of quality primary education in the State.

Sustaining Past Initiatives of the State

In the last few years, several initiatives have been taken in the State, including innovations under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). After the completion of the period of the project, these initiatives should be carried forward and institutionalised wherever possible. Further, there is a need to create space for alternate platforms, and for civil society initiatives.

Services for children are to be integrated and provided through a single window, but the question remains- whose responsibility is that? Interests of children can be best served through collaborative efforts of all concerned because we need to give our children the best that we ever can.

References

1. Census of India 2001, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.

2. Campbell, F. & Ramey, C. (1994). Effects of Early Childhood on Intellectual and Academic Achievement: a Follow-up Study of Children from Low Income Families. *Child Development*, 65, 684-698.

3. Duncan, G.J.; Brooks-Gunn, J; Klebanov, P. K. (1994). Economic Deprivation and Early Childhood Development. *Child Development,* 65, 296-318.

4. Doherty, G (1997). *Zero to Six: The Basis for School Readiness.* Applied Research Branch, R- 97- 8E Ottawa: Human Resources Development, Canada (adapted).

5. *Early Childhood Programes in India: An Evaluation of ICDS (2001).* A paper prepared by ICDS Unit of National Council of Applied Economic Research for the International Conference on Early Childhood Care for Survival Growth & Development.

6. Government of India (2000): *Integrated Child Development Services*. Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

7. Government of India, MHRD, Annual Report 2001-02.

8. Halpern, R. & Myers, R. (1985). *Effects of Early Childhood Intervention on Primary School Progress and Performance in the Developing Countries*. Paper prepared for Programme and Policy Coordination – USAID. Ypsilanti: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

9. Kaul, V., Ramachandran, C., & Upadhyaya, G. C. (1993). 'Impact of ECE on Retention in Primary Grades', National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi.

10. NIPCCD 1992, National Evaluation of Integrated Child Development Services.

11. National Policy of Education- Final Report of the Committee for Review, December 26, 1990.

12. PROBE Team (1999), *Public Report on Basic Education in India*.. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

13. Sinha, A., Tyagi, R. and Thakur, R.S. (1997). *Educational Administration in Himachal Pradesh*. NIEPA, New Delhi.

14. Sixth All India Educational Survey (1998), NCERT, New Delhi.

15. Sood, N. (1987). *An Evaluation on Non-formal Pre-school Education Component in Mangolpuri ICDS Block*. National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development, New Delhi. No. 1, April, 1987.

16. Sood, N. (1992). *Pre-school Education in ICDS –An Appraisal*. National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development, New Delhi. No. 5, March, 1992.

17. *Statistical Outline of Himachal Pradesh* (1995). Economics and Statistical Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla.

18. UNICEF (1993). *Towards a Comprehensive Strategy for the Development of the Young Child – An Inter-agency Policy Review.* UNICEF House, New York.

19. Woodhead, M. (1979). *Pre-school Education in Western Europe: Issues, Policies & Trends*. London, England, Longman.

Annexure I

SIRMAUR – DISTRICT PROFILE

District Sirmaur is located along the border of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Majority of the population in the district is Hindu. The next in order are the Muslims, followed by Sikhs. Jains and Christians form only a small part of the population. Hindus live both in rural and urban parts of the district, while the Muslims are mostly confined to the semi-urban places in Paonta and Nahan Tehsils.

A glance at the following statistics gives an idea about the district:

- Area : 2,825 square kilometres
- Population : 3,79,695
  - Male : 2,00,193 (52.72%)
  - Female : 1,79,502 (47.27%)
  - SC : 1,14,605 (30.17%)
  - ST : 6,113 (1.61%)
  - Rural : 3,41,621 (89.97%)
  - Urban : 38,074 (10.02%)
- Population Growth Rate : 23.72 % (1981-1991)
- Density of Population : 134 persons per square kilometre
- Sex Ratio : 897 females per thousand males
- Literacy Rate : 51.6 %
  - Male : 63.2 %
  - Female : 38.4 %
- Number of administrative blocks : Five
- Number of education blocks : Ten
- Number of development blocks : Six

Sirmaur is situated on the Kumaon mountain ranges and is surrounded by the Shivalik hills. Most of the areas of the district have a high altitude. The river Giri divides Sirmaur into two parts: Trans Giri and Cis Giri. Trans Giri is more

mountainous and rugged. Transport and communication facilities are poorer as compared to Cis Giri. Literacy in Trans Giri is much lower, reasons being the abject poverty in the area, distant schools with difficult approaches, lack of basic infrastructure like schools and teachers, and above all, the prevalence of social taboos against the education of the girl child. The main occupation of people is agriculture.

District Sirmaur is among the most under-developed districts of Himachal Pradesh. Despite its close proximity to the industrialized States of Haryana and Punjab, it has a relatively poor industrial development. Most of this can be attributed to difficult terrain and poor accessibility, poor network of roads and transport facilities etc. There are some villages in the district that do not have electricity. All these problems have led to a poor rate of development, few educational facilities and extremely limited employment opportunities.

The district is divided into five *administrative blocks* - Shillai, Paonta Sahib, Nahan, Renuka and Pachhad. The ten *education blocks* are Shillai, Satun, Paonta Sahib, Nahan, Saria, Dadahu, Sarahan, Norhradhar, Bakras, and Rajgarh, and six *development blocks* are Nahan, Paonta Sahib, Sarahan, Shillai, Rajgarh and Sangrah.

Block Profile

A glance at the following statistics gives an idea about the selected blocks:

Nahan

- Population : 58,834
  - *Male* : 30,810 (52.36%)
  - *Female* : 28,024 (47.63%)
  - SC : 5,666 (9.63%)
  - ST : 1,265 (2.15%)
  - Rural : 36,956 (62.81%)
  - Urban : 21,878 (37.18%)

- Sex Ratio : 910 females per thousand males

By virtue of being the district headquarters, Nahan is also the most developed. It has a government college that offers graduate courses in arts, commerce and science. Nahan also has an ITI and a DIET. It is the second most literate block of Sirmaur (after Paonta Sahib). Nahan has 133 government primary schools and 71 Anganwadis. The Nahan "Community Development Block" comprises Nahan and Surla Education Blocks and a part of Dadahu Education Block. Among all these, Surla Education Block is the most poorly developed, has difficult access, the lowest literacy and hardly any employment opportunities except for agriculture. The Nahan C.D. block is 2 per cent urban and 98 per cent rural. Almost all of the rural areas in Nahan are covered by the ICDS and have access to PHCs.

Sarahan

- Population : 39,195
  - *Male* : 20,109 (51.30%)
  - *Female* : 19,086 (48.69%)
  - SC : 3,577 (9.07%)
  - ST : ----
  - Rural : 37,986 (96.91%)
  - Urban : 1,209 (3.08%)
- Sex Ratio : 949 females per thousand males

The development block of Sarahan has 64 Anganwadis and 132 government primary schools. The entire block is rural. As compared to Nahan, Sarahan has more areas that are located along difficult terrain and in the interior parts, and is therefore, less developed and less literate. The main occupation of the people here is agriculture.