

Parental Concepts About Preschool Education

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INTRODUCTION

Parents play an important role in the early childhood education and development. This fact is becoming increasingly popular (Lau and Leung, 1992). Parents transmit cultural values and expectations to their offsprings and create for them an environment of competence. The child internalizes his parental expectations and tries to make the parents happy by conforming to them. This forms the '*developmental niche*' (Harkness and Super, 1991), which has been conceptualized in terms of three components i) the physical and social settings in which the child lives, ii) culturally regulated customs of child care and child rearing, iii) psychology of the caretakers. The Child's developmental environment is shaped by '*parental ethno theories*', because the parents, while taking decisions about their children's socialization, use these. Harkness and Super (1991) view '*parental ethno theories*' as expressed in the ways that parents assign their children to different kinds of physical and social settings. They also posit that many customs of child rearing function as instantiations of parental ethno theories and thus are of special importance in translating parental thinking into action that has developmental consequences.

Parental socialization practices are shaped according to their culture. The cultural expectations are activated through these customs of childcare and development, which are further built into the parental schema. Parental beliefs are outcome of a large number of factors including culture, socio-economic status, parents' own socialization, residence (rural/urban) etc. (Sharma, 1999). Models of socialization stress the adoption and internalization of parental goals as a critical step in promoting developmentally appropriate and socially valued outcomes. Work in this area provides consistent and convincing evidence that parents aspirations for success influences the Child's academic achievement (Wentzel, 1998). Similar observations were made by Bradley and Caldwell (1986). They found that early environment and academic performance were moderately related. Children who have parents that are more responsive and nurturing

early in life are likely to behave in a more considerate manner in school and perhaps show a greater degree of overall adjustment.

Owing to the societal and cultural pressures to achieve high parents may become '*pushy*' too. Parents who use formal academic instruction, choose learning activities for their children, believe in early timetables for children's acquisition of skills, and use drill and practice have been defined as displaying '*hot housing*', parental behaviors (Hyson et al., 1991). Such '*Hot Housing*' may lead to academic burnout at a later stage in educational ladder, but Asian children have been found to score high academically even though Asian parents have been found to be more '*controlling*', and '*authoritarian*'. Chao (1994) argues that these concepts are embedded in a cultural '*tradition*' that European Americans do not necessarily share. She further says that these concepts may have very different implications when considered in light of the culture, and may not be useful for understanding Asian parenting. Hence parenting should be understood in the cultural context. What transpires at home shapes the child's capacities and this reciprocal relationship shapes parenting and parental beliefs.

Going back to Harkness and Super's postulation about parental ethno theories and the '*development niche*' one must try to understand what parents in different cultures expect from their child and how they shape the learning environment. The developmental results of differing parental ethno theories and their expression in the organization of settings of daily life and customs and child rearing in Kokwet and Cambridge is that children's competence in culturally marked areas is accelerated, while development in other domains lags, if indeed it is even recognized (Harkness and Super, 1991). While children in Kokwet learn daily life skills, Cambridge children may be highly precocious verbally, in cases speaking full sentences by the age of two. (Harkness and Super, 1991)

Thus parental ethno theories are activated into customs of childrearing. The present paper focuses on parental beliefs about early childhood education among the Dogras of Jammu region

of Jammu & Kashmir state of India. Previous research has shown that though the preschools try to impart education in a play way manner it is the parents who pressurize them to start on formal learning skills early (Kapoor, 1997). The present research focuses on parental conceptions about the contents of early childhood education and their own role in this area of development.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Sample group consists of 65 parents [Fathers (n=15) and Mothers (n=50)] of 50 preschoolers of Jammu City of J&K State. The aim was to contact 50 fathers but because of paucity of time and non-availability of father, all interviews could not be conducted.

The controlled variables are:

1. *Residence*: Only those parents belonging to urban areas of Jammu City of J&K State were included.
2. *Age group of the child*: Only those parents were selected who had at least one child in the age group of 3-6 years.
3. *Socio-economic status of the family*: Sample was drawn from among the middle socio economic strata.
4. *Qualification of parents*: Educated parents were selected the sample.
5. *Occupation of parents*: Fathers belonging to medium level of business or medium level of services were included in the group. Among mothers only housewives were selected.

Procedure

As there is no formal list of preschools of Jammu City, the areas were selected randomly from four zones of urban Jammu through lottery method. After selecting the preschools from these areas parents were selected at random.

The tool used for data gathering in the present study was interview schedule. The interview schedule was initially prepared and questions were framed which progressed from general to specific, both open ended and close ended questions were included and the schedule was made accordingly. Pre-testing of interview schedule was done on a sample of 10 parents. After analyzing the data certain alterations were made and some more questions about parent's

beliefs, attitudes, ideas and expectations pertaining to the present topic.

Background Information

This category includes items such as name, age, qualification, occupation, number of family members, total family income which helped us to gain an idea about parents' educational status, their living conditions and this also helped to establish rapport with the respondents.

Scientific Information

This comprised of detailed and in depth questions which were categorized under heading to depict responses from the parents regarding their beliefs, ideas, and concepts about early childhood education. The questions were devised under the broad heading:

Parental Beliefs

These are about

1. Teaching methods,
2. Teacher-child ratio,
3. Facilities provided,
4. Teaching equipments,
5. Teacher attitude towards child,
6. Books,
7. Evaluation of the child in the class,
8. Overall functioning of the school.

Procedure for Data Collection

Data collection proceeded in two phases.

1. *Preliminary Investigation*: Preliminary investigation was done to identify the sample and to pre-test the tool for the study. The tool was pre-tested on a sample of 10 parents. After analyzing the tool, the sample was contacted to establish rapport with them. After pre-testing the tool was modified and finalized for data collection.
2. *Data Collection*: After selection of sample and modification of the tool the data was collected by personal visits to the parents at their residence. One-hour visit was conducted in each house for interviewing and obtaining the desired information. Mother respondents were more as compared to fathers due to the unavailability of fathers during the conduct of the interview.

3. *Data Analysis:* Master sheet was prepared for coding purpose and scoring individual responses, the data was presented systematically in a tabular form and graphic illustrations have been used wherever possible. Content analysis was done for the open-ended questions and finally percentages were calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The median age of the mothers was 37 years and that of fathers' was 32 years and their median education level was graduation. (Table 1) In the present study all mothers were housewives and majority of their husbands were in service. The

median of the family income was Rs.17000/- and they all belong to middle socio-economic strata.

Table 2 reveals that most of the parents i.e. 40% of mothers and 47% of fathers believed that three and half year is the right age for the child to enter into a preschool as according to them at this age child is able to understand things well. It was found that 60% of mothers and 74% of fathers preferred that children should possess capabilities like identifying alphabets, numbers, fruits, and colors, parts of the body, correct speech, responsive attitude and good mannerism before entering a preschool.

Majority of the mothers (32%) and fathers (40%) believe the following to be important features of a 'Good School'- building of school, location, transport facilities, use of latest teaching equipments and methods. Thirty percent of mothers and twenty six percent of fathers considered reputation of school as an important consideration for selecting a school for the child.

Parents hold a lot of expectations from their child's school and teachers. Most of the mothers' (40%) and fathers' (54%) expect that the school and teachers should enhance the overall development and personality of children. Accor-

Table 1: Background information of the parents

Observations	Median
Age of the mothers	37 years
Age of the fathers	32 years
Education of mothers	Graduation
Education of fathers	Graduation
Occupation of mothers	Housewives
Occupation of fathers	Service
Family income	Rs. 17000

Table 2: Parental beliefs regarding early childhood education

S.No		Mother		Father		Total	
		n=50	%age	n=15	%age	n=65	%age
1	Preferred age at entrance into a preschool						
	3 ½ Years	20	40	7	47	27	41
2	Capabilities parents want their child to possess before entering preschools	n	%age	n	%age	N	%age
i	Identifying alphabets and numbers	15	30	6	40	21	32
ii	Naming and Identifying fruits, colors, parts of the	12	24	2	13	14	22
iii	body	8	16	2	13	10	15
iv	Correct speech, responsive and good manners	15	30	5	34	20	31
	All the above						
3	Points to be considered while selecting a preschool for the children	n	%age	n	%age	N	%age
i	Infrastructure	16	32	6	40	22	34
	Reputation of the school	15	30	4	26	19	30
	Trained and Qualified teaching staff	7	14	1	7	8	12
	Environment of school	7	14	1	7	8	12
	All the above	5	10	3	20	8	12
4	Parents expectations from preschools and teachers	n	%age	n	%age	n	%age
i	All round development of child	20	40	8	54	28	44
ii	Make their child a good citizen	14	28	7	46	21	32
iii	Maintained the standards	8	16	-	-	8	12
iv	Good teaching and discipline	8	16	-	-	8	12

ding to the present study 100% of the parents preferred changing the schools, if it falls below their expectations.

The data given in the table 3 indicates that more than half of the mothers (70%) and fathers (67%) prefer books for teaching preschoolers whereas less than half of the mothers (30%) and fathers (33%) were against using books as they thought play-way is the best approach for teaching basics to a preschool child. Parents who preferred books for their preschool child were in favor of teaching 3R's in preschool but through a simple and effective medium. Only 30% mothers preferred colorful books and approximately 50% of fathers (47%) preferred simple learning books.

Sixty percent of mothers and fifty three percent of fathers believed in providing audio visual aids and toys to the preschoolers for enhancing their learning and level of understanding. Majority of parents i.e. 72% of mothers and 74% of fathers, preferred play way approach and most of the mothers (56%) conversation of play way approach for their children at home whereas hundred percent of fathers believed best

way to teach child is through reward and punishments. Less than half of the mothers (42%) say that teacher follow play way approach in the preschool and more than one third of fathers (80%) say that teacher uses teaching aids like charts, pictures.

Analyses of data given in table 4 shows that only 30% of mothers and more than half of fathers (66%) wanted their child's teacher to be caring and loving so that the child feels comfortable in the class. Half of the mothers (50%) and sixty seven of the fathers preferred teacher child ratio to be 1:15 so that the teacher can handle all the children easily and she can interact with child equally.

Majority of parents (66% of mothers and 73% of fathers) wanted their child's performance to be calculated on the basis of his overall performance in his class like his scores, extra curricular activities, and behavior.

According to the present study, more than half of the mothers (76%) and more than 90% of fathers (94%) believe that parent-teacher association is meant to enquire about the child.

Table 3: Parental beliefs regarding infrastructure of the preschool

S.No		Mother		Father		Total	
1	<i>Necessity of books</i>	n=50	%age	n=15	%age	n=65	%age
i	Yes	35	70	10	67	45	69
ii	No	15	30	5	33	20	31
2	<i>Kinds of books</i>	n	%age	n	%age	n	%age
i	Colored picture books for alphabets and numbers	15	30	-	-	15	24
ii	Simple learning books	12	24	7	47	19	29
iii	Rhyme and Story books	6	12	2	13	8	12
iv	Writing books	6	12	6	40	12	18
	All the above	11	22	-	-	11	17
3	<i>Educational equipments parents want to be used in Preschools</i>	n	%age	n	%age	n	%age
i	Audio visual aids and toys	30	60	8	63	38	58
ii	Educational games	5	10	-	-	5	8
iii	All the above	15	30	7	47	22	34
4	<i>Teaching methods to be used in homes/schools</i>	n	%age	n	%age	n	%age
i	Play way manner	36	72	11	74	47	72
ii	With teaching aids	8	16	2	13	10	16
iii	Explanation with patience	6	12	2	13	8	12
4(a)	<i>What do you do?</i>	n	%age	n	%age	n	%age
i	Repeated Conversation	28	56	-	-	40	61
ii	Play way manner and Teaching 3'Rs	12	24	-	-	-	-
	Rewards and Punishments	10	20	15	100	25	39
4(b)	<i>What does the teacher do?</i>	n	%age	n	%age	n	%age
i	Play way manner	21	42	3	20	24	37
ii	Use Aids and Materials	17	34	12	80	29	45
iii	With Love and Patience	12	24	-	-	12	18

Most of the parents i.e. 66% of mothers and 80% of fathers believed that the main reason behind the parent teacher association in the preschool is to know and overcome the drawbacks of the child and also get idea about the child's performance in the class as well as in the school.

Table 5 reveals that all mothers (100%) and more than half of fathers (67%) helped their children in their homework. Sixty six percent of mothers and hundred percent of fathers believed that a child who is well behaved and is obedient is a disciplined child. More than one third of the mothers (84%) and all the fathers (100%) believed that child can be disciplined through proper guidance and school can also help in guiding and discipline the child.

Regarding the parent's role in preschool education, majority of the mothers (86%) and fathers (87%) believed in praising the child over his success and believed in giving rewards for maintaining their interest and motivated them through giving material rewards. Seventy two percent of mothers and hundred percent of fathers believed that the child should be motivated and encouraged to do better if he scores less and does not perform as expected rather than scolding. Most of the mothers (70%) and fathers (67%) believed in guiding the child with patience if he uses abusive language.

DISCUSSION

Parents play an important role in the first

major transition of the child away from the secure and known environment of home into unfamiliar environment of preschool. Parents have to take majority of decisions about the child's future, one of the major one being about the age of entrance to a preschool. From the researches conducted previously (Kapoor, 1997) in Jammu; it is known that the age range of children attending preschools is 2-5 years, and that preschool teaching is as formal as the primary or elementary stage teaching. The children are loaded with bags, books and a lot of homework with an emphasis on teaching of 3 R's (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) (Kapoor, 1997). Hence, preschool education in Jammu is the downward extension of formal teaching.

Keeping the philosophy of preschool education being practiced in Jammu in mind and attempt was made to know the parental expectations and beliefs regarding various concepts of education, as studied earlier (Kapoor, 1997) from the point of view of the preschools, its teachers and principals. The parents in the present study prefer an earlier age at entrance to a preschool i.e. three and half years. They believe that children should possess capabilities like ability to socialize and express themselves, recognize colors, alphabets, and numbers before entering the preschool. None of the parents said anything about toilet training or self-help skills, which are more essential for entering the preschool or for separation from primary caregivers. Parental expectations are guided by their

Table 4: Parents belief regarding teachers role in education

S.No		Mother		Father		Total	
		n=50	%age	n=15	%age	n=65	%age
1	Parents expectations about the attitude of teachers towards the child						
i	Caring and Loving	15	30	10	66	25	39
ii	Interactive	11	22	5	34	16	25
ii	Encouraging	10	20	-	-	10	15
iv	Friendly and Motherly	8	16	-	-	8	12
v	Any other	6	12	-	-	6	9
2	Parents expectations about teachers-child ratio	n	%age	n	%age	n	%age
i	1 : 10	10	20	-	-	10	15
ii	1 : 12	11	22	5	34	16	25
iii	1 : 15	25	50	10	66	35	54
iv	1 : 20	4	8	-	-	4	6
3	Evaluation of the child according to the parents	n	%age	n	%age	n	%age
i	Overall performance	33	66	11	73	44	68
ii	Daily routine activities and Progress	9	18	4	27	13	20
iii	Discipline and Behavior	6	12	-	-	6	9
v	Maintaining records	2	4	-	-	2	3

culture. Indian parents lay much emphasis on early learning of 3 R's (Sharma, 1999). In the present study parents lay more emphasis on scholastic skills rather than readiness skills. In their study on pregnant women of Costa Rica and Federal Republic of Germany (Keller et al., 1984) too reached similar conclusions.

Teacher has a great responsibility in molding the personality of the students. NCERT (1995) recommends that a preschool teacher should be pleasant, energetic, and innovative with a basic interest and concern for others. In addition to home experiences it is the teacher who influences their attitudes, values, interests, morals, ideas, conduct and behavior. Teachers have important

role to play in shaping the future generation. Chauansheng (1988) revealed, in his study that Chinese parents placed strong emphasis on the role of teacher; 66% of Chinese mothers believed that the teacher was more important than the parents and only one Chinese parent believed that parents play a more important role in influencing children's academic performance. In contrast only 19% of the American mothers believed that teachers were more important than parents. In the present study the parents believe that the teacher should be loving so that the children can relate to her and share their problems with her without feeling any hesitation and it is the duty of the teacher to encourage the develop-

Table 5: Parents' role in child's education

S.No		Mother		Father		Total	
1	<i>Do you help your child in homework?</i>	<i>n=50</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n=15</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n=65</i>	<i>%age</i>
i	Yes	50	100	10	67	60	92
ii	No	-	-	5	33	5	8
2	<i>Who according to you is a disciplined child?</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>
i	Obeys elders	14	28	5	33	19	29
ii	Well behaved	19	38	10	67	29	45
iii	Finishes all work in time	5	10	-	-	5	8
iv	All the above	12	24	-	-	12	18
3	<i>What do you do to make him disciplined?</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>
i	Guidance	42	84	15	100	57	88
ii	With Love	8	16	-	-	8	12
4	<i>How does the school help?</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>
i	Guidance	41	82	12	80	53	82
ii	Strictness	9	18	3	20	12	18
5(a)	<i>If child scores high than expected you...</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>
i	Praise	21	42	10	67	31	48
ii	Reward	22	44	3	20	25	38
iii	Both	7	14	2	13	9	14
5(b)	<i>If child scores less than expected you...</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>
i	Scold	14	28	5	33	19	29
ii	Explain and Guide	18	36	10	67	28	43
iii	Motivate to do better next	18	36	-	-	18	28
5(c)	<i>If child uses abusive language you...</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>
i	Scold	15	30	5	33	20	31
ii	Explain and Guide	35	70	10	67	45	69
5(d)	<i>If child learns abusive words from school you...</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>
i	Scold	12	24	8	53	20	31
ii	Guide	20	40	7	47	27	41
iii	Talk to teacher	18	36	-	-	18	28
6	<i>Parents belief about the reasons of parent-teacher association in the preschool</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%age</i>
i	Get to know and over come draw backs	17	34	4	26	21	32
ii	Get idea about child's performance	16	32	8	54	24	37
iii	Awareness of class activities	11	22	2	14	13	20
iv	Discuss about child and give suggestions	6	22	2	14	13	20

ment of confidence among them.

Majority of parents believe that a child at this stage needs individual attention so the teacher child ratio should be not more than 1:15. As reported by parent's majority of preschools in Jammu, in which their children study, have a teacher-child ratio of 1:20. Parents are not much satisfied with this ratio. Kapoor (1997), found that in 58% school, teacher-child ratio is 1:25. It was observed that large groups create strain and reduce the contribution which the school can make to individuals, to overcome this problem there should only be 20 children in a group so that each child receives individual attention and interacts with teacher frequently. NCERT and Western theorists' too lay similar emphasis on individual attention to each child's needs, but many preschools of Jammu are run in very cloistered conditions. There are more students than space, the play area being almost non-existent. Parents are not ignorant about their child's needs but they have no other alternative because they do not want to send their wards to far off but good and expensive preschools.

Children's books are a wonderful source for helping children adjust to the rapid change occurring in their daily lives. Parents believe that books-story books, rhyme books, alphabet and number books- should be used for nursery school teaching. Even the preschools in Jammu emphasize the use of books for teaching the children formally even though they say that they use play way approach (Kapoor, 1997). The play way approach is considered good but parents lay more emphasis on the formal learning. They say, '*Play way is 'OK', but child should learn the 3 R's right from the beginning*'. They believe that the teacher should use teaching aids to provide a stimulating environment and to enhance learning but previous experience. Kapoor (1997) shows that teaching aids though available are less frequently used in preschools of Jammu. She observed that these were stored away atop the almirahs and were collecting a lot of dust. Only a few preschools were using these aids but that too besides the formal learning.

Regarding evaluation, parents believe in annual promotion to next grade on the basis of overall performance, progress, discipline, behavior and daily activities. Parents show a gross ignorance for extra curricular activities and life skills development during these years. The purpose of parent teacher association, according

to parents is to get an idea about their child's performance, problems and activities of the school. They believe that such meetings should be regular but are not aware about their own contribution to such an association.

Parents believe in helping children in their studies as they think that their role and participation in their child's early education is important. The parents in the present study played an important role as supporters, motivators as well as teachers, but this is limited to a much formalized educational attainment. Parents, when they talk about homework, have disclosed that their child's school uses very formal approach to early childhood education. They are quite ignorant about the philosophy of preschool education. The parent-teacher association is limited to discussing about the result of the sessional examination, which too is held in a very formal manner. They want to inquire why their child was not ranked among first three. Why did he achieve low? How can his standing be improved? These are some '*important*' questions that parents ask the teachers, and they reflect upon the parent's expectations. They also served as a pointer to the cultural context in which the child is growing up. This '*developmental niche*' is shaped by parents' desire for recognition. If the child performs well the parents are praised and they earn a name. Higher academic achievement makes entry into the coveted courses-medical and engineering-easy and with fewer donations. The parents' desire for higher achievement pressurizes the child to perform well early in life, hence a stress on early starting of formal teaching. Parents must realize the importance of development of skills in this early phase, which is more important than mastery of 3 R's. Even the child's physical mechanisms are not yet ready to take the over load of academic skills.

The parents' beliefs about early childhood education are entrenched in a will to make him a '*bada-admi*' (big-man). Indian parents lay emphasis on the early learning of scholastic skills, where as they do not emphasize on the learning of values. From their construct the preschool must work hard to teach their children 3 R's. They lay emphasis on homework and private tuitions. Parents do not have an adequate knowledge about the philosophy behind early childhood education.

Though NCERT has given its recommen-

dations and the schools try to follow it, it is sometimes the parents who impede such implementations. No homework according to most of them, means no education. Play way approach is considered to be good for just play and not education. The load on the child is increasing with the coming on computers. Now parents want their child to learn about computers as early as 2 years of age. Such a mad rush is proving detrimental for the child. They are far removed from any value education. They do not learn to respect and share, to obey and conform, the basic tenets of Indian philosophy. Children spend half the time in formal learning and the other half in front of the television sets watching family dramas and cartoons shows. They are forgetting to learn about the cushioning mechanisms of Indian traditions, leading to increase in suicide rates at the first instance to stress, the board exams. The need is to make the parents realize the importance of each stage of education especially the foundation years of early childhood and to help them decide on the right kind of schools for their children, the objectives of preschool education, the methodologies to be followed and the importance of parent-teacher association. The planners should focus not only on the curriculum, schools and teachers, but parental awareness about importance of early years and the importance of play way approach in early childhood education.

KEYWORDS Childhood. Preschool. Education. Stress. Socialization.

ABSTRACT The present study was done with a purpose to know the parental concepts about the pre-school education. An urban sample of 65 parents [mother (n=50), father (n=15)] whose children were in the age group of 3-6 years was selected for the purpose. The data was collected with the help of Interview schedule Findings of the study indicate that though parents consider early childhood education as important for development of child yet they are ignorant about the play way approach. They lay more emphasis on 3R's (reading, writing and arithmetic). Preschool has emerged as a downward extension of formal system of education where teaching is aimed at learning skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Parents report that preschools in which their

children are studying consider play-way as good but lay emphasis on training in 3R's even as early as the child joins the school. Teaching aids and educational games are also used but not very frequently, as reported by the parents. Parents are generally satisfied with type of education being imparted to their children in the preschools, as they have no alternatives.

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