

came first, development of knowledge through signs, language learning through repetition and reinforcement, the meaning of *moortha* and *amoortha*, and language death.

Gururaj presented a paper titled “NCF Position Paper on Teaching of Indian Languages”. It was followed by a lively discussion. Devraj’s paper on “The Structures of Letters in Kannada” added a valuable contribution to the deliberations of the workshop.

On the second day of the workshop, the participants embarked on the task of translating the NCF position paper on the teaching of Indian languages. It was further decided that Kalandar would write a paper on “The Nature of Language”, Hanumanth on “Language Learning”, Showrish and Gururaj on “The Constitutional Provisions and the Three Language Formula”, Shreedevi and Shambanna on “Other Language Issues in the School Curriculum”, and Janaki and Zabeer would write on “Multilingualism and Scholastic Achievement”.

The two-day workshop was indeed a rewarding experience for the participants as they could share their readings on language and language pedagogy as a collaborative endeavor, there by sharpening their understanding of the different theories and approaches towards language acquisition and language pedagogy.

(The report is based on the inputs provided by Roopa Koti, District Institute, APF, Yadgir, Karnataka.)

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Language and Language Teaching Workshop 2 in Jaipur, Rajasthan

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The second workshop of Language and Language teaching for fifty members of the Azim Premji Institutes focused on the development of reading skills.

Objectives

1. To understand the concept of reading and the development of this capacity in children.
2. To understand how children acquire emergent capacities of reading from the environment.
3. To understand the role of the parents/teachers in supporting an emergent and developing reader.
4. To understand the theories of reading and the pedagogical implications of the strategies of reading.

The workshop commenced with a discussion on the experiences of the first workshop on the nature of language and a re-examination of some questions. These questions were: What are the metalinguistic rules that a child hypothesizes and acquires? How does it help to understand this process? If children do not learn through imitation, how do they learn? If children already know so much about language before they enter school, is the teacher needed?

Emergent Literacy

This session re-examined the literacy capability of children with a focus on the environment. The participants discussed the signs of literacy that children notice in their environment. They talked about rich and poor literacy environments: children who have a print-rich environment are often engulfed with a whole world of print that includes sign boards,

hoardings, wrappers, etc. They also got a feel of how children unconsciously acquire metalinguistic knowledge about reading by handling authentic materials. The facilitator collected many wrappers, tickets, advertisements, labels and photographs of shop signs and hoardings. These materials which children handle every day and know how to 'read', was examined from the viewpoint of the child. It was discussed that children understand 'letters' as signs or symbols which signify meaning. While handling authentic materials, the participants raised seminal questions such as: What is literacy? What is emergent literacy? Does emergent literacy happen only once in a life time? If a person becomes literate in one language, does she / he go through the same process again while learning another language? How do metalinguistic skills of emergent reading get transferred from one language to another?

The debates were referred to Dr Khanna who in answer to the questions above explained that we cannot become literate every time we learn a new language. Literacy can happen only once in a lifetime. Professor Agnihotri further suggested that this is because the metalinguistic capabilities acquired during our first engagement with literacy are deep structure universal rules. For example, a child who acquires the concept of grapho-phonemic relationships and its connection with meaning need not acquire that knowledge once again for another language. The knowledge of these relationships, once understood, is available throughout life for learning any other language. The only difference will be that the relationships will be expressed in different ways in different languages.

In the next session we examined case studies of some children who were emergent literates and others for whom literacy was a challenge. These case studies led to the discussion of getting the support from parents and teachers in developing literacy. Through the case study

of Donny from "Other People's Words" by Victoria Purcell Gates, and "Confronting Stereotypes" by Mini Srinivasan, it was deduced that culture plays an important role in making literacy acquisition meaningful by giving value and functional importance in daily life.

The participants discussed the theories of restricted and elaborate code by Bernstein. They also examined the debates arising out of a comparison of the ideas of Bernstein and Lisa Delpit. Basil Bernstein developed a theory of linguistic codes which posited that the upper and middle classes have an elaborated code with greater vocabulary while the lower classes follow a restricted code. This distinction raised a storm as it was taken to mean that the lower classes have lower language abilities. Lisa Delpit in her book *Other People's Children* challenges educators to break the stereotypes about the language of marginalized cultures. These discussions gave rise to the discussion of linguistic insecurity amongst children from marginalized communities in schools who share the burden of incomprehension as they do not understand the dominant language.

Developing Reading

To understand the concept of developing reading habits in children, the participants worked on different texts. The components of reading were culled as: capacity to understand relationships between graphemes and phonemes; word-meanings; ability to understand the structure and organization of a text; the importance of predicting words and their meanings through semantico-grapho-phonemic cues, syntax and structure; and vocabulary development for speed and fluency.

The groups also discussed how to choose a text for children. According to the group, the text should be a mirror of time and society. Moreover, it should not contain words or ideas beyond the capacities of children, and should be examined

for conceptual density. The significance of the readability test and its implications for text choice were also discussed.

Reading Strategies

The participants discussed the qualities of a good reader. This was followed by a discussion on how these qualities can be developed. The groups put forth their ideas: exposing children to different types of texts, encouraging children to talk about and question the text, asking open-ended questions and responding to them in an analytical manner, synthesizing the ideas in the text, etc. It was agreed that teachers could scaffold the strategies of prediction, interpretation, questioning, visualizing by creating well-designed learning experiences.

It was further discussed that children should be encouraged to read not just the words of the text but also read the world through the words of the text. For example, while reading R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends*, Swami's troubles in school can raise class discussions on school life from the child's point of view as against the point of view of the adult. Children may think about the two world views and talk about similarities between Swami's struggles and their own. For this, children need to make connections between the text and life, the text and the world, and the text and other texts. The group created activities to understand how these strategies could be acquired by children.

Theories of Reading

The final session of the workshop was on theories of reading. The participants went through an experiential journey of what happens when children are exposed to a bottom-up approach to learning. This led to an understanding of how such approaches actually distance the child from opportunities to make meaning of a written text. The second exercise

brought home the realization that reading is a cognitive activity that puts together an understanding of the world and the word, i.e. our experience, knowledge and culture, to reorganize the text in our minds. No text is read as it is. Understanding a text involves a reconstruction of the text according to the schema in our minds and with reference to our experience of the world.

This was followed by a short discussion on the theories of reading. Participants appreciated the fact that both top-down and bottom-up models need to be taken into consideration when thinking of scaffolding/ facilitating the development of reading in the class room. The teacher is the best judge of which approach will work with her students.

Reading Sessions

Daily reading sessions were conducted using the compendium of readings relevant to the sessions. Some interesting questions emerged from these readings which were addressed by Professor Ramakant Agnihotri in an audio mode.

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