



## Implementation Framework and Pedagogic Processes for a Foundation Programme in Early Literacy and Learning with a focus on classroom practice

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The context Early Literacy and Learning (ELL) which includes Early Grade Reading (EGR) has been recognised as a core focus area within the recent global discourse on education. It is increasingly being identified as fundamental to the comprehension and cognitive ability of a school going child. This has been driven by recent research which has highlighted that children who do not make good initial progress in learning to read in their early school years find it increasingly difficult to master this process later on. These children have difficulties in engaging with school based learning and this becomes a major reason for their inability to participate in class activities and to a corresponding to a high dropout rate. This worrisome trend is accentuated in the case of children from socially vulnerable and low literate backgrounds who do not have support for school based learning in their homes and social environments.

Conversely, studies at the national and international levels have also shown that innovative classroom pedagogies and facilitative learning environments can significantly improve early grade reading and learning outcomes. Success becomes a prime motivator for a child wanting to continue in school and engage in meaningful ways with learning. School success also impacts a teachers' belief in the capabilities of her learners and sets in motion a positive cycle of learning.

Research evidence especially from the neurosciences, has underscored the fact that a major portion of brain development occurs within the first eight years of a child's life. This research has also substantiated the fact **that interventions made in these initial years can have a lifelong impact.** In other words the foundation for the future learning for each child is laid in the early years. Recent research based perspectives argue for research for supporting natural ways of learning inside classrooms and laying emphasis on the classroom learning environment as an essential component of the learning process so that the learner, the content and the context are adequately addressed with curricular frameworks.

The Organization for Early Literacy Promotion (OELP) is a not for profit, grass root organisation that has worked intensively and in a sustained manner since 2006 inside government schools and with children, communities and teachers to develop a Foundation Programme for Early Literacy and Learning aimed at building foundations for meaningful reading, writing and school based learning for young learners from low literate and socially or economically marginalized backgrounds. This programme has been piloted successfully with approximately 800 children from Classes 1 and 2 within rural government schools in Rajasthan. We have tried to align the programme to the mainstream system and work within available resources to the extent possible, keeping scaling up within the realm of possibility. Viable options for scaling up are currently being explored for supporting the implementation of the OELP resources that have been distributed by the State Government to 14000 schools in 7 Special Focus Districts.

The programme incorporates the basic principles of ECE within the formal school. This also ensures an ease of downward extension into pre-primary programmes along with a focus on facilitating

smooth transitions either from the preschool to school or home to school in the case of young learners who are directly entering Class 1.

The cornerstone of the OELP innovations in Early Literacy and Learning is our focus on classroom practice.

We have experienced that it is not enough to focus on WHAT to teach

We need to focus on HOW to facilitate meaningful learning

This is more so in young learner classrooms in which children come from diverse socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds

## An overview of OELP's approach to Early Literacy and Learning

OELP locates its work within a Balanced Approach with an emphasis on both meaningful engagement with language and literacy in natural ways and a structured programme which focuses on developing strong foundations. It is based on the premise that children need meaningful, and socially relevant engagement with books, along with various opportunities to actively and purposefully engage with a variety of print based reading and writing activities. The framework acknowledges the need for tapping the rich resources of spoken language and real world experiences that the children bring in to the classroom. In addition to this, it provides the opportunity for explicitly planned and developmentally appropriate classroom practices to support the development of phonological awareness (the awareness of sounds and sound-symbol correlations), knowledge of alphabets, and vocabulary and comprehension strategies which create strong foundations for lifelong reading and writing proficiency

It is important to note that engagement with a variety of language forms and creative expression such as oral, drawing, dramatisation are coupled with opportunity for engagement with children's literature and environmental print along and a planned approach for supporting meaningful decoding. All the above learning experiences are all introduced simultaneously from Day 1. The level of complexity increases gradually over a period of time so that natural progressions within the domains of language, literacy are facilitated and mapped. Basic concepts of numeracy and Maths are also introduced along with English through action poems. However, learner progression in these two domains are not being assessed / mapped at present. This is work in process and is constantly evolving to incorporate new research based insights or feedback from the field.

## Classroom approach and pedagogic processes to obtain a balanced programme

1. The *Varna Samooha* Approach: OELP understands that reading is more than word recognition. However, the active and meaningful processing of sentences and paragraphs cannot occur unless a beginning reader can recognize individual words reliably and efficiently. We therefore realise that learning to decode is an important step for learning to read. We have attempted to make the process of decoding a meaningful one through the *Varna Samooha* approach (based on the phonology of the *Devanagari* script). This approach connects the processes of decoding with meaning construction.

Within this approach the Hindi alpha-syllabary (varna mala) has been re-grouped into **6 groupings** called ***Varna Samoohas***, with a limited number of consonants, vowels and their abbreviated forms (matras) within each group. These groupings were arrived at through a two year intensive

engagement inside government schools and with the involvement of government school teachers. These akshara sets are presented to the children one group at a time in a chronological and cumulative manner through *akshara* charts, flash cards, words walls, and poem posters. It is important to note that unlike the phonics approach these are all presented simultaneously so that children begin to view *aksharas* as sound units which combine to make meaningful words. The children learn to understand that their spoken words are made up of these sound symbols and that written forms are another mode for representing oral language. They learn to combine these sound symbols to construct their own spoken words and illustrate meanings for them through drawings. The words that the children construct are from their spoken language. Pre determined word lists are not given. This process helps the children to build script knowledge and decode actively in meaningful ways. This approach has been used for languages which have the same phonological base as the *Devanagari*. For example, children have constructed words in Bengali, Nemadi, Bhojpuri, Punjabi etc. The approach facilitates transitions from the home language to the language of curricular transaction.

OELP's *Varna Samooha* Approach has the following components:

- a) Identifying beginning sounds
- b) Matching written symbols for each spoken sound – sound symbol correspondence
- c) Combining sounds to construct meaningful words / sentences/ poems
- d) Illustrating the meanings of newly constructed words and sentences through pictures

Once children have learned to decode efficiently and are able to process simple texts fluently, they are able use more of their cognitive resources to engage with the meaning of texts.

## 2. Four Blocks Framework

OELP's Foundation Programme is being implemented through the **Four Blocks** as a delivery framework for implementing classroom based language and literacy interventions with a focus on the enabling conditions and the actual classroom transactions and pedagogies. This framework is viewed as a scaffolding for the teachers which allows flexibility within a broad structure, so that it balances the space for teacher autonomy with the opportunity for a systematic mapping of learner progressions through well defined assessment procedures

It spans two hours and basic numeracy and English are woven into the programme. 30 mins are devoted daily for each Block. Decoding, meaning making, engaging meaningfully and thoughtfully with a variety of authentic texts including children's literature and are taken up simultaneously and not sequentially. The children are immersed in a print environment and the Four Block framework is used to facilitate natural progressions into literacy by allowing adequate space for meaningful and thoughtful engagement with oral and written language with planned transitions to the school language.

A broad overview of the pedagogic processes which have been incorporated in the Four Block framework is presented below:

### **Block 1. Talk time and Reading: *Time duration - 30 to 40 minutes***

#### **Pedagogic processes**

**A. Conversations and talk** based on a theme through open and closed questions which help children to draw on their experiences; connect with deeper aspects of books, pictures and other texts and that encourage children to think, draw conclusions, reason etc.

The focus of the pedagogic processes is on

- Types of questioning to generate rich and meaningful conversations – both teacher led as well as student led questions.
- In the beginning the emphasis is on developing rich oral language and getting children to listen to written language through Read Aloud.

**B. Read Aloud.**

The focus of the pedagogic process is on strategies to be used for

- a) Pre-reading
- b) During reading and
- c) Post reading
- d) Questioning that can generate higher order thinking.

**Note:** Emphasis is laid on Read Aloud as an important pedagogic approach which should not be confused with storytelling. There is strong research evidence to show that the structure of written language is not the same as spoken language. It is important for children to listen to written language. This becomes even more important in the case of children from low literate communities. As children acquire proficiency there is a shift in the pedagogic processes incorporated into Block 1. And the following practices are introduced :

- Guided reading
- Shared reading
- *Pathan Saathi* or Buddy Reading
- *Mukt pathan* or free reading
- Independent reading.
- The focus of pedagogic process in the First Block is on:
  - Rich conversations to draw upon children’s real life experiences, home language and contexts
  - Creating print awareness and strengthening print concepts
  - Experiencing and responding meaningfully to written language
  - Numeracy and basic Maths concepts are introduced through the calendar and ganit mala

**Block 2. Word study & vocabulary: Time duration - 20 minutes**

This time is considered important especially for facilitating transitions from home language to school language. A variety of word activities and games have been developed. They use the displayed print in the classroom and more specifically the words in the word wall. Words in the word wall include words constructed by the children as well as words from conversations or Read Alouds.

The focus of this pedagogic process includes:

- Building spoken vocabulary in home and school language
- Building written vocabulary in home and school language
- Analyzing words and word categories

**Block 3. Writing and expressing: Time duration – 30 minutes**

Children are encouraged to use a variety of natural ways to express their ideas in creative ways.

The focus of this pedagogic processes includes:

- Experience based writing which includes emergent writing, drawing and invented spellings

- with a gradual and natural shift to conventional writing
- Opportunities to using new vocabulary in a variety of ways – spoken and written
- Opportunities to construct meaningful sentences in natural ways – spoken and written
- Story mapping and other post reading extension activities
- Shared writing
- Theme bases projects
- Extending poems or creating their own etc

At least three different types of writing which are listed above are done in a week

**Notes:**

1. Writing is considered a developmental process and space is provided for children to progress in natural ways from drawing, scribbling, and other forms of emergent writing to more conventional forms.
2. The print environment is considered as vital and planned scaffolding in this process and various corners are set up in the classroom and include a word wall, a book corner, children’s corner, poem corner, calendar etc. Low cost and available resources are used.

**Block 4. Skill building for R / W: Time duration – 30 minutes**

Skill building focuses on both foundation skills and higher order thinking skills.

The focus of the pedagogic processes include:

- Building the foundations for R/W through OELP’s structured *Varna Samooha* approach with a focus on phonological processing and meaning construction
- Skill practice worksheets to reinforce particular foundation skills
- Skill reinforcement through games and activities

Conceptualisation of the Four Blocks is based on three skill sets

A. Foundations for schooling

- ✓ Following simple class rules towards building self regulation and channelizing emotions
- ✓ Learning simple social skills required within the classroom
- ✓ Learning the skills required for efficient executive functions and cognitive processing
- ✓ such as staying on a task; listening attentively etc

B. Foundations for R/W

- ✓ Print awareness
  - ✓ Building concepts of print
  - ✓ Building effective listening skills
  - ✓ Developing the skills for expressing thoughts and ideas clearly
  - ✓ Building script knowledge – through the OELP *Varna Samooha* approach for developing :
  - ✓ Vocabulary building\*– i.e. spoken and written vocabulary
  - ✓ Introduction to simple sentences in active ways
- \* through the use of the word wall and other print elements and books in the classroom with a focus on building fluency at the word and simple sentence level

C. Higher order cognitive processing

- ✓ Predicting and confirming
- ✓ Questioning / answering questions – direct and inferential
- ✓ Reasoning and problem solving

- ✓ Identifying main ideas
- ✓ Re-telling and summarising
- ✓ Classifying; sequencing; matching components etc
- ✓ Building awareness of the story structure and various elements of a story
- ✓ Building awareness of different genre

## Assessment

Formative and summative assessments: have been incorporated as a part of the OELP learner tracking process which include:

- ✓ *Structured, competency based formats for summative assessments*
- ✓ *Observation based checklist for formative assessment.*
- ✓ *Profile folders for each child used during the monthly meetings*
- ✓ *Parents are invited into the classroom periodically to see and discuss their children's work.*

Competencies and indicators: Learning indicators are based on six broad competency areas. Learner progressions are mapped on these core competencies measured at increasing levels of complexity at six assessment points i.e. every trimester across two years

Levelling: Based on summative assessments children are grouped into six levels – A, B, C, D,E, and F. with the lowest level being at Level A. Learner progressions across these six levels are mapped on at six data points over two years i.e. through Grades 1 and 2. Shifts across performance levels are mapped at each assessment point

Internal assessments include:

1. A baseline evaluation
2. Summative, competency based evaluation – at the end of each trimester
3. Formative, observation based check-list at the end of each trimester
4. Individual profile folders

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