Appraisal of the
Proposal for the Early Literacy Project (ELP)
of Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion (OELP)

Final Report

submitted to Sir Ratan Tata Trust

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with a Field Visit Section by Meena Shrinivasan

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Final Report of the Appraisal

CHAPTER 1
Executive Summary

Background of the Appraisal (Comprising **Chapter 2** of this report)

Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT), through its Early Literacy Initiative, supports curriculum development, field-level pedagogy and research in the area of literacy learning in Indian languages. A proposal has been submitted to SRTT by Organisation For Early Literacy Promotion (OELP), New Delhi, for the continuation in Kishengarh Block of Ajmer district in Rajasthan of interventions that introduce meaningful teaching methods and facilitative classroom environments for literacy learning in young learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. SRTT has previously supported similar OELP interventions in selected schools of the Municipal Corporation, Delhi (MCD) and more recently the Bal Sahyog Kendras (BSKs) in Ajmer District which are ongoing. The new project proposal is for the period 2012-2015. The SRTT has requested Ms. Zakiya Kurrien to appraise the proposal, review OELP's current work and material, and make recommendations to strengthen the proposal and OELP's activities on the ground.

The **methodology** of the appraisal includes an extensive desk review of the OELP project proposal, budget, other background documents and teaching-learning materials to be used in the project, supplemented by field visits to current OELP BSKs and their administrative office in Delhi. The necessary field visits were conducted by Ms. Meena Shrinivasan.

A Draft Report of this appraisal was submitted to SRTT and shared with OELP in order to elicit the feedback of both organisations. This final report incorporates the feedback received. It is prepared and submitted by Ms. Kurrien. The field visit section is formulated by Ms. Shrinivasan.

Review and Appraisal of OELP's Project Proposal
(Main desk review, comprising **Chapter 3**)

Rationale, aims and objectives of the project – The project recognises the pivotal role of literacy in equipping young learners for schooling and for meeting the expectations of the emerging global world. Through meaningful, active teaching methods and facilitative classroom environments, it seeks to build strong foundations for reading and writing with understanding in children from disadvantaged socio-economic background. It also seeks to provide technical support and materials for other NGOs and GOs who share these aims.

OELP's Early Literacy Methodology (ELP) – The teaching methods developed already by OELP, to be adopted in the project, are based on sound theoretical considerations and lend the necessary conceptual clarity to the ELP. They result in *the Balanced Approach* which combines a structured programme for introducing young learners to early decoding skills

and meaningful vocabulary, together with opportunities for them to freely engage in various literacy activities. Some suggestions are given in the Recommendations chapter of this appraisal whereby the approach can be deepened.

Analysis of the Proposed Intervention

Part 1 – Resource Support and Training

1. *Bal Sahyog Kendras (BSKs)* These have already been established in 20 villages of Kishengarh block in Ajmer District. Some are 'remedial centres ' within government schools; others are community-based, for out-of-school children Expanding to 50 further BSKs over the next 3 years seems feasible.

2. *Model of Exposure-Based Training* OELP will share its experience in running effective BSKs, by providing training to other organisations. 10 of their existing BSKs are poised to serve as good demonstration sites for trainees. Increasing the duration and content of training is suggested.

3. *Provision of Training and Resource Support – Development and Dissemination* This is a much needed attempt at larger outreach to NGOs and GOs in other states. It will need travel for on-site mentoring and monitoring.

4. *Development of Supportive Reading and Writing Environments* in the BSKs and outside. This is a very significant input to compensate for the print deficit in the homes of first generation school entrants and create a broader reading culture both in schools and in the village communities. It will include a variety of print rich features which are described.

5. *Research* Although OELP is poised to undertake research activities, this component of the proposal is relatively weak and will need to be worked on separately.

6. *Systemic linkages* OELP's resource support to SSA and NGOs will be feasible with some strengthening of capacity building of their own trainers

Part 2 – Resource Material : Compilation, Development, Dissemination

The OELP Resource pack and Skill Practice worksheets are reviewed and found to be suitable for wider dissemination. Teacher involvement in their development is a key strength. The pack could be augmented with some more picture material for literacy learning. The production quality is good. Logistics for producing large numbers of worksheets have to be considered. Compilation and consolidation of existing OELP material is important, as there is a great need for resource materials in the area of early literacy. Dissemination strategies are suggested in the Recommendations chapter.

Part 3 – Consultation

OELP plans to organise at least one Consultation per year on literacy themes. All the examples of themes mentioned in the proposal are highly relevant. This will require separate planning and additional resource support.

Year-wise Work Plans – Outlines of year-wise work plans over the 3-are provided . Since diffusion processes may take more time than expected it is probably more sound to expect work plans for one year at a time.

Human Resource – Profiles and roles of all project staff are spelt out and are generally appropriate, though field supervisors may need to be increased later. The number of trainers appears sufficient; training capacity of this level needs strengthening.

Expected Outcomes and Impact -The expected outcomes of the 3-year ELP project have been outlined as follows:
- Enrolment of out-of-school children in schools – 60%
- Demonstration BSKs at locations in and outside Rajasthan - 25
- Use of demonstration sites for 300 teachers to be trained
- Mobile libraries, linking them to schools, starting lending facility – 10 more villages
- Establishing one centrally located library-cum-activity centre
- Community-based monitoring of library programme – 20 villages
- Resource support to NGOs and GOs – 6
- Production and dissemination of OELP material in user-friendly formats
- Compilation and sharing of OELP research studies in user-friendly formats

These outcomes are mainly quantitative and commensurate with the inputs. Expected literacy acquisition needs to be added as an outcome. The assessment indicators listed contain quantitative as well as various qualitative aspects. The indicators will need to be categorised and refined in more detail at the outset.

Review and Monitoring Mechanisms - Tracking of learner performance, monthly meetings with stakeholders and school visits are planned. Although these are good monitoring strategies, there will be a need to develop monitoring instruments. Provision for formative and summative evaluation will also need to be included.

Budget - Year-wise budgets are submitted. It is difficult to appraise externally the appropriateness of allocations. Some suggestions for rectifications and modifications have been made in the appraisal.

Field Visit Observations and Findings (comprising **Chapter 4**)

A field visit to Ajmer district was conducted as part of the appraisal. Discussions were held with the OELP team, with teachers in the BSKs, teachers and heads in government schools, some elected representatives and block education department officials. Discussions were also held with community members. Observations in the BSK classrooms showed that the

methodology and materials are being used with ease and confidence by the teachers, even though they are not highly trained or educated. The teachers have been selected from the local community and use the children's home language to communicate with them.

Children in the remedial BSKs in government schools were observed at the very early stage of the OELP methodology, while those in the community-based centres were at a fairly advanced level. In both cases the children seemed to be enjoying the activities and were able to demonstrate a level of reading and writing with understanding that is not usually seen in government school children of comparable grades. The print rich environment was also seen to be used effectively and contributes greatly to children's learning. The range of books could be augmented further. The mobile libraries were functioning well.

There is no data at present about how children from the remedial BSKs fare when they are mainstreamed into their own grades. Suggestions for tracking their achievement are given in this appraisal.

It is suggested that OELP broadens its engagement with School Management Committees.

The overall attitude of the government school system was seen to be very positive to the ELP, and it was felt that there is scope to expand and train teachers to use this in a wider circle of government schools, perhaps the whole block. Towards this, it will be necessary to deepen the training content related to home language, culture and literacy acquisition, and support through mentoring. More capacity building of the OELP team would be required before such an expansion could be undertaken.

Suggestions/Recommendations (comprising **Chapter 5**)

The suggestions / recommendations given in Chapter 5 are based on the desk review of the proposal as well as the observations and discussions during the field visits. The first three recommendations deal with revisiting theoretical concepts. The rest are operational in nature.

1. ***Facilitating children's transition from culture of home to culture of school*** Besides print rich environments, it is necessary to provide at least an initial curriculum of early cognitive stimulation for 6-7 year olds who have had no sound preschool experience. Such early inputs in cognitive skills and reasoning abilities influence later levels of literacy. It is recommended that OELP engage with the Class 1 school curriculum to introduce such a programme.
2. ***The Varna Samooha Approach*** Decoding in Devanagari would ideally need to be extended to the remaining *akshara* not included in the existing pedagogy. OELP could consider making such a contribution to the development of further materials to be used at later levels. Higher level reading skills need to be tested for children exposed and not exposed to the existing sets of *Varna Samoohas*. Implementation by government school teachers would require extension of the materials to cover further *akshara*.

3. *Tracking Learner Progress* There are certain technical aspects in the formulation of test items, particularly for evaluating reading with understanding, that need strengthening. Data from tracking learners who are mainstreamed is necessary.

4. *Outreach* The thrust of the outreach should be on BSKs in government schools within the block, given the context of RTE. For out-of-school children there should be a time-bound plan for mainstreaming them. In the case of implementation of the ELP pedagogy entirely through school teachers, the ' order ' for implementing the inputs needs to come from the highest level.

5. *Exposure-Based Training* The exposure-based training needs to adopt a longer initial duration and a follow-up recurrent design with periodic on-site mentoring. The training content also needs to be augmented.

6. *Capacity building* The core team of OELP which is going to take on the task of capacity building for other NGOs or government school teachers itself needs more capacity building before they can independently train government school teachers and staff of other NGOs.

7. *Materials* The OELP Resource Pack is reviewed in detail. The appraisal finds the TLM quite user-friendly in its present form, and the field observations of their use bear this out. The OELP team wishes to add colour, use larger fonts, etc. This can of course improve upon them. Suggestions are included for training videos. For wider dissemination of all materials, some strategies are suggested.

8. *Mobile libraries and field library* -These components need to be described in more detail in the proposal.

9. *Monitoring and Evaluation* - Indicators will need to be developed, for a monitoring instrument. There is no mention of project evaluation in the proposal. In connection with learning attainment, OELP needs to state the expected level of literacy acquisition of different groups of learners as an outcome of the project. A budget for Formative Evaluation will have to be included.

10. *Research* - The areas of research that OELP decides to focus on will need separate research proposals that outline research design, methodology, etc., both quantitative and qualitative. Separate budgets will need to be funded. Ways of disseminating OELP's existing research are suggested.

11. **Community participation** - It is recommended that OELP get more involved with School Management Committees (SMCs) to raise their awareness about issues related to quality education, of which reading and writing meaningfully is an important part.

Conclusion

The ELP proposal needs a few modifications. The project has the potential to make a significant contribution in the field of early literacy learning in India. It is strongly recommended for funding.

CHAPTER 2
Background of the Appraisal

Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT), through its Early Literacy Initiative, supports curriculum development, field-level pedagogy and research in the area of literacy learning in Indian languages. This is in response not only to the importance of the acquisition of reading and writing skills by all children, but also in recognition of the evidence that young students in our government schools, especially first generation learners, fail to acquire these skills at a functional level by the end of five years of primary education.

A proposal has been submitted to SRTT by Organisation For Early Literacy Promotion (OELP), New Delhi, for the continuation in Kishengarh Block of Ajmer district in Rajasthan of interventions that introduced meaningful teaching methods and facilitative classroom environments for building strong foundations for reading and writing with understanding in young learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. These interventions have been ongoing since the year 2009 with partial funding from SRTT. In the main, they have included the setting up of support centres called Bal Sahyog Kendras (BSKs) as informal learning spaces, and classes in schools for out-if-school children run by SWRC. Prior to this, in 2006, SRTT had supported one phase of a similar project implemented in 6 schools of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). It had also supported Phase 2 in 2008-09 in 8 rural government schools in Silora Block of Ajmer district.

The new project proposal is for the period 2012-2015. The SRTT has requested Ms. Zakiya Kurrien to appraise the proposal and submit a report which includes a field visit to OELP's existing centres to be undertaken by Ms. Meena Shrinivasan.

Objectives of the Present Exercise as laid down by SRTT

- To appraise OELP's project proposal
- To review OELP's ongoing work and material
- To make recommendations to strengthen the proposal and OELP's activities on the ground.

Scope of the Appraisal

The appraisal attempts to encompass the following:

- Review OELP's current work being implemented in schools and village level centres in Ajmer in terms of conceptual clarity in the approach, methodology pertaining to teaching-learning and assessment practices and response from children / teachers / community members.

- Comment on the robustness of sites as demonstration centres in terms of physical, methodological, capacity of personnel etc.

- Appraise the proposal in terms of: a) Appropriateness of design of different components and activities; b) Suitability and adequacy of implementation and

institutional structure proposed for carrying out the activities; c) Proposed human resources and any areas where additional support / expertise is required .

- Assess readiness of the OELP team to expand and network with other organisations.
- Review the curricular material development by OELP in terms of its wider relevance and applicability for groups / schools working to foster literacy skills in children; suggest ways in which material can be made available more widely and changes required to make it suitable for dissemination and marketing.

Methodology of the Appraisal

The methodology of the appraisal includes the following:

- Extensive desk review of the OELP project proposal and budget
- Extensive study of other background documents maintained by OELP.
- Review of the teaching-learning materials and other materials to be used by OELP in the project.
- Field visits to current OELP implementation sites in Ajmer district
- Visit to OELP administrative office in New Delhi after site visits.
- Discussion with OELP project personnel, their field level partners, children, and other stakeholders
- Sharing of an initial Draft Report of the appraisal with SRTT and OELP in order to elicit feedback from both organisations and incorporate this in the Final Report.

A list of the above documents is given in Annexure 1.

CHAPTER 3
Review and Appraisal of OELP's Early Literacy Project (ELP) Proposal
2012-2015

This chapter comprises the main body of the desk review of the proposal as well as other background documents. The field visit is reported in the next chapter, and the subsequent Recommendations chapter is based on the combined findings of the desk review and field visits.

Structure of the Proposal

As mentioned earlier, the proposed 3-year ELP is to a large extent a continuation and expansion of OELP's current work. Hence it should be noted that the structure of the Project Proposal departs from the usual expected structure whereby sections entitled Project Objective, Project Strategies, Project Activities, etc. are delineated. Instead, as much as the first half of the 40-page proposal is devoted to the context, background, rationale and description of OELP's Early Literacy Interventions since their inception in 2006 up to their current status. From this delineations can be gleaned the rationale and main aims of the proposed 2012-2015 project, which remains essentially the same. With some modifications and augmentation to be carried out in this further 3-year period, the main contours of the project components continue to be similar to those currently in process.

Rationale, Aims and Objectives

The proposed project recognises the pivotal role of literacy in equipping young learners for schooling and for meeting the expectations of the emerging global world. It is rooted in OELP's substantial prior experience in developing classroom methodologies which equip children from marginalised backgrounds to build strong foundations for reading and writing with understanding in Hindi, and to become successful independent readers and writers.

The urgent need to address the challenges of ineffective, de-contextualised teaching and learning that continue to plague our school systems, to create learning environments that bridge the gaps between a child's socio-cultural backgrounds and school, and to facilitate literacy acquisition through processes of active learning (as envisioned in the National Curriculum Framework, 2005) – these considerations provide the sound rationale for undertaking the project and setting out its aims. The underlying vision of the RTE Act – attainment of equal educational opportunity for all children – also provides an important rationale for demonstrating meaningful alternatives to rapidly expanding State-supported macro programmes for early literacy which are often not grounded in clear theoretical and practical understanding of how young children, especially those from disadvantaged homes, learn best.

Given the above rationale and overall aims, the objectives of the proposed interventions have been formulated by OELP as follows:

- To build a system of support for the school system which will help to increase school participation and retention for children who belong to marginalized backgrounds in school as well as for children to are still out of school.

- To strengthen existing field based interventions and classroom literacy practices in ways which are sensitive to the natural learning behaviours, diverse learning needs and situations of young learners.

- To develop a model of exposure based training for the capacity building of education workers and teachers

- To sensitize teachers and parents to the special learning needs of first generation school learners from marginalized backgrounds

- To enhance resource support through consolidation, development and dissemination of resource material, training and development and demonstration of mechanisms for learner tracking and assessment

Proposed Project Activities 2012-15 at a Glance

The project activities as listed by OELP are as follows:

1. Consolidation and expansion of the Bal Sahyog Kendras (BSKs)
2. Setting up a model of exposure-based training.
3. Provision of training and resource support
4. Development of supportive reading and writing environments
5. Research
6. Systemic linkages
7. Resource material compilation, development and dissemination
8. Consultation

A detailed appraisal of these activities features later in this report.

Methodology of the Early Literacy Project

There is a copious amount of background documentation that reveals a thorough review of global literature done by OELP's Director in the area of Early Literacy Development. For OELP, this has resulted in basing the teaching-learning methods of the ELP broadly on 3 main considerations, viz :

- Impact of children's socio-cultural backgrounds on school-based learning; more specifically the need to facilitate their transition from the oral cultural at home to the print culture of school (supported, for example, by Vygotskian perspectives, insights from the work of Purcell-Gates and others.)

- Impact of recent theories of early literacy acquisition, particularly the view that reading is a constructive process, in which meaning of a text is not contained on the printed page but is constructed by young readers through the experience of their own personal world.

- Importance of developing a core set of decoding skills, as children do not learn to read and write entirely through natural processes.

The above theoretical considerations are eminently sound and lend the necessary conceptual clarity to the ELP. They result in the Balanced Approach adopted in the project which combines a structured programme for introducing young learners to early decoding skills and meaningful vocabulary, together with opportunities for them to freely engage in various literacy activities.

Having said this, there are however, some major concerns that arise out of OELP's own understanding which are perhaps inadequately addressed in their approach. Towards building early foundations for later, higher levels of literacy, a pedagogical approach to early literacy learning for young children from disadvantaged backgrounds must attempt to compensate for their overall deprived backgrounds, as much as for the absence of print and a reading culture in their homes. This would require engagement with the curriculum in Class 1 of primary schools. The theoretical aspect is further fleshed out in the Recommendations chapter of the present appraisal. OELP has responded that they are open to dealing with the issue perhaps at a later date.

Specifics of the Balanced Approach of ELP

There are four main research-based strategies in the Balanced Approach to early literacy developed and being used currently by OELP. As the project proposes the continued use of this approach, a brief appraisal of each strategy is delineated below:

1. Decoding skills developed through six *Varna Samoohas.*

   The teaching of decoding has to consider which linguistic unit to start within a given language, as orthographies vary within language groups. Since the basic written unit in the Devanagari script , therefore in Hindi, is a combination of phoneme and syllable, OELP has chosen to introduce script through *'akshara'* (alpha-syllables) rather than through discrete alphabets and *'matra'*. Thus a selection of Hindi alphabet letters and vowel sounds is divided into six groups. By progressively working through these groups children learn to decode a range of words from familiar vocabulary.
   Although this beginning pedagogy for Devanagari was not altogether new when OELP started its work, the uniqueness and significance of their approach is two-fold:
   - It is systematically integrated with other important aspects of reading with understanding

   - The *varna samoohas* are used not only by material developers to formulate texts for children to read, but children themselves use them to combine sounds and construct their own familiar words and sentences. Thus, the teaching of reading partially through the home language – Marwari in this case – becomes a reality, as children naturally construct words in their home language as well as in Hindi

and make the important connection between the spoken and written forms of language.

A possible limitation and strengthening in OELP's approach is discussed in the Recommendations chapter, in the light of their plans to introduce their methods in mainstream classrooms.

2. Print-rich classrooms

The teaching of decoding skills is combined in each BSK with the creation of spaces for engaging children meaningfully with a variety of print materials which are used for child-centred literacy games and activities.

Our government schools do not recognise the significance of print-rich learning environments for young, first generation school-goers. OELP on the other hand draws upon the research in Emergent Literacy which confirms that, in accounting for difference between children in early literacy learning, the major influence is that of the home. For children from backgrounds where there has been little or no opportunity for any orientation to print, or for interacting with adult literates, the BSKs serve to compensate for this early deficit.

That the compensation needs to be further deepened has already been mentioned ; possible ways to do so is dealt with in the Recommendations chapter.

3. Reading Corner

Each BSK has a book corner where children read independently and engage with the books with their teachers in the various ways. This component not only supports literacy learning but gives children the pleasure that books bring and helps them to become life-long readers. The inclusion of a book corner is part and parcel of OELP's balanced instructional strategies. OELP could explore ways by which children could borrow books to take home, especially for those children who may not have access to the mobile library.

4. Skill-Practice

That children need practice in some specific reading and writing competencies is the rationale for providing graded worksheets as part of instructional programme.

Further reference to these is made in this report in the section on Materials.

Analysis of the Proposed Intervention

The activities of the proposed intervention for the period 2012-15 are categorised in the proposal in three distinct parts, viz. :
Part 1 – Resource Support and Training
Part 2 – Resource Material: Compilation, Development, Dissemination
Part 3 - Consultation

These parts of the document are followed by :

- Outlines of year-wise work plans for the BSKs, up scaling in Rajasthan and other Hindi-speaking states
- Profiles of the work areas and locations of selected areas
- Human resource for the project
- Expected outcomes, deliverables and impact
- Mention of some review and monitoring mechanisms
- Year-wise budgets

 The **overall strength** of the entire proposal is that it has evolved out of a sound research base related to Early Literacy, along with several years of actual implementation in the field. The lessons learned through previous implementation, listed on p.19 of the OELP proposal, endorse the continued need for support centres like the Bal Sahyog Kendras (BSKs) for young learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Baseline and endline data of literacy skills of learners over one year of intervention in 2009, presented in the External Evaluation conducted by the Regional Institute of Education, Ajmer, endorses the efficacy of OELP's pedagogical approach. The tracking of learner progress in the BSKs from February to May 2011, though incomplete, also revealed significant gains in literacy skills. Moreover, as evinced from the two research studies undertaken during 2010-11, OELP's commitment goes beyond the implementation of an instructional programme; it encompasses knowledge building in an area of children's education where there is a dearth of informed practice in India.

The following section of this chapter is a desk review and analysis of the above parts of the ELP Proposal. Observations arising out of the field visits are delineated in the next chapter.

Part 1 – Resource Support and Training

1. <u>Bal Sahyog Kendras (BSKs)</u> The initial number of BSKs to be run by OELP have already been established in 20 villages of Kishengarh block in Ajmer District. Some are 'remedial centres 'within government schools; others are community-based, for out-of-school children. Procedures in setting them up have been well thought out and include the main components of OELP's methods and materials as well as important aspects such as baseline testing of all newly admitted children and learner tracking mechanisms. The proposal to expand the number to 50 further BSKs over the next 3 years seems feasible, as it is planned to do this in partnership with other NGOs and GOs in Rajasthan and other Hindi-speaking states. However, there is a need for the project proposal to briefly spell out the profile and proven capacities, (especially staff capacities) of the said NGOs to effectively run the BSKs, in order to assess whether the projections are realistic.

2. <u>Model of Exposure-Based Training</u> With OELP's considerable experience in running effective BSKs, the plan to provide training in their concepts and methodologies to other organisations, and to use 10 of their existing BSKs for giving trainees actual

exposure to classroom practice, addresses an important need in teacher training. The selected BSKs are poised to be good demonstration sites. The infrastructure to be provided by SWRC for introductory and follow up training sessions appears adequate. The resource persons consisting of the combined OELP and SWRC teams would probably be adequate in number, to start with.

There are, however, some major concerns that will need to be addressed regarding the following: the 3-day duration of the exposure-based training, the design of the training content, the capacity of the existing trainers – See the Recommendations chapter.

3. Provision of Training and Resource Support – Development and Dissemination
This is an ambitious plan. In terms of the expertise that OELP has to offer, this attempt at larger outreach to NGOs and GOs in other states certainly needs encouragement and support. The impact on larger numbers, as envisioned by OELP is outlined on pp. 25-26 at 3 levels – the children, the community, the government school system. While this is possible, there are some concerns that will need to be addressed – See the Recommendations chapter.

4. Development of Supportive Reading and Writing Environments The major aspects of this endeavour will continue to be located in the BSKs and contain the following elements : Reading corners, poem corners, word walls with correlated activities, message boards, labels, captions, written instructions for children, display areas for children's own writing and drawing, portfolios of children's work, etc.

This is a much needed component in the project. It is in continuation of OELP's effort to provide print-rich classroom environments in order to compensate for the print deficit in the homes of first generation school entrants and create a broader reading culture both in schools and in the village communities.

Some new activities have also been proposed, namely:
- Development of a reading resource centre for out-of-school children
- Development of further supplementary reading materials
- Compilation and dissemination of local stories and poems

There is no mention here of the mobile libraries started in the earlier phase of the work, though they are mentioned later in the year-wise activities of the project and in the expected outcomes. The Field Visit chapter presents a more detailed appraisal of the current mobile libraries.

Workshops and exposure trips for the ELP team and teachers, and meetings with School Management Committees (SMCs) have been listed. The reason for placing them in this section is unclear.

5. Research OELP has undertaken important research studies in the past, mainly through the strong research capability of its Director. Although OELP is poised to

undertake research activities, this component of the proposal is relatively weak, in that significant areas of research would be 'explored ', but there is no clear research plan yet. Ways of disseminating OELP's existing research, and formulation of new research, is dealt with in the Recommendations chapter.

6. <u>Systemic linkages</u> With OELP's expertise and field experience, the proposed outreach through training programmes, setting up demonstration BSKs, and resource support to SSA and organisations like Doosra Dashak and Jan Sahas will be feasible if further strengthening of certain aspects of the proposal is taken on board, particularly with reference to capacity building and exposure-based training. See Recommendations chapter.

Part 2 – Resource Material : Compilation, Development, Dissemination

1. <u>Resource Pack for the *Varna Samooha* approach</u>
   The materials in this pack support OELP's *Varna Samooha* approach for beginning reading and writing in Hindi. The grouping of the alphabet has been done over one year with the involvement of regular school teachers inside classrooms. Teacher involvement in its development is a key strength. The pack consists of the following:

   - A teacher's guide book to explain the method

   - 6 bags with colour coded material for each of the six *varna samoohas*.

   - Each bag contains:

     - an *akshara* chart on cloth specific to each *varna samooha*

     - a set of 6x6 inch *akshara* flash cards specific to each *varna samooha*

     - a set of three poem posters related to the *varna samooha*

     - a teacher's guide book

   - CDs explaining the methods and giving suggestions for activities

   - A book of suggested activities

   - A book of evaluation formats

Most of the above components were available for the desk review. In the case of the *varna samooha* charts, posters and guide books, a sample of one full set out of six sets was reviewed; from this review it was possible to extrapolate the nature of the remaining sets.

The Resource Pack is correlated well with the ELP pedagogy. The use of cloth and reinforced, laminated paper and cards lend sufficient durability. The guide book for teachers is clearly laid out. It could be improved by adding visuals of each step in the pedagogy.

The production quality of the VCDs is adequate from the point of view of both promotional and training material. A suggestion regarding video material is given in the Recommendations chapter.

The inclusion of evaluation formats is useful.

The cloth packaging is practical and durable.

TLM for literacy learning for young children, as well as for adults, usually includes a fair amount of picture material, as it is effective for vocabulary development, comprehension activities, independent writing, etc. OELP encourages children's own drawings as a significant literacy activity, but appears to have chosen to omit printed picture material designed for multiple uses in literacy learning. This perhaps requires further reflection.

2. <u>Skill practice worksheets</u> The desk review was based on a few samples. It is evident that these are graded according to varying levels of learning and provide practice in at least 9-10 key competencies. Separate worksheets, as opposed to bound, per-pupil workbooks, lend themselves well to programmes like ELP that maintain child portfolios as part of a continuous record of children's learning, and where learners move at their own pace. For upscaling of dissemination, however, large numbers of worksheets to be printed, collated, and kept in different categories of competency-levels, can be cumbersome.

3. <u>Compilation and consolidation of existing OELP materials, including the learner tracking system</u> There is a great need for sound TLM and other forms of resource materials in the area of early literacy. Although state-level macro programmes may or may not access NGO-developed materials, many organisations are expressing a demand, particularly in response to the effective implementation of RTE. OELP also mentions that they too are receiving many requests. They will need to elicit further feedback from potential users related to necessary modifications, pricing, etc. Suggested strategies related to wide-scale dissemination are mentioned in the Recommendation chapter

Regarding the evaluation tools that are part of the learner tracking system, see Recommendations chapter.

Part 3 – Consultation

OELP has responded positively to SRTT's suggestion that the organisation of at least one Consultation per year on literacy themes be included in the ELP activities. All the examples of themes mentioned in the proposal are highly relevant. The note added by OELP is well taken – that this suggestion will require separate planning and additional resource support.

Subsequent to the above three main parts relating to project activities, the proposal features the following aspects of the work.

Year-wise Work Plans

Outlines of year-wise work plans over the 3-year project period are provided in the proposal. These include upscaling of interventions in Rajasthan and other Hindi-speaking states. OELP must have based these time frames in accordance with its experience in

partnering with other organisations. Given some modifications that may be required in training durations (see Recommendations), it is likely that diffusion processes may take more time. It is probably more sound to expect work plans for one year at a time.

Human Resource

The human resource for the project has been spelt out in detail, with designations, profiles, expected roles and numbers required. The main leadership is to be provided by the Director, Programme Coordinator and Academic Coordinator. It is unclear whether they will have time to travel to other implementation locations outside Rajasthan at the frequency that may be required. This may need more personnel at a knowledgeable level.

The field-level staff and trainers are adequate for Year 1. The field supervisors/mentors particularly may need to be increased when inputs are upscaled further. In the case of trainers, the numbers appear sufficient, but training capacity of this level needs strengthening. See Recommendations chapter.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

The expected outcomes of the 3-year ELP project have been outlined as follows:

- Enrolment of out-of-schoolchildren in schools – 60%
- Demonstration BSKs at locations in and outside Rajasthan - 25
- Use of demonstration sites for 300 teachers to be trained
- Mobile libraries, linking them to schools, starting lending facility – 10 more villages
- Establishing one centrally located library-cum-activity centre
- Community-based monitoring of library programme – 20 villages
- Resource support to NGOs and GOs – 6
- Production and dissemination of OELP material in user-friendly formats
- Compilation and sharing of OELP research studies in user-friendly

These outcomes, as listed, are commensurate with the inputs delineated in the proposal. However, a crucial expected outcome is missing from the list, namely the expected level of literacy acquisition of children when they leave the BSK programme. The expected level would not be the same for all learners, so the proposal could formulate these in a disaggregated way. See Recommendations chapter.

Moreover, whereas the outcomes in the list are formulated mainly in quantitative terms, the indicators listed subsequently contain quantitative as well as various qualitative aspects. The section on Expected Impact of the project is also rightly conceived in qualitative terms. From the point of view of both formative and summative evaluation of the project, the indicators will need to be categorised and refined in more detail at the outset, including levels of literacy acquisition.

Review and Monitoring Mechanisms

Tracking of learner performance, monthly meetings with stakeholders and school visits are planned. Although these are good monitoring strategies, there will be a need to develop monitoring instruments.

OELP proposes to systematically track the children who have been mainstreamed in 2011-12. This will be done over the next academic year, to compare the performance of these children with that of their class peers who had not undergone the ELP remediation programme within the BSKs. There is no mention of evaluation, except for learner progress. See Recommendations.

Budget

Year-wise budgets for the 3-year project period are submitted. It is difficult to appraise externally the appropriateness of allocations. Broadly speaking, the following points need attention:

-   Certain salary allocations appear low compared to current norms for NGO salaries, eg. for the Project Director and Academic Director
-   Other sources of funding for certain line items are not consistently listed, so there appears a difference in total requirement and request to SRTT
-   There are zero amounts against certain items, eg. mobile libraries.
-   Modification of the Exposure-Based training, if undertaken, will require further allocation. Similarly the consolidation and publication of resource materials, and research

CHAPTER 4

Observations and Findings of the Field Visit to the OELP Project in Ajmer, Rajasthan

Prior to the field-visits, a detailed set of questions and issues were listed for the observations and discussions to be undertaken, bearing in mind various points arising out of the project proposal. These are given in ANNEXURE 2. The reporting in this chapter is done by Meena Shrinivasan.

Overview of the field visit : July – August 2012

Day 1:
- Arrival at SWRC field office in Singla
- Observation at Singla government primary school BSK, discussions with BSK teacher and school head.
- Presentations by OELP, along with discussions on the pedagogy, materials, assessment, profiles of the communities, capacity building, outreach, etc.
- Visits to three community-based centres: Bavrion-ki-dhani (also meeting with mother's group), Daniadio-ki-dhani, Kalyanipura

Day 2 :
- Visit to BSK centre in government school (Phaloda) , discussions with teachers, school heads
- Discussion on field visits
- Meeting with SWRC team involved in ELP interventions
- Observation at mobile library (Bhojiawas)
- Meeting with SMC and other community members (Bhojiawas)

Day 3:
- Visits to two BSK centres in government schools (Bhojiawas, Kankankniawas), discussions with teachers, school heads
- Visit to planned ELP field centre and library
- Meeting with Panchayat (Patan) president and secretary, and BEO

Day 4:
- Debriefing at Delhi office of SRTT

Key Findings

OELP methodology and materials in the field

At each of the centres we visited, the materials were clearly in use, displayed appropriately, and handled with familiarity by teachers and children. The methodology appeared to be interesting, lively and engaged children in activities that fostered independent reading and writing. Children in the government schools had been selected after a baseline test was applied to all children from Class 2 to 5. Children who were in the BSK last year have been

mostly mainstreamed to their own grade level, except two or three in each school who had to remain in the remedial class. There were about 25 children in each of the classes. They were at the very first stage of the methodology, and it was clear that they were learning to read with understanding the words made up from the first cluster of consonants and vowel sounds, and also to make their own words and write them.

In the community-based centres, most children were a little more advanced, in some cases having worked with 4 or 5 of the 6 clusters, and were reading and writing quite confidently. In one of the classes we observed a group essay being constructed and then written on the blackboard with full participation of the children.

Local language (Marwari) was used throughout as the means of oral communication, while words were being made in both Marwari and Hindi. A great deal of freedom was given to children to draw to illustrate the words they made as well as to decorate their notebooks and worksheets. This seemed to serve the dual purpose of conveying the meaning of the written or copied word as well as creating interest and engagement.

The teachers had a clear and simple timetable of activities for the week that was displayed in the class and was being followed. A variety of different activities to do with phonemic awareness, letter-sound association, word building along with word games was observed in different centres.

The print-rich environment, consisting of letter and word charts made by children, word walls made by teachers, books hung from strings, group essays, stories and poems written and decorated by the class, poems on posters, etc., was seen in each of the centres. These were appropriately placed at children's eye level, even within the constraints of the school class room or the community centres.

However, it seemed as if the books were more or less of the same reading level. In some of the centres the books displayed were all from the same series, the Barkha series distributed under the SSA. Even where there were other books, we did not observe a range from the early reading levels to a level of substantial text that would be suitable for children from Class 5.

Children's portfolios were well organized and readily available, with the baseline test, on-going checklist assessments, and samples of work.

We were not able to see the impact of the remedial classrooms on children who attended last year, as the schools had only opened one week previously and it would have been rather pointless to attempt to assess their reading levels without spending a long time with them. However, teachers we spoke to all said that children learned to read better in the remedial class and read with understanding, a point they all emphasised.

Mobile Libraries

In one of the villages we observed a session conducted by the 'mobile librarian' of OELP. The librarian visits each village on a particular day of the week, and the children expect him on

that day and look forward to his coming. He is called the "Guruwar wale master" (Thursday teacher) in one village, "Somawar wale master" in another village, and so on. In this particular village we arrived when around 50-60 children had already gathered on a large platform outside a temple which is in the middle of the village, surrounded by houses. At first the children hurriedly grabbed books and settled down to read in little groups of two or three. The books here had a wider range than those seen in the classrooms. The librarian then called them together and conducted a series of activities around one particular book. Children were very excited at the presence of strangers, and their teachers too had come for the event, and so I would not say that we saw a normal library day. However, it was clear that it was a regular and much enjoyed activity.

One slight concern is that the group was rather large, and so the activities had to be conducted at a fairly loud volume and with a great deal of action. This could perhaps lead children to think of library time as a time for a lot of fun around books, and may take away the emphasis on silent individual reading that should be a large part of a library programme, more so for slightly older children. However, as said earlier, this may be happening on normal days and we did not get to see it. This is just to flag a possible deflection of focus from engagement with books to too much 'fun'.

Materials

-   The clusters of letter/vowel sounds are introduced through a chart printed on cloth, with large letters that are visible to the whole class. Care is taken to avoid rote learning by playfully pointing out different letters and getting children to read them out in random order. Large cards with the same letters are then used to help children construct words. The six sets together form a fairly bulky pack, and require some sturdy storage, which was seen in all the classes. The OELP team expressed the need to further refine the printing of the materials, add more colour, larger fonts, etc, which they have not been able to do due to budgetary constraints, but which would be possible if material were produced on a larger scale.
-   We were informed both by the OELP team and the teachers that the first cluster took a long time, sometimes as much as 2 months, while the following clusters were mastered faster and faster. It was pointed out that the 6 clusters do not cover all the letters of the Hindi alphabet and all the vowel sounds. The team as well as the teachers stated that after going through the six clusters, children pick up the rest just by being read to and reading with the teachers, with a minimum of instruction. In the most advanced class that we saw, children were indeed reading and writing text with all the letters and matras and also conjunct letters with ease.
-   Poem charts that use the letters in playful ways are put up and read together many times. The 'word wall' consists of a pocket chart with transparent pockets in which a variety of words are placed, and changed from time to time. Various games and activities are played around these basic materials. Most of these materials remain on display through out the period when the cluster is being taught.

- The large range of colourful children's books are also used regularly both for reading aloud by teacher as well as for quiet time when children look at them individually, attempting to read them.
- Besides this, children use their slates, note books and worksheets for written work and drawing. There were plenty of sketch pens, which the children preferred over pencils and pens. A lot of the reading material visible, like charts for each new letter learnt, picture and word charts, etc., had been produced by the children with the teacher's help.

Teachers

The BSK teachers are all from the local community, selected by the community. They are almost all doing higher education, after Class 10. They all seemed very comfortable and confident with the methodology, and expressed that they could do it with ease and that the children learned fast and enjoyed the classes. They felt that the traditional method of teaching is boring and that children do not become independent readers and writers. They expressed appreciation of the training and the monthly meetings where they continued to learn new activities and games. Several of the teachers are single young women doing undergraduate studies, and there is a concern, also expressed by OELP, that they would soon be married and move away from the village. There is also the concern that the young men would move on to jobs with better prospects. Both these have already occurred in some cases, and OELP is now trying to employ more married women to prevent this happening.

A few minor points about the classroom transactions that are easily corrected were pointed out to the team: the importance of well formed letters using the strokes in the right direction, which helps in fluent and neat writing, the need to have teachers sit on low seats so that they are not far high above the sitting children, the voice modulation of teachers which tend to mimic the loud tones of the government teachers, etc.

Government schools

Most of the government schools visited had fairly good infrastructure and overall environment, compared to what one has seen in other parts of Rajasthan. A large classroom has been allocated to the BSK and has been equipped with a good large thick durrie by OELP. Drinking water and toilets are available.

All of the schools have a shortage of teachers, and the school heads clearly stated that he BSK was a relief for them, as otherwise they would not have been able to give the attention needed by the slightly slower learners. They were full of praise for the OELP methodology, saying that it focused on understanding.

Teachers in all the schools in the block have received the ELP methodology training and materials, around two years back. However, there was no evidence of the methodology being adopted by other teachers in any of the schools visited, except in a rather superficial manner in one case. The BKS teachers, who spend over two hours in the school, also stated

that they had not seen the methodology or materials in use. In one school visited, a teacher has been allocated to the ELP class, and works in tandem with the OELP teacher. She seemed to be implementing the methodology more thoroughly.

One of the potential problems is that the government is implementing the 'Leher' programme (ABL) in some select government schools. The particular methodology used in Leher precludes the use of the ELP methodology. At present only 35 schools out of the 250 in the block are being covered, and no one is sure how many schools will be covered and when.

Communities

In the OELP presentation we had been informed that the local communities are mostly involved in animal husbandry, making it inevitable that children would spend a great part of the day wandering around with animals in search of grass. Evening classes and night schools were thought to be inevitable for a certain number of children if they were to get any education. SWRC, with whom OELP works closely, too follows this philosophy of night schools and has done so for years, though their night schools have a broader purpose of teaching practical skills with a scientific grounding. However, both organizations are committed to eventually mainstreaming children and feel that this is more likely to happen if parents see that they are actually learning something in the community centres. The ELP methodology has been used by SWRC in bridge courses to bring drop outs back to school in 2007. In fact SWRC staff stated that they thought of the OELP methodology as not only as a new method to teach school work, but as a grounding for future vocational training and work life.

Some of the communities, like the Bagris, are considered thieves and outside the pale of society, constantly on the move and harassed both by the settled communities and the police. Forced seasonal migration is also rampant.

Wherever possible we tried to have a word with parents and SMC members, and in two villages we had an extended meeting with the SMC and other community members. In all cases, community members were very much aware that something new was being tried in the classes and that it was meeting with success. They could articulate quite clearly that children are not learning to read and write independently by the traditional method and that the OELP methodology was not only working in the short term but that children did not forget what they had learnt. In all cases the centre in school or in the community had been started with the full involvement of the SMC.

In the context of RTE, it would perhaps be a good idea for OELP to get more involved with SMCs, since a good relationship has already been established. See Recommendations chapter.

OELP staff holds regular meetings with parents, sometimes at the NREGA work sites to facilitate participation of women.

In the meeting in the Gram Panchayat in Patan, we were told that the ELP classes were very effective and taught children to read well with understanding which the school system did not. They felt that children do not forget what they have learnt in the classes. The group made a strong plea for extending the project to cover first the whole panchayat and then the whole block. The BEO suggested that the project can take the schools where the 'Leher" program (ABL) is not being implemented.

Capacity building

The organisation plans to expand the project through other partner NGOs who would run similar centres in other parts of Rajasthan and other states, as stated in the proposal. The field visit only covered centres run by OELP and SWRC, which is almost like a partner in the field. Therefore it was not possible to assess the capacity of the other proposed NGOs to take the process forward in the field.

The impression I gathered from observing and discussing with the core team of OELP is that the group which is going to take on the task of capacity building for other NGOs or government school teachers itself needs more capacity building. While their own training is comprehensive, and also involves extensive field experience, further inputs would be required if they are to become a training team for teachers over whom they would have little direct control, be they in NGO programmes or government ones. Further points that emerge from this understanding are covered in the Recommendations chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions/Recommendations

The suggestions / recommendations given here are based on the desk review of the proposal as well as the observations and discussions during the field visits. The first three recommendations deal with revisiting theoretical concepts. The rest are operational in nature.

1. **Facilitating children's transition from culture of home to culture of school**

The provision of print rich learning environments is a highly significant contribution of OELP. It compensates for the lack of orientation to print with which children from disadvantaged backgrounds enter primary schools. There is a need to consider, however, the general deficit in early cognitive stimulation and ways of using language that these children face. Although the initial steps in literacy learning would certainly be facilitated by providing a wealth of print materials, the constructive nature of the reading process , the ability to derive meaning from text demands prior background knowledge. As OELP itself states in the proposal, "Schemas, or internally organised knowledge of the world, thus provide a framework for comprehension." In building "strong foundations " for reading and writing, which is OELP's major objective, it is necessary to go beyond the provision of print materials. It is necessary to provide at least an initial curriculum of early cognitive stimulation for 6-7 year olds who have had no sound preschool experience. Such early inputs in cognitive skills and discursive thinking influence later levels of literacy. There are relevant curricular programmes and materials available in Hindi that address this need. OELP need not therefore spend large amounts of time re-inventing the wheel. They could engage with the curriculum in the first 2-3 months of Class 1 of primary schools, to introduce a playful programme of cognitively stimulating activities and language development inputs.

Besides the issue of the early development of background knowledge and experiences of readers as crucial in understanding written texts at later levels of school education, the provision of an initial curriculum of early cognitive stimulation also gives young school entrants, who are often below the statutory entrance age, a general school readiness programme before plunging them into literacy activities.

OELP has responded positively to this recommendation, but would like to consider its implementation at a later date. One suggestion is that they could use Year 1 as a preparatory period and pilot it in a small number of schools from Year 2 onwards. It will need additional staff and budget.

2. **The *Varna Samooha* Approach**

The ELP pedagogy assumes that once children successfully complete the six *Varna Samoohas* made up of selected akshara (alpha-syllables), they reach a 'take-off stage' in reading ability whereby decoding skills involving further alpha-syllables will be acquired by them naturally, without specific instruction in decoding. Although during the field-visits to

the BSKs it was observed that some children were in fact reading text that involved alphabet and matra not included in the *Varna Samoohas* , this is not to be taken for granted in the case of a majority of learners. In English, for instance, awareness in pedagogy of the crucial need for phonic skills for subsequent reading development leads to conscious teaching of all consonant sounds and vowels, including consonant clusters, vowel diagraphs, diphthongs, etc. In keeping with the Scientifically Based Reading Research incorporated by OELP, decoding in Devanagari would ideally need to be extended to the remaining akshara.

 OELP has responded that they are firmly convinced that, as borne out in the field observations, children who go through the selected *Varna Samoohas* automatically pick up further phonetic elements on their own. Hence OELP does not see the need to complete further *samoohas*. It is the opinion of this appraisal that though the BSKs that are run and monitored closely by OELP itself may not need the extension to the remaining *akshara*, any Early Literacy pedagogy that has a chance to be accepted and adopted by the government system, that has a chance to replace existing unsound approaches on a larger scale, will need to address the extension suggested. It will need to eventually provide a sequence of teaching that spans at least all of Class 1, preferably Classes 1 and 2. Only then can it provide a systematic, acceptable alternative to programmes like *'Leher'*. Otherwise the system will not consider it comprehensive. Moreover, other NGOs, CSR programmes, would also find it useful.

To reiterate: the above suggestion applies mainly to eventual, scaled-up outreach to government schools. Whether to take it on board during this project period should be OELP's call. The findings from tracking the learning of children from BSKs mainstreamed in government schools would help to establish whether the above-mentioned extension of *Varna Samoohas* needs to be provided to schools.

3. **Tracking Learner Progress**

There are three testing stages at each of three learning levels in OELP's learner tracking system. The evaluation tools for the first two levels are appropriately constructed. The third level of expected literacy attainment, as reflected in the evaluation tools, could be re-visited. There are certain technical aspects in the formulation of test items, particularly for evaluating reading with understanding, that need strengthening. For instance, OELP's emphasis on teaching and testing the ability to give written answers to comprehension items poses a technical question – does a given item test whether a child understands what she is reading if she is unable to spell the words or formulate the written sentences in Hindi for the required answer? This is very important in formulating evaluation tools for reading with meaning.

It is necessary to incorporate in the proposal and budget the assistance of a special consultant on Evaluation Tools who can study in detail OELP's existing baseline and other instruments and advise accordingly.

It would be a great achievement of the project, and validation of the ELP methodology, if children who go out of the BSK are able to read and write at a higher level than children who have been in the regular classes all through. These higher level reading skills need to be tested for both sets of children.

4. Outreach

The thrust of the outreach should be on government schools within the block , where the climate is just right, with demonstrated effectiveness as well as a supportive BEO. OELP has responded that centres for out-of-school children must be continued. In the context of RTE, such continuation should ensure that the children attending them are mainstreamed into schools in a time-bound manner. In other words, the goal should unequivocally be school entry. The recent total ban on child labour facilitates the way forward. Refer to Annexure 3 for the position taken by the appraisers.

 Within government schools, the input model of a BSK as a support class for young first generation learners remains relevant and necessary even within the context of the RTE. However, in the case of an attempt at implementation of the ELP pedagogy entirely through school teachers, the ' order ' for implementing the inputs needs to come from the highest level, otherwise it will not be implemented at all. Lobbying will have to be done for this. Moreover, the suggestion regarding the extension of the *Varna Samoohas* and related materials development could be considered, for reasons outlined above.

5. Exposure-Based Training

The exposure-based training proposed to be conducted by the OELP team for ELP expansion and for other NGOs and GOs is far too short in duration. The 3-day design is more akin to an exposure <u>visit</u> with follow-up discussion, rather than <u>training</u>. As a training programme there is a need to adopt a longer initial duration and a follow-up recurrent design. The training content also needs to be augmented.

For instance, the sensitivity that OELP has towards the communities and the children's language need not necessarily exist in the school teachers. It is a precondition for implementation of the methodology, as is the whole discussion of home language and culture, respect for it, and how that affects learning. Hence these understandings should form the attitudinal part of teacher training, if this methodology is to have any effect in the system.

Periodic on-site mentoring of teachers over 2-3 years is essential for a new pedagogy to take root, over and above recurrent training sessions. In order to do this within the programmes of participating NGOs and GOs, the OELP core team will need to allow for sufficient staffing and travel time.

6. Capacity Building

While the OELP core team's own training is comprehensive, and also involves extensive field experience, further inputs would be required if they are to become a training team for

teachers over whom they would have little direct control, be they in NGO programmes or government ones. These inputs could include:

- How children acquire literacy, and in some cases why they don't. What are the pre-requisites
- How to raise and discuss home language/school language issues with teachers who don't see it as a problem (perhaps through structured observations in Class 1 at the beginning of the year, etc.)
- Handling contrary opinions and difficult trainees, especially in the government system (through role play is one way of doing this)
- Mentoring skills (simulations, role play)
- How to help trainees to understand and engage with the role of parents and SMCs
- Evaluation methods, developing assessment tools, analysing results – practical exercises
- Variety of training techniques, use of technology in training

This is not an exhaustive list but an indication of what a training of trainers and mentors needs to include if they are working with teachers outside of their own projects.

7. Materials

In the project proposal, it is stated as expected outcomes that production and dissemination of these materials, and OELP research studies will be done in user-friendly formats. The present appraisal finds the TLM quite friendly in its present form, and the field observations of their use bear this out. The OELP team wishes to add colour, use larger fonts, etc. This can of course improve upon them.

For wider dissemination of materials, there will be two different categories of users : (1)those who want to follow the ELP methodology in its entirety, and (2) others who want to avail of the more general OELP materials. There could also be a third category ,(3) those who want the full Resource Pack to use as they wish. Realistic pricing needs to be worked out for all items. Most NGOs who are attempting wider dissemination of their materials have had to set up a separate unit within their organisations to deal with this task. OELP can consider this strategy – a unit that handles not only the initial production, but wide-scale publicity and promotional activities in the Hindi belt, supplying orders through packing and forwarding, maintaining a mail order facility, stock and accounts maintenance, etc. Budgets for staffing and housing such a unit have to be considered, including storage space.

For Category 1 and 3 above, it would be difficult to find existing publishers to produce, promote and distribute the materials, since they are tied to a specific pedagogy. Generally, publishers want large potential markets. For Category 2, OELP could explore whether a publisher is interested. But items like worksheets are difficult to handle on a large scale. Publishers prefer workbooks. Perhaps the worksheets could be disseminated directly by the OELP unit only to users of learner portfolios, and could be packaged as workbooks if an interested publisher is identified.

As part of any dissemination effort, OELP representatives will need to travel to personally find "champions" who see the value in such methods and materials and are willing to promote them in the right circles.

The VCDs are relevant for promotion and training. One suggestion is that since the footage is already there in its original camera work, a specific training video could be made with labelled sub-sections on each of the sequential steps of the ELP pedagogy, with discussion points appearing on the screen itself. Such video material could be particularly useful when master trainers trained by OELP have to train teachers elsewhere (cascade).

8. Mobile libraries and field library

These components need to be described in more detail in the proposal. Also see this section in the Field Visit chapter for suggestions.

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

Although the monitoring mechanisms mentioned in the proposal may be adequate for OELP's own BSKs, the expansion to 50 more NGO and GO centres requires a monitoring instrument to be used by them, as well as OELP supervisors, reflecting indicators of ongoing effective implementation. This will also help OELP to get more formal feedback, and to document and analyse the progress in other organisations. Ideally the instrument should be devised in a participatory manner, with inputs from stakeholders as to programme expectations in the field. Besides straightforward items such as number and gender of children attending on a given day, maintenance of the variety in the print rich environment from day to day, etc., it could contain more nuanced items relating to observed teacher-child interaction, appropriate use of the *Varna Samooha* pedagogy, regular and authentic maintenance of learner portfolios, and so on.

There is no mention of project evaluation in the proposal. In connection with learning attainment, OELP needs to state the expected level of literacy acquisition of learners as an outcome of the project. This could be stated in a disaggregated manner, depending on entry-level skills of different groups, and in the form of percentages of children expected to attain particular levels, e.g. to move from Stage 1 to Stage 2 to Stage 3. These percentages can be estimated by OELP entirely on the basis of their own prior experience, since there are many variables that affect learning attainment besides sound pedagogy and teacher involvement, regular attendance being one such variable.

A budget for Formative Evaluation will have to be included.

10. Research

OELP has undertaken important research studies in the past, mainly through the strong research capability of its Director. These studies could be vetted further by a research consultant or committee, in case some refining is needed. The dissemination of this research needs both print and online channels. The monographs that are presently on its website need publicity which could reach key institutions and stakeholders by email and a

print newsletter. Institutions willing to put links in their websites to OELP's site should be identified, e.g. relevant Indian and foreign universities, other academic bodies and centres, and NGOs. The regular organising of Consultations on Early Literacy, an existing part of the proposal, can provide a forum for research dissemination. The findings of research should also be featured in journalistic articles that reach out in newspapers and magazines to the public at large.

About OELP's further research agenda: This component of the proposal is relatively weak. The areas of research that OELP decides to focus on will need separate research proposals that outline research design, methodology, etc., both quantitative and qualitative. Separate budgets will need to be funded.

11. Community participation

In the context of RTE, it would be a good idea for OELP to get more involved with School Management Committees (SMCs) to raise their awareness about RTE and issues related to quality education, of which reading and writing meaningfully is an important part. A good relationship has already been established, and this could be used to further strengthen SMCs. This would add a significant dimension to OELP's contribution in the overall field of school education for disadvantaged children.

Conclusion

The ELP proposal needs a few modifications. The project has the potential to make a significant contribution in the field of early literacy learning in India. It is strongly recommended for funding.