

# 4

## **Best Practices to Promote Learning at the Foundational Stage: A Study of an Anganwadi Centre in Assam**

Priyanka Koch\*

Hitesh Sharma\*\*

### **Abstract**

*An integral part of the community, Anganwadi centres play a very important role in the holistic development of children in the foundational years by providing adequate care and stimulation. At that particular point of time in life when children are curious about everything happening around, it is important that the senses of a child are stimulated through observation, engaging them in multiple activities, storytelling and drama to help them experience learning in a joyful manner. In the foundational stage, care and concern is integral to bring the best in children. The importance of cognitive, social and emotional development is immense. Brain development in the early years of the child is very rapid. Foundational learning takes into account the learning of the child in settings like Anganwadis and Balwadis, ranging from the age group of 3–6 years, and in institutional settings ranging from the age group of 3–8 years. The study follows the functioning of an Anganwadi Centre in Lakhimpur district of Assam, throwing light upon the different pedagogical processes used by the Anganwadi workers for effective learning in the foundational years, with a special focus on the use of storytelling as an effective pedagogical approach.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Anganwadi centres are an integral part of the community and play a very important role in facilitating the holistic development of children. Community health workers, along with

Anganwadi workers and helpers, play a very important role in promoting the health of both mothers and children in India. Activities include taking care of pregnant and lactating mothers, giving polio vaccine on time, and providing

\*Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, Tezpur University

\*\*Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Tezpur University

quality food to both mothers and children, to name a few.

Effective functioning of the Anganwadi centres definitely depends upon the collaborative work of the Anganwadi workers, helpers, parents and people from the community. Thus, it is crucial to understand the importance of the early years of the child and the role played by Anganwadi workers and helpers in letting a smooth transition to further stages of learning through adequate scaffolding.

Among the different roles and responsibilities of Anganwadi workers, some significant ones include:

1. Conduction of the day-to-day activities of the centre, like welcoming the children to the centre first, followed by cleanliness of the children, then prayer and the daily activities of the children which centre around different themes;
2. Engaging children in different activities; and
3. Maintenance of different registers.



Figure 1: Welcome Board of the Anganwadi Centre

The objective of the study is to explore the best practices for promoting children's holistic development during the foundational years. The methodology used for the purpose of the study is case study approach. Focus has been directed by the researchers on storytelling as a pedagogical process among many other activities conducted in the Anganwadi centre, with an example of a story used by an Anganwadi worker. The Anganwadi centre chosen is an excellent example, as it portrays the untiring effort, commitment and accountability, along with the vision of the Anganwadi workers and helpers, and support from parents and the community that is crucial for the sustenance of the Anganwadi centres. The findings of the study bring to surface the different ways through which Anganwadi workers can ensure children's presence. They can emerge as an excellent example in the upbringing of children following different methods enjoyed by children like storytelling, singing rhymes, etc. Thus, this Anganwadi centre sets an example of the exhibit of different local specific material that children enjoy seeing and playing around.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the pedagogical processes associated with learning in the foundational years with a focus on storytelling as a pedagogical approach

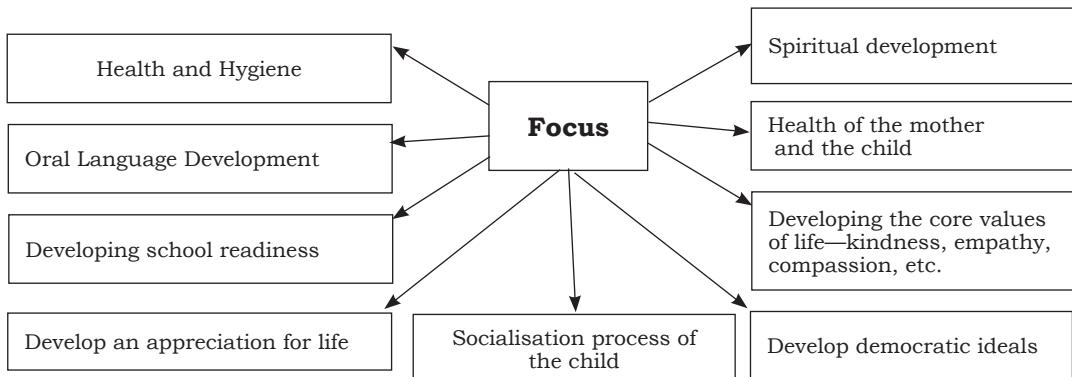


Figure 2: Role of the Anganwadi Centre in the Holistic Development of Children

2. To study the role of the Anganwadi worker in promoting holistic development in children

### STORYTELLING IN THE FOUNDATIONAL YEARS

Storytelling as a pedagogical process is highly effective in promoting oral language development and helps in value inculcation in children. Further, storytelling also helps to develop interest towards reading and helps children make better connection with the real world around them. Storytelling also helps in the socio-emotional development of children as well, which is crucial to function effectively in the society by being able to connect with people and develop self-awareness.

The Anganwadi workers use the storytelling technique for optimal effect: 'Madan...' So started the story by the Anganwadi worker. She picked up a paper and folded it in several ways till it became a small paper boat; she also gave the children a

few papers, while narrating the story. The children, too, with the help of their mothers, started making paper boats from it.

### Story

*There was a little boy called Madan. He lived in a village near a river. He loved to do boat riding in his leisure time. But his parents did not like his boat riding. After school, Madan would go to the river to ride his boat. One day, Madan disappeared after school to ride his boat as usual. He was on his boat in the river when he saw dark clouds hovering above his head, indicating an impending storm. Suddenly, it started raining heavily and he felt all alone, away from home. For a moment, he was afraid. He remembered his parents, thinking that he should never have left his home without informing his parents. He rowed his boat towards the bank. Every time he tried, a part of his boat sank. But he did not give up. After a lot of struggle, he reached the bank and*

saw his parents waiting for him. They were so happy to see him. Madan's joy knew no bounds. He wrapped his arms around his mother. A sense of warmth surrounded him. He promised his parents that he would never leave his home ever again without informing them.

In a split second the Anganwadi worker created a magical atmosphere all around the little children, who sat around her and listened with rapt attention. Some mothers also sat behind the children and listened. The honey bees buzzed in the garden outside the Anganwadi centre. The story ended with a small interaction of the Anganwadi worker with the children:

**Anganwadi worker:** *School r pasot Madan koloi gosil baru?* (Where did Madan go after school?)

**Child 1:** *Now kheliboloi* (to play in the river with his boat)

**Anganwadi worker:** *Tumaluku r logot nau kai khon ase baru?* (How many boats do you have?)

**Children (In chorus):** *Five khon* (five boats).

**Anganwadi worker:** *Tumaluke baru nau t uthi paisa ne?* (Have you ever visited any place on a boat?)

**Child 2:** Yes

In this way, the Anganwadi worker ended the storytelling session. All the

children clapped when they could make a paper boat.

### **Main features of the storytelling session**

1. Promoting oral language development of children
2. Helping children understand the concept of numbers and counting
3. Adequate hand modulation, eye contact and gestures of the Anganwadi worker
4. Introducing different colours to children
5. Ability to draw children's attention to the discussion
6. Anganwadi workers' ability to strike a balance between promoting joy of learning through stories and incorporating the playfulness of the act
7. Ambience and setting of the Anganwadi centre with presence of plenty of play materials that are highly attractive to children; all around the Anganwadi centre, a lot of play materials could be



*Figure 3: The Boat Used as Part of the Storytelling Session*

seen, made of locally available materials and other craft items

8. Hands-on experience, making learning fun promoting experiential learning
9. Developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills of children
10. Introducing children to the concept of seasons
11. Helping children identify shapes
12. Helping them understand the importance of being patient in life
13. Further teaching children to be courageous and never stop trying

### ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Immense focus is given to oral language development of children in the foundational years. Some of the ways oral language development can be facilitated are as follows:

1. Through stories
2. Day-to-day conversations centring on different themes
3. Taking children to explore nature
4. Making small groups to promote social interactions during play
5. Use of *bhogima geet*, which is done in many Anganwadi centres of Assam to help children understand different concepts like parts of the body, different colours, etc.;
6. Use of different seeds collected by Anganwadi workers and making dolls for children to play with

7. Use of different flash cards with pictures of animals, birds, etc., as per the themes chosen for specific days
8. Discussing a story with children by using story cards

It is essential during the foundational years to introduce children to their language and culture, food habits, and customs and traditions of the community that they belong to, which gives them a sense of identity and belongingness. The chosen Anganwadi centre in this study sets an example in this regard as there are toys made by the Anganwadi workers, with the help of parents, with dresses that belong to the Assamese culture. When considering different low-cost and no-cost materials, there are many different locally available varieties of paddy used by the Anganwadi workers to make different items of art. It is sustainable, and children can easily connect to it. In the Anganwadi centre, it was found that the Anganwadi workers, through community assistance, have ensured that there is no scarcity of play materials for children. Some of the significant items include newspaper cuttings, pieces of waste cloth collected from the tailor shop, unused cloth items, paper cut of flowers, Chandan seeds, different art items made of dal, etc. The presence of all of these items make the Anganwadi centre quite a happy place for children.



Figure 4: Art Items Made from Paper

### **Involvement of Parents in the Storytelling Session**

1. Making paper boats using colourful papers
2. Providing ideas to the Anganwadi workers with regards to making the storytelling session more attractive for children

### **Community Partnership in the Learning Process of the Child**

1. Resource monitoring and support
2. Providing constructive feedback
3. Taking note of the best practices

### **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

Some of the significant findings of the study are in relation to the involvement of the Anganwadi workers during the storytelling session, along with parents' active participation as part of the storytelling session. It is essential that humans are able to understand and be aware about their emotions and regulate them in a way that is healthy. Many of the problems of life stem from unresolved issues faced during the foundational years. It is due to the dedication of many Anganwadi workers that is letting the Anganwadis sustain. It is high time that Anganwadi workers and other stakeholders associated with the functioning of the Anganwadi ponder all that is required to make the Anganwadi attractive to the child and come up with the best practices that make child care the most important act that societies are committed to.

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