

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A close look at the present education system in India reveals that the country's goal of universalization of elementary education is yet to be realized. The colossal wastage and stagnation bear witness to the fact that we are far from this ideal goal of education for all. The general condition of an average Indian child who is poor, often suffering from poor nutrition and sanitation apart from the extreme insecurity of the economic condition, is the root cause of these phenomena. To these familial conditions are added the inadequacies of the school system in terms of quantitative as well as qualitative dimensions. These can be listed in terms of the limitation of foreign models in curriculum, application of irrelevant curricula and weak teaching. The whole curriculum which is fixed and prescribed is characterized by the lack of clear-cut and explicit aims, improper division of curriculum into haphazard units, lack of cognizance of the psychological process involved at different levels of learning, lack of explicit guidelines for teaching, and inadequate, non-diagnostic evaluation at the very end of curriculum when it is by all probabilities difficult to say where the fault lies with the teaching, the students or the curricula (Rowntree, 1974).

Teachers in schools are trained to follow the "fixed curricula" through prescribed methods. There seems to be no acceptable compromise between the aims and values of

formal education and needs/difficulties of the individual child (Wall, 1975). Within the paradoxically instructional yet rigid educational establishment, the teacher is at a particular disadvantage. He/she is a product of the very faulty process he/she must perpetuate.

Idealized theories give way to routine problems of how to keep an overcrowded class in order, how to get students to come to school with all their books and how to deal with administrative problems. High sounding abstractions regarding pupil handling take second place against the major hurdle of "making oneself heard". "Individual differences" and "the whole child" become useless phrases as the teacher confronts 50 or more strange faces (Fantini and Weinstein, 1968).

Evaluation within the school requires the students to perform according to the "norms", and teachers as well as schools strive toward achieving this. Under the circumstances, the educational process continues on the assumption that the academic subject matter must be mastered by the student in order to be called "educated" disregarding the development of a healthy personality. While these conditions generally characterize most schools in India, children from the disadvantaged section find these problems more crippling and are unable to cope with them. The

#### The Disadvantaged Child

To state that an average Indian child is a disadvantaged child is to state an obvious fact. According to Verma

(1982, p.8) "The child in India essentially means the children of the large masses of people who live below poverty line, residing mainly in the rural area and overcrowded urban slums and who are woefully deprived of education and other basic amenities of life". It is this child who is the major concern of all educational effort and hence the focus in the present study.

The disadvantaged community or sub-culture is characterized by: economic deprivation, and social and educational deprivation leading to alienation from the main stream of society (Source: Report of the Seminar on curriculum in Early Childhood Education, 1972).

#### A Demographic Profile of the Disadvantaged Child in India

The child population in India has grown even faster than the total population of the country and its share in the country's population has increased considerably from over 38 per cent in 1901 to 42.02 per cent in 1971. (International Year of the Child, Publication of the International Institute for Population Studies, Bombay, 1979). Three out of four children are deficient in calories and protein and manifest some deficiency symptoms either in terms of retarded growth or other pathological conditions. About 20 per cent of Indian children face the risk of losing one parent before the age of ten. (Times of India, 1980).

#### Disadvantaged Children and Education

The concept of universalization of education assumes

new dimensions because unless all the disadvantaged children are helped to go through the relevant learning experiences in a meaningful manner, the hopes and aspirations generated by the concept might never be realized (Basu, 1978).

One of the most controversial issues during the past two decades, regarding the education of disadvantaged children concerns their language competence. Bereiter and Engelman (1970) extend the stand that children from poor homes and sub-standard environments suffer from language deficits particularly with abstract dimensions of verbal functioning. According to them, in this aspect 'the culturally deprived child' manifests his greatest degree of intellectual retardation. Bernstein (1971), a famous sociologist has proposed that there is a difference of code between the speech of the working class and the middle class. The middle class family uses an elaborate code while the lower class family uses a restricted code. This has an adverse effect on the school learning of lower class children since the school generally adopts middle class values.

Various researches in the West as well as in India on language and scholastic development of disadvantaged children indicate the following:

1. Bereiter and Engelman (1966) claim that the speech of Black Chetto children lacks substance, logic, and breadth. Ausubel and Sullivan (1970) contend that children living in sub-standard environment suffer from language deficits, particularly with respect to the abstract dimension of various functioning.

2. Kuntz and Mayer (cited in Wilson and Robecks (1973) found some differences in the knowledge of words selected from the Gates word list between economically disadvantaged and advantaged children. However, when the words from a familiar background were the stimuli, the sentences used were equally long for the disadvantaged and the advantaged groups.
3. On the basis of an intensive review of intercultural language differences, Cazden (1966) concluded that economically disadvantaged children show retardation in language development.
4. McCarthy (1930) revealed that children from the upper socio-economic status were found to use a large percentage of adapted information responses and ask more questions than the children from the low socio-economic status.
5. A study by Thomas (1963) on oral language sentence structure and vocabulary of fifty white and fifty negro kindergarten children living in the low-socio-economic urban areas demonstrated the deficient language performance of negro children as compared to white children.
6. In a study of social class differences in the use of language as a tool for learning in two year old children, in 1975. Golden, Bridger and Montare concluded that while there were no significant SES differences in learning ability on the non-verbal or sensori motor level, the higher class children did significantly better than the lower class children on the verbal level.

7. In states of Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh some of the pioneering studies among socially disadvantaged children have recently been reported. Singh (1980) has attempted to relate in Bihar social disadvantaged with academic achievement. Dutta and Das (1981) have reported in Orissa non-cognitive correlates of malnutrition among rural and urban Harijans of short and tall stature. Mishra and Tripathi (1980) have eloquently summed the psychological consequences of prolonged deprivation among Uttar Pradesh children.
8. Three studies conducted by the Department of Child Development (Mohite, 1973; Basu, 1976; Patel, 1976) revealed that children from low socio-economic class were inferior to their middle class counterparts in vocabulary, comprehension, intonation, articulation and general language readiness.

These studies indicate that disadvantaged children lack the kind of language competence to benefit from school related tasks but profit from language training programs.

On the other hand, there exists a different perspective to this issue. There are some psychologists who are opposed to the theory of language "deficits" of the poor children (Anandalakshmi, 1975; Annamalai, 1982). They contend that what exists is not a "deficit" language but the "difference" in home and school dialects. Linguists also claim that all languages are equal though different (Chomsky, 1968). Anandalakshmi (1975) points out that some Indian studies in

this area have shown no significant differences in the content or style of children's speech across social class levels.

The implication derived from this controversy is that while the disadvantaged child's language may not be deficient it is necessarily different from that of the school. This probably is the reason why poor children fail in academic tasks.

There is an acute need to help them. This is evident in the variety of intervention programs planned for disadvantaged children, with Head Start as the initiator (1964). Since then various studies have been reported which prove the effectiveness of such intervention programs in various aspects of scholastic and language related tasks (Gray and Klau, 1965; Goldstein, 1965; Beller, 1965; Weikart, 1964). All these studies prove that disadvantaged children profit from the language training programs and pre-school programs.

The review so far has referred to one group of children disadvantaged who face acute difficulties in learning, especially scholastic learning. The review will now move to another group of children who fail academically but who may or may not be from the disadvantaged group.

#### A Child with Learning Disabilities

As referred to earlier, the concept of child with learning disabilities is fairly recent. It has generated many controversies - over such fundamental issues as an acceptable definitions—not only from within the field but

from outside as well. Often the field has been criticized of being "elitist" in its conception. The whole field is in a state of flux as many professional disciplines have attempted to identify children with learning disabilities from the orientation of their own disciplines. According to McCarthy and McCarthy (1969), the definition selected will depend on terminology to be used, prevalence figures, selection of criteria, characteristics of the population and the choice of intervention strategies. Finding an acceptable definition of learning disabilities has been a problem from the beginning.

One of the most recent definitions of learning disability to achieve acclaim has been advanced by the Council for Exceptional Children (1971). "A child with learning disability is one with adequate mental ability, sensory process and emotional stability but evidences specific deficiencies in perceptual, integrative or expressive processes. The outcome is, therefore a child who suffers from severely impaired learning efficiency".

If any trend in recent definitions could be isolated, it would be one toward a definition that is educationally relevant, one which offers a remedial strategy.

#### Prevalence of Learning Disabilities

The U.S.A. National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children (1969) makes an estimate of one to three per cent of school population as a prevalence estimate until research

provides objective criteria for identification of each child clearly. On the other hand Bruininks (1971) in a survey of research findings by leading authorities on prevalence estimates on learning disabled children found the figures ranging from 10 per cent to 15 per cent of the school population.

In India there have been no published studies which help us determine even the gross prevalence of children with learning disabilities, especially in our primary classes. Since the symptoms of learning disabilities are bizzare and not "special", - as in other categories of exceptional children - it is extremely difficult to make even an impressionistic estimate in a class. For example, almost all criteria refer to the fact that a learning disabled child is most likely to be facing difficulties in learning to read and write, he may typically be hyperactive, impulsive, restless, withdrawn or aggressive! But he may not be all of these together.

#### Assessment and Identification

Two factors are essential to establish any assessment; (1) the primary cause underlying the educational discrepancy (differential diagnosis), (2) the nature and extent of the perceptual handicap producing learning disabilities, if it is found to exist (Wepman, 1968). Assessment should always be in terms of the individual child. The decision to classify a child should be based not only on the obvious test results but also upon the child's behaviour and other observations made by the teacher.

Hendrix (1981) suggests that the evaluation team for a child suspected of having learning disabilities must include atleast one specialist in the area of suspected disability, the regular teacher and atleast one person qualified to conduct an individual assessment. The subsequent step is diagnosis i.e. to collect and analyse information that will help in planning an educational program.

At the end of an extensive review, Kapoor (1980) concludes that in general, the trend seems to be toward a growing relevance of research and theory in learning disabilities for its implications in the classroom and the importance of the teacher's role.

It would be appropriate to note that the first part of the review has commented on two groups of children—the disadvantaged and the learning disabled who encounter learning difficulties and fail in school leading to the wastage and stagnation at primary level. Both these categories of children can be described thus:

- Learning disabled child may be a disadvantaged child and vice versa but one does not necessarily imply the other;
- Both encounter difficulties in learning inspite of having normal intelligence.
- There is a discrepancy in what they achieve and what they are capable of achieving i.e. potential and performance.

- The source of difficulties of a disadvantaged child is poor stimulation at home and school. The source of learning disability lies in sensory processes and functional skills but not in the environment;
- Both groups require different kinds of compensatory and remedial programs.
- Apart from parents, the teacher is the key figure in helping these children overcome their deficiencies. Any plan of action for these children would have to be based on Indian context, cultures and available resources.
- While the prevalence of disadvantaged children is very wide in India, there is no estimate available of the children having learning disabilities.
- Both have difficulties with their language.

#### Reading and Writing : The Crux of Classroom Learning

"The greatest prevalence of learning disabilities are those in which language is involved" (Lerner, 1971, p.44).

"The language of the culturally disadvantaged is usually informal or restricted. Simple in nature, it lacks the breadth and depth necessary for precision (Rowland, 1968, p.379).

Both these quotes emphasize that language is the major obstacle in learning. Classroom learning is dependent on language, especially on reading and writing. Language relates to all curriculum areas. Lerner (1971) enlists the hierarchy of language development thus: listening; speaking; reading; and writing.

Reading and writing are referred to as a secondary language system, listening and speaking being primary. Reading and listening are receptive skills, speaking and writing are expressive skills. While reading is a decoding function, writing is an encoding function. Reading is the ability to gain meaning from a structured system of written signs which are used to represent oral language. Robeck (1969) considers reading a multiskilled construct which requires: (1) visual perception, (2) auditory perception, (3) sensory-motor integration, (4) language potential, (5) intellectual competence. Each successful reader uses a unique complex process system which integrates many sensory channels and thought processes. Effective reading requires the transition of symbols from one modality to another with facility-visual to auditory and auditory to visual - and ability to anticipate the other's thoughts and words; a sense of syntax which enables the reader to place anticipated words into a syntactical structure that is acceptable. The more available reading cues one uses, the more automatic is the response (Sapir and Wilson, 1978).

Writing including spelling and hand-writing is the process of translating a linguistic message into a graphic form (Bangs, 1968). Spelling is a process conceived with the appropriate ordering of sounds or letters to form words. Although spelling may be an oral act or originate as such, it is usually thought of as an integral part of written language (Bangs, 1968). Johnson and Myklebust (1967) point

out that spelling requires more auditory and visual discrimination, memory, sequencing and integration than perhaps any other skill. Good writing should also become automatic or it will interfere with thinking.

The primary school curriculum is based on the skills of reading and writing. The major components of reading and writing include comprehension, word recognition, oral and written expression, oral and silent reading, hand writing and spelling, visual and auditory perception (Greene and Petty, 1971). Reading and writing are two sides of the same coin because written expression is based upon oral expression. It is essentially when a child fail to acquire competencies in all these competents that difficulties crop up.

Major findings of studies in the area of reading and writing are presented briefly herein.

Two studies (Sheldon and Carrillo, 1952; Carrillo, 1978) on the relation between environmental differences and reading problems concluded that (i) home environment is important in the genesis of reading ability, (ii) in developing, retarded readers seem to share a background of slow development of verbal skills, speech defects and slower motor development, (iii) the emotional histories of poor readers revealed a lack of adjustment to change, friends and independence.

In a study on visual discrimination tasks as predictor of first grade reading achievement, Barnett (1965) concluded that three tasks make the strongest contribution to such participation, the ability to read letters and numbers, the

ability to copy geometric patterns; and the ability to match printed words. Hirsch's study (1966) similarly indicates that a number of visual perception tasks significantly contribute to predictive reading index.

Barnett (1972) found that disabled readers in his sample of eight year olds were hostile to adults and children in the educational environment. He concluded that their hostility grew as a result of reading failure. In this context Kashinath (1980) observes that when the youngster feels he is getting nowhere, he just drops out. Actually dissatisfaction with the school is generally part of the larger picture namely, psychological discontent embracing the student.

A longitudinal study (Lesgold and Resnick, 1981) was designed specifically not to investigate reading disabilities, but rather as an extension of recent cognitive psychological research on the problem some children have in learning to read. It concluded that lack of word processing efficiency may lie at the heart of reading disability. The obvious suggestion for instruction that emerges from these findings is that more emphatic and systematic attention to word recognition skills might reduce or eliminate the number of children with learning difficulties.

Similarly a study by Fayne and Bryant (1981) examined the relative effectiveness of various word attack strategies for a reading disabled population. Word attack strategy was varied for five treatment groups. The results confirmed the usefulness of teaching a decoding strategy that emphasized

an initial biagram pattern i.e. words broken down into two components.

Vogel (1975) found that even in comparison with other poor readers the learning disabled children had poorer language. Merrill, Perber and McCanley (1980) studied the effects of context on word identification in good and poor readers. Findings suggest that differences between good and poor readers in word decoding skills are not necessarily related to differences in the ability to extract and utilize the semantic content of written materials, whereas a study by Klein (1977) demonstrates more efficient use of context by good readers.

Sinha's (1977) study on relationship between social disadvantage and perceptual skills concluded that disadvantage was detrimental to perceptual skills and the quality of schooling was a powerful factor as childrens' performance was higher in superior schools. Wedge and Prosser (1973) found that there are more poor readers in the disadvantaged group than in control group which was not disadvantaged.

All these studies review the correlates of reading failure and the best strategies to attack it. While different studies have focussed upon different aspects of reading, a few general points clearly emerge.

1. Since home environment is important in the genesis of reading difficulties, disadvantaged children are found to face more reading failure.
2. Failure in reading leads to psychological discontent and emotional problems.

3. There are various strategies and approaches available in teaching reading.
  - a. Visual perception training affects reading ability positively. This is very useful for learning disabled (ID) children.
  - b. Word recognition is a pre-requisite for successful reading.

A brief view of the most prevalent approaches and programs of teaching reading is presented in the following section:

The Basal Reader Approach: This approach to teaching reading is centered around the use of one or more series of graded reading text-books as the core of the reading program. The pattern of teaching with basal Readers is usually referred to as Directed Reading Activity (DRA) and involves teaching skills in vocabulary, word attack and comprehension.

The Language Experience Approach: The language experience method is used as an approach to initial reading, to remedial reading and as a supplement to other approaches and materials beyond the beginning stages. The three major characteristics of this approach are: (1) the reading material is pupil produced; (2) the teaching of reading is integrated with instruction in the other language arts; (3) vocabulary is not controlled since any word a child uses in his speech is integrated in the reading material.

The Individualized Reading Approach: The characteristics of a reading program organized around this approach is, as is implied in its name, highly individualistic in nature. Pupils select their own reading material from a wide array of books available, they work through the material at their own pace and direct instructions occur in a pupil-teacher conference rather than in a reading group. The reading materials utilized in this approach are trade (library) books rather than basal Readers. The teacher plays a vital role in organizing the environment and materials for each child in order to provide an enriched experience for learning.

The Linguistic Approach: The application of the results of linguistics is yet another approach to teaching reading. Two schools of thought exist in the study of linguistics. The structural linguists who are concerned with the structural elements of language that influence the meanings conveyed through language and the phonologists whose major concern is in studying the speech sounds of language. Linguistic readers stress the controlled introduction of vocabulary, guided by regular spelling patterns. A striking feature of the books used in the linguistic approach, is their omission of pictures. Several linguists feel that pictures encourage children to guess rather than to recognize the printed words.

The Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA) Approach: The Initial Teaching Alphabet Approach has been the subject of much interest in England and United States, since

its introduction in 1960. Developed by Sir James Pitman, ITA is an "altered" alphabet of 44 symbols designed for use in the beginning stages of reading instruction to provide greater regularity between speech sounds and their representation in print.

Phonic Approaches to Reading: Phonic approaches to initiate reading instruction place great emphasis on learning sounds than on recognition of whole words. Approaches to phonic instruction can be classified as either synthetic or analytic in nature. Synthetic phonic approaches begin with the study of individual letter sounds and build upwards by combining different phonic sounds. Analytic phonic approach on the other hand, involves the ability to understand the various components of a given unit (a word, a sentence or a story), once the whole unit has been understood.

The Programmed Reading Approach: A salient feature of the programmed reading approach is that pupils' books are of a work book nature with the content presented in individual frames. Children make a written response to each frame, for the correct response being given at the end of each frame. This provides immediate feedback.

The programmed reading approach has been found particularly useful since it enables children to work at their own rate through the frames and also provides immediate feedback as the child completes each frame.

Combined Approaches: Research does not show conclusively the clear superiority of one approach over others. It is believed that combined approaches have considerable merit for the improved teaching of reading. The direction for modern elementary teachers is toward an eclectic program, drawing the most pertinent features of several approaches into a total program that is sufficiently flexible and enriched to provide individual differences in a given class. Though no definitive conclusions can be drawn about the best method regardless of the name given to the approach or method used—the key to effective instruction in reading is the teacher and the context. The ultimate responsibility for developing a program based on sound principles and implementing it rests with the teacher.

#### Measurement and Evaluation of Reading

The major focus of this section revolves round the following points:

- Formal and informal method of measuring reading.
- Evaluating a reading program at the elementary grade level.
- Classroom evaluation.

Formal and Informal Methods of Testing Reading: Formal measures of testing reading are standardized tests. These have values as well as limitations. Perhaps the most important value of a reading test or any other standardized test is that it leads a certain amount of authenticity is to our thinking about the achievement of a pupil or a group.

Another major advantage is that reading tests provide the appraisal of growth of individuals in groups in a developmental reading performance and provide worthwhile diagnostic information.

Evaluating a Reading Program at the Elementary Grade Level:

The objectives of the primary reading program can be grouped into three categories (Harris, 1970).

1. Creating favorable attitudes toward reading.
2. Developing fundamental reading skills.
3. Building personal teaching tests and interests.

Evaluation therefore must be keyed to these goals. In practice the tendency is strong to measure only the most obvious aspect of the program—the reading achievement—though complete evaluation goes much beyond the scores on standardized tests. Variables such as student attitude and home background should not be neglected in the evaluation program. A complete evaluation goes beyond student related variables to include quality of instructional program.

Classroom Evaluation: Classroom evaluation is an essential aspect of teaching and a preliminary step to sound instruction. Evaluation in lesson planning suggests two things:

1. Lessons in reading must be planned with specific understanding of each child's limitations in reading. This requires use of formal/informal tests.
2. As teachers gain precision in evaluating the reading status of children, instructions will tend to become

more specific and instructional group will be limited in size (Sheldon, 1960). For the ordinary child understanding of concepts related to each lesson, understanding of meaning of words, ability to attach new words analytically, ability to comprehend the material read, and to answer questions about it become the guidelines in assessing reading ability.

In sum, the literature reviewed so far highlights trends, unresolved issues and theoretical conceptualizations which must guide any further researcher or action program in the area of primary school education for the disadvantaged.

1. After 30 years of endeavour the universalization of elementary education still remains a distant goal. It has not yet been possible to provide satisfactory educational facilities for all children. Even where these facilities prevail, they leave much to be desired as far as their quality is concerned.
2. The main cause of non-enrolment and low attendance in schools is the poor economic condition of children. The existing school system falls short of their goals of effective teaching.
3. The rate of wastage and stagnation is particularly high in rural, tribal and urban poverty areas and among children from disadvantaged communities (Mitra, 1979).
4. The existing curriculum is characterized by irrelevancy, rigidity and lack of clear goals.

5. The disadvantaged child who is the nucleus of this system when he/she enters school, is preconditioned to failure.
6. Among these or besides the disadvantaged children, there may exist another group of children who have recently become 'visible' on the educational scene. These are the children with "specific learning disabilities". The exact or projected prevalence of such children in primary school classes should be the immediate research priority.
7. Disadvantaged children as well as children with learning disabilities face difficulties in school learning especially in language related tasks, mainly in reading and writing.
8. There are various programs and approaches available to help children overcome their difficulties in reading and writing which are the crux of all learning. Adaptation of any program would be dependent on its relevance to the context and conditions wherein it is applied. In our country, faced with many constraints in the educational settings we have to look for a viable model which can work in our standard classes.
9. There are various measures and standardized tests to measure reading performance of children. Though these are useful, very few are developed in the Indian context. Further, we need a device which a teacher can effectively use within the constraints of her setting, since in our schools as in all school systems, the teacher is the key figure to make prognosis, diagnosis or evaluation of a child's performance.

In sum, our priority is to focus on those children who are already in the primary schools. The first priority would be help them learn effectively in the classroom inspite of their deficiencies. We have to stop the cycle of failure, Somewhere, somehow. To do so, we must focus on early primary years. While the long term goal would be to bring about improvement in all aspects of education, presently the efforts be directed to help children learn in the existing circumstances. The teacher operates in a very difficult environment with many odds against her. There is a need to equip her with teaching strategies and programs which make her efficient to deal with a large group of disadvantaged children successfully. Methodologically, therefore, the "action researches" would be fruitful if they suggest feasible "actions".

The present study attempts to do both, "action" as well as "research". The major aim is to help disadvantaged children overcome their learning difficulties, especially in reading and writing. To reach this aim, an attempt is made to develop a classroom instruction programs of reading and writing for primary school children who face learning difficulties. The focus in designing this program would be essentially "pragmatic" It is an attempt to combine "efficacy" with "workability". The guiding principles in building the program do not stem only from relevant theoretical propositions but also more pragmatically, from the system where the program has to ultimately fit in. Along with these, an effort is directed to scratch a surface of an almost virgin field of study i.e. "learning disabilities".