



The teacher as a research participant/consumer and researcher

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The present article addresses the significance of the teacher as a researcher in her own right besides being a consumer of research information and a participant in other's research. We will begin by looking at some of the reasons why people do research in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Whether done on a large scale or small scale research in ECCE serves several purposes:

1. It improves ones own understanding of how children learn, how children grow, how early experiences at home and in school help or hinder children's growth and development (physical, social, emotional, intellectual).
2. Knowledge gained through research helps in building a culturally relevant knowledge base others can draw from and use for application, advocacy and policy development.
3. Research provides evidence regarding good practices in early education settings and or on the success and failure of intervention programs aimed at improving young children's lives.
4. Research can also contribute evidence for developing useful policies regarding early education.

Research in ECCE falls broadly into three levels namely, the macro- the mid- and micro-levels. Macro level research is by definition large scale, often covering the entire population like is the case of the census of all children below six attending (or not attending) pre-school. Large scale surveys of teacher availability, teacher qualifications, infra-structure facilities in pre schools at the state or national level, also fall in this group. Surveys conducted by NSSO, ASER, Pratham, Educational Initiatives are all macro level research. This is useful for mapping access, availability, gaps and the like.

The mid level researches usually use a large and representative sample so that the findings can be

generalized. Studies conducted in several places (institutions, states, locations) also fall in the mid level. Studies that aim at standardizing tools (measuring instruments) such that they can be used with large samples are often at this level. Micro level research refers to small scale in depth studies that help explore a new idea, describe the characteristics of a specific sample, or experimental studies that test a given hypotheses.

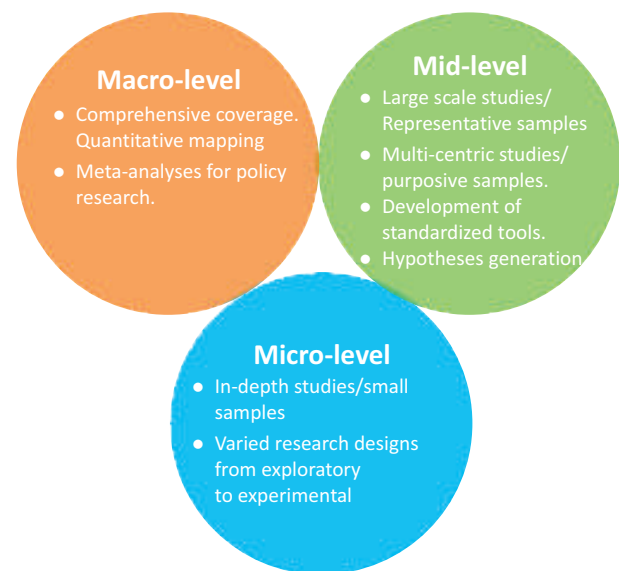


Figure 1. A MULTI-PRONGED AGENDA - RESEARCH IN CARE AND EDUCATION DURING EARLY YEARS

Teachers' role as respondent at the macro and mid level researches

We will make a very brief mention of the role of the teacher as a respondent in the first two levels of research, namely, the macro and the mid-levels before moving on to the teacher as a researcher, the latter being the thrust of this article. All research in ECCE requires the participation of the teachers either directly or indirectly. Since the teachers' responses are based on the reflection of their own participatory experience, they are invaluable for

understanding the dynamics of class room practices, gaps in implementation of intervention programs and lessons for policy development. Researchers who collect the data are only intermediaries between programs and practices. It is the teacher who provides the needed link and information and hence her contribution is of great significance.

Teacher as a researcher

In this section we will talk about the significance of the teacher as an action researcher, raising questions, collecting relevant data and analyzing them to seek answers that will in turn be applied in the class room setting, or in her interaction with children and their parents.

We had mentioned earlier, that research is a systematic search for answers to one's questions, fostering the development of a knowledge base in any chosen area of work. This knowledge should be useful to the owner of this fund of information. In this regard, the teacher is at an advantageous and in fact in a enviable position. Her questions relate to how children learn, what makes them motivated, why some children enjoy learning while others do not, and other similar queries. The subjects of her research are those she interacts with on a daily basis and the answers she finds lend themselves to helping children under her care. At the same time it also enhances her feeling of competence and empowers her as a teacher for she has found solutions based on evidence. She is a researcher in action. And what she is good at is action research.

Let us look at few examples of action research in the early education setting:

Example 1. The teacher notices that three or four children in the group sit quietly during song time watching the other children sing. After a few days of systematic observation (research strategy) the teacher decides to have the children sit near her during singing time and encourages them to sing helping them with the words when necessary (planned intervention). If the children open up and continue singing even when placed elsewhere (observation) the teacher has evidence that her intervention (experiment) worked.

Example 2. The teacher observes that during group exercises to promote numeracy, some children take the lead and complete the tasks while others remain

passive observers. The teacher decides to break up the group in pairs and structures problems where cooperative problem solving is required. If the teacher finds that pairing results in higher scores on numeracy after a few weeks (and perhaps more noise in the class room), than was the case with group learning, the researcher in the teacher has once again found systematic answers to her question "how can I help children learn numeracy?"

Example 3. The teacher finds the participation of parents in monthly meetings is very poor. She hypothesizes that sending an oral or written message to the parents through the child is not sufficient. She decides to personalize the invitation through home visits and also develop a sense of ownership in the parents through making them take some responsibilities during the meeting, including ensuring the presence of their neighbors. She uses the opportunity of home visits to collect other information or to discuss the child's progress. Where possible the mobile phone is used to remind the parent the previous evening. If attendance in the next and subsequent meetings improves and is encouraging, the teacher has added another useful item to her fund of knowledge regarding what works and how. Once again, this knowledge is based on a systematic search for answers to real life questions embedded in the teaching-learning setting.

One can go on and on with examples of the teacher as a mentor, teacher as a learner interfaced with teacher as a researcher, observing, intervening, experimenting, hypotheses testing, and above all building a fund of knowledge that is her own! Of course in order to make this entire exercise note worthy an attempt to systematically record the findings empowers the teacher further. It would help to team up with other like minded teachers sharing similar experiences and classroom practices, children, parents and the community. Such teams work in looking for answers to similar problems or challenges faced by them across situations and serves to motivate each other. Even more productive is the experience of sharing these findings in group meetings thereby empowering one's self and the peers.

Research is not the exclusive privilege of the academics in the institutes of higher education. We talk of every child being a curious scientist. Is the



teacher not in a privileged position of fostering the spirit of inquiry in the young scientists and understanding how they learn and grow? What more - the experience of researching can become a self-rewarding and fulfilling experience especially since it enables the teacher to identify and resolve

every problem in the classroom, seen not as a problem but as a challenge to find a resolution. Hence more power to the teacher as a researcher, not one who is only being researched upon!



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