INTRODUCTION
AND
REVIEW
OF
LITERATURE
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Each person (pindah) has different aptitude / opinion.

Water in different ponds differs.

Different communities have their own ways of life.

Each mouth speaks different language.

The ancient Sanskrit Subhaashita (wise saying) above emphasizes that there is diversity in this world and no two things are same. We must accept that all cannot be the same. Ancient wisdom perhaps helps understand the existence of competing images and discourses surrounding the ‘young child’.

Thoughts, policies and practices pertaining to early childhood education curriculum have long been a subject of philosophical discussions and debates. Owing to tremendous diversities in children’s needs, cultural traditions, parenting practices and family contexts a variety of assumptions surround its conceptualization and practice. Often, the debates revolve around what education for young children actually is or should be. Childhood education might be favoured as primarily a preparation for later schooling, while some might view it as a support to children’s learning and development.
There has been a global recognition of the early years of a child’s life to be the most critical for lifelong development. Recent research in the field of neuroscience has provided convincing evidence that “experience-based brain development in the early years sets neurological and biological pathways that affect health, learning and behavior throughout life”. (Mustard, 2006) Research also suggests that in the absence of enriching environment/experiences the chances of the brain developing to its full potential maybe irreversibly reduced.

A stimulating and enabling environment helps a child by building a sound foundation for a lifetime. Investing in the educational and psychosocial development during the early years is as important as ensuring health and nutritional inputs for a sound body and mind. Learning and development are naturally cultural (Rogoff, 2003). A great extent of children’s learning is shaped by the context and culture they live in. Thus, if early childhood education programs aim to create conditions in which children can thrive, a basic prerequisite for learning must be addressed. Cultural appropriateness thus assumes equal importance along with developmental appropriateness. Increasing importance is now being paid to optimization of programs to address not only the child, but also the child’s milieu.

There is world-wide acknowledgment to the validity of local, indigenous ways of knowing about, and working with, children. This is evidenced in the goals for quality education formulated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s Education for All initiative. Many international development experts are calling for educational programs that are rooted in indigenous knowledge of local cultures while also providing the knowledge and skills the people may need to live in a global world. (Cleghorn & Prochnor, 2003)
From earliest years of their lives, children replicate the culture of their primary caregivers and peers. Curricula for early childhood education are cultural constructions grounded in the world views, beliefs, and norms of those who conceptualize the curricula. (Boven & Morohashi, 2002) The social ecologies of which children may be a part are continuously reflected by teachers, parents and significant elders. This is evident through their encouragement of particular response styles, forms of interaction, ways of understanding the events, and enactments of implicit beliefs.

Culture is embodied in processes of communication. The meaning and value of cultural knowledge and practices are always reinterpreted within cultural communities, implicitly and explicitly, individually and in dialogue. Encouraging recognition of the value of indigenous knowledge should be understood as valuing the social process of knowledge transmission and the ongoing social construction of individual and group identities (Boven & Morohashi, 2002)

Individuals creatively and selectively recall, use, and shape both the accumulated wisdom and traditions of their culture of origin and the process of their own enculturation (i.e., of their own valuing, learning about, interpreting, and reproduction of that culture perhaps in traditional or in new, hybridized forms). Thus, encouragement should be given to emphasizing the ‘generation of indigenous knowledge’ or the ‘social reconstruction of indigenous knowledge,’ rather than the ‘transmission of indigenous knowledge.’ (Boven & Morohashi, 2002)
National or state/provincial ministries in most countries typically issue only guidelines about early childhood programming and do not mandate a rigid national curriculum for teachers to deliver. The reluctance to offer detailed requirements is closely related to the nature of early childhood education curriculum and our understandings of society, young children and their learning (Bennett, 2004). On one hand, the early childhood education curriculum is expected to be holistic and include children’s overall development. On the other there are dramatic diversities in children’s needs, cultural traditions, parenting practices, and family expectations from one context to another. Very few current theories of early childhood care and education would advocate an instructional curriculum and yet in many education systems there is an emphasis on such an approach (OECD, 2006).

Early childhood education is a conceptual framework, with the potential for being interpreted as creating unique learning environments or cultures for learning. They have the potential to instigate both positive and negative consequences for children. The contemporary characteristic of early childhood education imparts it a certain ambiguity, especially when it intersects with current societal assumptions, concerns and expectations. Thus it is crucial to examine where early childhood education goals and practices comes from, what and whose purposes they intend to serve and whether they are functional in the local context.

The nature and pattern of education encapsulate a broad variety of factors. Within the realms of a temporal context, the ethnic factor, the geographical factor and the religious factor perhaps are the strongest determinants of the nature of education. Whereas, the pattern of education maybe largely determined by economics, socio-political climate and global trends. Stephen (2006) notes that curriculum is a dynamic
component of education; it refers to a way of structuring learning experiences, an
organized program of activities, opportunities and interactions that is usually derived
from some explicit or implicit ideological or theoretical understanding about how
children learn. In addition, curriculum and pedagogy are closely linked; pedagogy will
be influenced by the beliefs about learning that underpin curriculum. In turn,
curriculum will be influenced by pedagogy (Stephen, 2006)

Curriculum undergoes changes in response to the needs and values of life in any
society. Thus, it must be analyzed in context.

**Early Childhood Education Curriculum: Contemporary Perspectives**

Focus on early childhood education has increased significantly in the past
decades. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report (OECD, 2001) indicates that all member countries had committed to a national focus on early
childhood education. The World Bank, UNESCO and other international organizations
have invested heavily in early childhood education around the world (Dahlberg &
Moss, 2005). Different philosophies and approaches to children, childhood and learning
are reflected in various forms of early childhood services and programs
available for children and families.

Stephen (2006) notes that “the kinds of educational experiences offered to
children reflect the expectations held by society in general and practitioners and policy
makers in particular about appropriate outcomes and goals” (p. 5). The expected
outcomes are, in turn, derived from ideas about children, childhood and learning and
socio-political perspectives on the purpose and outcomes of educational
provision in the early years (Stephen, 2006, p. 5).
Community discourses about children and childhood influence pedagogical theory and practice. The views pertaining to children have changed over time, according to different cultural constructions of the role and place of children within particular communities and societies (Cannella, 1997).

Different constructions of children, childhood and the role of early childhood education impact the constructions of those who work with children in different settings. The most obvious example of this is the notion that educators in child care and preschool settings fulfill the role of ‘child minder’, while educators in schools are considered to be ‘teachers’ (Moss, 1999). Current perspectives on early childhood curriculum are labeled as cognitivist, behaviorist, and situative/sociocultural views. Each of these each bring their own expectations of what is important in learning and knowing, how this can be accessed through teaching and how learning can best be assessed (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1996).

Cognitive Perspective

Cognitive perspectives of learning describe the changes that occur through learning as changes in an individual’s ability to respond to, or understand, a particular situation (Woolfolk, 1993). According to cognitivist perspectives, people try to make sense of the environment, by attaching meaning to people, places and events. With growth and experience, children are described as developing more complex mental structures that enable them to process information and to extract meaning. This function develops over time and through experience, with children able to extract deeper and more complex meanings and understandings as they grow older and as their experiences broaden (McInerney & McInerney, 2006).
Behaviorist Perspective

The behaviorist view emphasizes learning as a process of forming associations between stimuli and responses. The strengthening or weakening of connections occurs through various forms of reinforcement (McInerney & McInerney, 2006). Early childhood educators are often thought to rely on behaviorist approaches in some of their everyday interactions. Taking away some of the desirable elements of the environment, using time-out strategies, or removing the toy children were fighting over, also relates to behaviorist principles (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2008). The influence of Piaget and his work remains strong in the early childhood field, largely epitomized by concepts of developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Situative Perspective

Situative views of learning regard knowledge as distributed among people and their environment, including objects, artifacts, tools, books and the communities of which they are a part. Rather than regarding learning as a process of internalizing knowledge, Lave and Wenger (1991) situate learning as a social process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice, such that an individual develops their identity as a member of a particular community. Collaboration among peers, or peers and more experienced others, and working to a common purpose characterizes models of situated learning.
Socio Cultural Perspectives

Socio-cultural theory, such as that of Vygotsky (1978) and Rogoff (2003) emphasize the contexts in which children are located and learning. The importance of the adult is increased significantly in programs reflecting socio-cultural programs, where practices such as attaining intersubjectivity and scaffolding are regarded as critical to effective learning (Berk, 2001; Rogoff, 2003).

Neuro-scientific Perspective

Shanker (2007, p.13) highlights a theoretical perspective impacting on early childhood education comes from the field of neuroscience. The impact of early experiences is important for future neurological development. “the child’s experiences in the early years of life are pivotal for how the genes that govern various aspects of neurobiological development are expressed” and “the child’s capacity to learn when she enters school is strongly influenced by the neural wiring that takes place in the early years”. While it is possible, and indeed important, to conclude that “enriched, stimulating, early childhood environments” have a positive impact on children’s learning, it is also important to note that “there is no biological necessity to rush and put the start of teaching earlier and earlier” (Blakemore & Frith, 2000, p. 2).

While a developmental perspective emphasizes regularities in young children’s physical and psychosocial growth during early childhood, as well as their dependencies and vulnerabilities during this formative, phase of their lives, the political and economic perspective is informed by developmental principles, translated into social and educational interventions. The social and cultural perspective draws attention to
how early childhood is a constructed status and recognizes the diversities of ways it is understood and practiced. Finally, a human rights perspective reframes conventional approaches to theory, research policy and practice in a way that aims to respect young children’s dignity, entitlements and their capacities to contribute to their own development.

Contemporary perspectives thus reflect recognition that the social and cultural contexts of children, families and communities contribute significantly to children’s learning (Berk, 2001; Rogoff, 2003). There seems to be an awareness that approaches to learning and teaching are embedded within specific contexts and that effective pedagogy and appropriate curriculum also exist within these contexts.

**Pedagogy of Early Childhood Education**

The early childhood years are defined as the period from birth to age eight. It is thought to be a time of rapid change in all areas of development and learning. There are constant debates on the most effective pedagogy that covers this entire period. Within early childhood, there is reference to, ‘preschoolers’ and ‘children in the early years of school’. Effective pedagogy tends to refer to each of these groups. However, experts disagree on a consistent pedagogy as the most appropriate for all children in all contexts.

Siraj-Blatchford, et al., (2002, p. 28) state that pedagogy refers to that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions
within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive processes between teacher and learner and to the learning environment (which includes the concrete learning environment, the family and community).

Arthur et al., (2008), maintain that within early childhood education, curriculum emerges as a contested term. Many early childhood educators shy away from notions of curriculum as a specific content area (such as mathematics or science) and use the very broad notion that curriculum is all that happens across a day within an early childhood context.

Bertram and Pascal (2002), in their review of curriculum guidance offered in twenty countries, highlighted the general lack of curriculum guidelines for children in the birth to age three grouping. They noted that, across the countries reviewed, a number of common elements were identified in the curriculum guidelines for children aged three to five years. These included:

- focus on holistic curriculum – where curriculum areas were not specifically identified as framing the curriculum
- consensus that the areas to be covered in early childhood curriculum should include social and emotional, cultural, aesthetic and creative; physical, environmental; language and literacy; and numeracy
- curriculum based on children’s active engagement, particularly through play
- Focus on guiding and facilitating children’s learning, rather than explicit teaching or direction and emphasis on the importance of working with parents
- awareness that there was often discontinuity between curriculum in the years
before school and the first year of school.

The following are few of the wide range of pedagogical approaches used in pre-school settings:

*Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)*

DAP draws heavily on Piagetian theory and promotes children’s engagement in active, self-initiated activities, supported by responsive adults. Play is regarded as one of the major vehicles for promoting learning. The design of the environment, based on the observed interests, needs and strengths of children, also contributes to children’s learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

*High/Scope curriculum*

The high scope curriculum originated as a targeted early intervention program for children and families from disadvantaged communities, this program also draws heavily on Piagetian theory (Schweinhart et al., 2005). High/Scope programs emphasize pedagogy that enables children to engage with a series of key experiences across the areas of creative representation; language and literacy; initiative and social relations; movement and music; and logical reasoning. Throughout the High/Scope program, children plan their activities, engage in these and then reflect on this engagement. The role of the adult in High/Scope programs involves engaging in positive interactions and authentic dialogue with children, promoting children’s involvement in planning and reflection.
Experiential education

This approach identifies two key dimensions as necessary for high quality early childhood education: emotional wellbeing and involvement (Laevers, 1994; 2000; 2003). Emotional wellbeing is evident when children’s physical and emotional needs are met. The dimension of involvement is characterized by sustained concentration, intrinsic motivation and supporting children to work in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Te Whārika

The national early childhood curriculum for New Zealand draws on socio-cultural theory, emphasizing the many different social contexts in which children live and the social, interactive nature of learning (Carr & May, 1994; Ministry of Education, 1996). Te Whārika is based on a view of children as competent learners and communicators.

Te Whārika outlines a holistic curriculum based on the principles of:

- empowerment
- holistic development
- family and community
- relationships

Essential areas of learning and development encompass the five strands of wellbeing; belonging; contribution; communication and exploration. Goals located within each of these strands emphasize ways in which educators can support children, rather than describing specific curriculum content or skills to be learnt.
Reggio Emilia

This approach emphasizes the role of children as competent agents in their own learning. Children’s active engagement with people and resources is seen as the basis for their development of understandings and relationships which link people, ideas and the environment (Edwards, Gaddini, & Forman, 1993). The Reggio Emilia approach is characterized by emphasis on multiple forms of expression as a means of seeking and articulating understanding (the many languages of children), adults who guide, listen to and provoke children’s engagement in collaborative experiences; and detailed documentation of children’s engagement in experiences (Stephen, 2006).

Shulman (1999) asserts that pedagogical knowledge is itself complex, incorporating knowledge of children’s learning, classroom management and organization, curriculum knowledge and appropriate use of resources. Pedagogical knowledge that informs thoughts and practice with young children primarily consists of views on purpose and aims of education, views of children, perspectives on learning, concepts of teaching, conception of knowledge and beliefs about assessment.

The principles underpinning effective pedagogy are linked to the beliefs, visions and expectations of educators. The professional dimension of effective pedagogy requires educators to engage in informed thinking about their practice and the ability to critically question, deconstruct and reason (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999).
Different philosophies and approaches to children, childhood and learning are reflected in the many different forms of early childhood services and programs available for children and families. Community discourses about children and childhood influence pedagogical theory and practice.

Different perspectives of learning carry different expectations of what is important in learning and knowing, how this can be accessed through teaching and how learning can best be assessed (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1996). Contemporary approaches to learning incorporate elements of each of these theoretical approaches. Approaches to learning and teaching are embedded within specific contexts. Effective pedagogy and appropriate curriculum take cognizance of these contexts.

Effective pedagogical decisions, which are context based, might thus be identified through an inquiry into the meanings associated with purpose of education, views of children, learning, teaching, knowledge and assessment. Gaining a contextual perspective requires an inquiry of not only the professional dimension of pedagogy, which includes educators and early childhood teachers, but also the socio-political perspectives of national early childhood documents and the perspectives of mothers and fathers of young children.
Curriculum for Young Children: Current Discourse

The National Curriculum Framework, 2005 asserts that in the present day educational discourse of India the term ‘curriculum’ is one of the most ambiguous. It may be used to denote a mere subject-wise list of topics to be taught in a particular class and something that encompasses, “the total experience provided to the children in as well as out of school. In India there is a tendency to take too wide a definition of curriculum in much of recent literature. (NCF, 2005)

The National Curriculum Framework 2005, further reiterates that a critical analysis of the Indian school education system projects a monolithic system perpetuating a set of practices adopted for development of curriculum, syllabus and textbooks essentially guided by the patterns and requirements of the examination system, rather than by the needs determined by a mix of criteria based on the child’s learning requirement, aims of education and the socio-economic and cultural contexts of learners. One of the key problems in the present crises of education is the burden that it imposes on children. This burden arises as much from and incoherent curriculum structure that is disassociated from the life and culture of children as from the inadequate preparation of teachers who are unable to make connections with children and respond to their needs in imaginative and dynamic ways. (NCF, 2005)

In an attempt to make a meaningful notion of curriculum it is important to note that in spite of all differences the main question that curriculum is concerned with is what sort of things ought to be taught in educational institutions. This is the question of curriculum choice.
Critics are questioning the overly dependent relationship between developmental theory and early childhood curriculum. These challenges come from the disciplines of philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, and curriculum studies, as well as early childhood education. In identifying the legitimacy of developmental theory as the primary determinant of early childhood curriculum problematic, a growing number of early childhood educators and theorists and early childhood curriculum theorists recommend that determination of educationally worthwhile experiences should be derived from discussions of our commitments, including community and societal values, and issues of equity and justice (Swadener & Kessler, 1991a)

Now, more than ever before, there is a realisation of the fact that by intellectual standards, India cannot flourish merely by importing or borrowing what is happening abroad, or by showing proficiency in solving problems that have been faced abroad. In concrete terms, this shift in thinking calls for evolving an approach to curriculum preparation based on thinking, experiences and innovations rooted in its indigenous tradition.

Ball (2010) affirms that the point is not to eschew an imported approach just because it is foreign or to favour a local approach just because it is indigenous. Rather there is a need for a critical examination of the perspectives of educators, practitioners and parents on where various preschool goals and practices have come from, what and whose purposes they are intended to serve, whether they are functional in the local context.
Curriculum and Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge refers to knowledge that is unique to a particular culture or a society. Indigenous knowledge systems consist of an integrated body of knowledge, researchers interested in learning more about traditional knowledge systems tend to focus on discrete aspects of the knowledge system. (Nakashima, Prutt, & Bridgewater 2000)

Some of them can be outlined as the following:

- *Learning systems* — indigenous methods of imparting knowledge; indigenous approaches to innovation and experimentation; indigenous games; and indigenous specialists;
- *Local organizations, controls, and enforcement* — traditional institutions for environmental management; common-property management practices; traditional decision-making processes; conflict-resolution practices; traditional laws, rights, taboos, and rituals; and community controls on harvesting;
- *Local classification and quantification* — a community’s definitions and classification of phenomena and local flora and fauna; and indigenous methods of counting and quantifying.

Table 1 identifies some differences between education systems based on indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge (Ulluwisewa et. al., 1997)
Table 1

**Indigenous Education vs. Formal Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of Education</th>
<th>Indigenous Education</th>
<th>Formal Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>View of Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Sacred and secular together; includes the spiritual</td>
<td>Secular only; often excludes the spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holistic and integrated - based on a whole systems view of knowledge</td>
<td>Analytical or reductionist - based on sub-sets of the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stored orally and in cultural practices</td>
<td>Stored in books and computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Powerful predictability in local areas (ecological validity)</td>
<td>Powerful predictability in natural principles (rational validity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less valued in distant areas</td>
<td>Weak in local use of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives</strong></td>
<td>Long-term wisdom</td>
<td>Short term recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural and ecological sustainability</td>
<td>Economic sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practical; for use in everyday life</td>
<td>Abstract; to pass examinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration of critical thinking and cultural values in decision making</td>
<td>Use of logical and critical thinking in making decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods of Teaching and Learning</strong></td>
<td>Lengthy period of acquisition</td>
<td>Rapid acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning through experience</td>
<td>Learning by formal education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching through example, modeling, ritual and storytelling</td>
<td>Teaching through abstract concepts and didactic methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tested in practical life situations</td>
<td>Tested artificially in examinations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although it may not be feasible to completely reorient formal education to an indigenous system, however, there may be some lessons that can be learnt.
It would be wise to sustain indigenous knowledge and integrate it into the school curriculum where culturally and educationally appropriate. (Ulluwishewa et. al., 1997)

**Curriculum for Young Children: Indian Thoughts**

Ancient Indian thought is rich in both metaphysical as well as the psychological thought. Vedic thinkers were concerned not only about the order in the outer universe but also about the order of the inner world. (Kuppuswamy, 1990). The aims and organization of ancient Indian education were largely determined by the people who lived there and the character of the environment in which their inherited capacities were called into active development (Das, 1996).

A rough correspondence to the modern word of ‘education’ can be found in ancient Indo-Aryan literature. The word ‘shiksh’ found in Vedic hymns means ‘to learn to recite’. In the Brahmanic, Upanisadic and Sutra literature the word ‘adhyayana’ means ‘to go near’ and expresses the idea of pupils going to some teacher for education. The word ‘vinaya’ comes from a root meaning ‘to lead out in a particular way’ or ‘an action in which (one) leads (oneself) in a particular manner’. Thus an idea of all sided development of man was conceived by the Indo- Aryans. The object of ancient Hindu education was made three-fold: the acquisition of knowledge, the inculcation of social duties and religious rites and above all formation of character.

Education in Ancient India was not merely concerned with the instruction of the young, nor even with the formation of habit and the development of will-power. It sought to build up the whole being of the individual and to enable him to lead the best and the highest kind of life possible for him in the circumstances in which he was
placed. Educational influences were so planned as to mould his life from the moment he was conceived to the moment of his death. (Das, 1996)

Elementary schools, as we know them today, probably did not exist in the earliest times. Even in the Sutras' there is no mention of different curricula for the different stages of education. It was left upon the teacher to mark the capacity of the pupil to enter upon a study. Authorities differ as to the earliest age for the commencement of studies. Works on astrology permitted education to begin as early as the third year. Charaka, insisted on the postponement of the school-going age to the fifth year.

The Vishnu-Purana (I, XII.18) regards the period from birth to fifth year of the child as a time for play, after which study commences. According to Kautilya, (Arthasastra) “having undergone the ceremony of tonsure the student shall learn the alphabet (lipi) and arithmetic. After investiture with the sacred thread he shall study the triple Vedas etc”. However, in some cases, there was introduction to letters at the age of three and initiation to Vedic studies a few years later.

The Siksa enumerates the course of elementary study as comprising the art of writing (lipt), prayers and psalms (stuti), meanings of words and their mutual relationships (nighantu) and elementary grammar including terminations and tenses, declensions and inflections (sabha). The Divyabadana has reference to school-room (lekha-sala), to sciences taught (ketubham), to stories which delight the young learners (parikatha), to pencils used in writing (tu:la) and the abacus (janittra) used in teaching arithmetic.
Chinese travelers like Yuan Chwang furnish us with some idea of the curricula of studies carried on in Buddhist Monastic schools. Children began learning the alphabet and the ‘siddhir-astu’ – a primer of twelve chapters. Then began the study of the five Vidyas- the ‘Sabda-vidya’ (grammar), Silpasthan-vidya (arts and crafts), ‘Chikitsa-vidya’ (medicine), ‘Hetuvidyā’ (logic) and ‘Adhyatma-vidya’ (philosophy).

Education was imparted through the medium of Pali and not through Sanskrit as was the case in Brahmanic schools.

The first Arab contacts with India brought about an advent of Madrasa Education in India. The Arab soldiers and commanders were not only fighters, but teachers and preachers as well. In medieval India, the Madrasas were established in the principal cities and towns and were mostly attached to mosques. Apart from the Qitar-recitation of the Quran, little is known about the early year’s curricula. However, historically traced early curricula consisted of the Quran and Qirat, calligraphy, grammar, poetry, the traditions, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, geography, astronomy, Fiqh or Islamic law, Isnad- scrutiny of genealogy, biography, history, medicine and alchemy (Kaur, 1990)

The aims and objectives of education of the Muslims were similar to those of the Hindus. The basis was religion and the ideal was to produce religious-minded and pious persons. Every Maktab and Madrasa, therefore had a mosque attached to it. Their education was a blend of religious and secular instruction. Character formation was also a great objective of education. They wanted to discipline the intellect of the young and inculcate in them the essentials which should promote their moral and material improvement. Elementary education was provided in primary schools and private houses. The new student was at first introduced to the alphabet. He was taught correct
pronunciation, punctuations and signs of accents. Then he was taught to combine these letters into words and phrases. Writing was practiced on ‘akhti’ with chalk pens. After teaching him reading and writing, elementary arithmetic was taught. Such schools were found almost wherever there was a mosque. (Pruthi, 2005)

When the British came to India; as merchants, interested in developing trade relations, two systems of education were in existence. One was the Brahmanical system of education and the Islamic system of education. Also present were the village schools which imparted rudimentary knowledge to the children of the village peasants, artisans and craftsmen to earn their livelihood. The Buddhist Viharas which came into existence after the death of Buddha, were organized educational institutions and were housed in erected structures where students and teachers who had renounced the world lived to achieve nirvana. These were demolished in the middle ages by Muslim invaders. The Vedic schools grew through the Guru-Shishya parampara and were able to survive the Muslim onslaughts through the patronage extended to it by the Hindu Kingdoms in North and South. (Ghosh, 2001)

The Vedic schools imparted lessons in the four Vedas- Rig, Sam, Yajur and Atharva and Six Vedangas- Shiksha, Jyotisha, Kalpa, Nirukta, Chhanda and Vyakarana, as well as in various arts and crafts including military science and ayurveda. The Vedic schools were centers of creative learning till Vedic learning was simplified and codified in various sutras to meet the challenge of Buddhism to the Brahmanical religion.

The Vedic learning was monopolized by the priestly class or the Brahmans, the other three classes- Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras- learnt military science, ayurveda and various arts and crafts. The educational requirements of the people other than these
were met by village schools or *pathshalas*, these were usually the children of peasants, artisans, craftsmen, small traders and merchants.

The medium of instruction was *regional prakrit* and the curriculum consisted of reading, writing and arithmetic, both written and oral. Printed books were minimal and locally made slates and pencils were only equipment the pupils needed. These village schools were extremely adaptable to local environments and existed for centuries through a variety of economic conditions or political vicissitudes.

The Islamic system of education came with Muslim rulers who adopted India as their homeland. The education imparted was to meet the needs and requirements of a growing Muslim administration and a growing Muslim community increased largely through conversion of the conquered people. *Arabic language was introduced to study the Quran* and in the Madrasas the medium of instruction was Persian to facilitate the transportation of Persian culture and etiquettes. The subjects taught were largely irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of the conquered people (Ghosh, 2004) Aurangzeb was the first Muslim emperor to question the relevance of an education which did not inform one about the country and its people, geography and history, arts and crafts. Sanskrit was soon replaced by Persian as the court language.

The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the British transform from merchants to rulers. This served to boost both the Vedic learning and Islamic education. On one hand the British started publishing Sanskrit manuscripts, helping Sanskrit scholars and establishing Sanskrit colleges and generally developed a love for Sanskrit learning for preserving, and cultivating the laws, literature and scriptures of the Hindus.
On the other hand, in 1771 Warren Hastings founded the Calcutta Madrasa to impart teachings of Muslim law and jurisprudence. The East India Company assumed responsibility for the education of the people of British India and soon in 1835; Persian was replaced by English in all official works.

The British rulers did give serious thought to the education of the people, and even appointed the General Committee of Public Instruction. However, the policy they followed to revitalize the country’s educational system was geared to win over the confidence of the people from the upper class of the society who had lost their political influence due to British conquest (Biswa, 1999).

The main intention of the policy is evident in the following words of Macaulay, “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the million whom we govern— a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother tongue” (Sharp, 1920).

With the introduction of this policy, the primary education of people in their mother tongue shriveled.

Three distinct patterns of education were evident during the British rule. The first had a revivalist outlook. Rejection was expected for any model that was not derived from ancient heritage. There was a return to Gurukul system and the contents of courses were confined to Vedic and Upanishadic literature and philosophy. The second stream attempted Indigenization of education. This did not reject modern foreign learning. The aim was to make education more relevant to Indian conditions and to impart it with a nationalistic flavor. In course of time these institutions suffered a dilution of their objectives and moved towards the colonial educational system.
(Sachchidananda, 2004) The third stream comprised of colonial models, aimed at producing western style educated class which would help the rulers govern the country, education of the masses however, was outside the purview of this stream.

From the middle to the nineteenth century, the Indian renaissance movement spread and there was phenomenal growth in national consciousness and a realization that the educational system must be in tune with the social, cultural and economic life of the people. Major attempts were made to reorient education towards national objectives, with different kinds of institutes offering alternate models of education (Sachchidananda, 2004)

Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore epitomized Indian thought on education by binding the fundamental unities of Indian culture with a universal outlook. Gandhiji and Tagore were not only thinkers but also practitioners.

Gandhiji conceived of Basic Education and envisaged an education which draws out the best in the child; body, mind and spirit. He strongly advocated beginning child education by teaching it as a useful handicraft. He held that the highest development of mind and soul is possible if such a system of education is implemented. He wanted that all boys and girls be given free education during the formative years of life sans any discrimination or distinction of caste, sex or religion. He believed that while education should promote the all round development of personality, the students should actively contribute to their learning. In his view the quantum of knowledge was not as important as its functionality. He recommended the inclusion of only that knowledge which was relevant to the pursuit of productive activity and to the understanding of the social and physical environment. Gandhiji’s basic principle of
education as a community centered tool for social change holds true even today, in its tailored approach to meet the socio-cultural needs of changing times.

Tagore envisaged many new ideas to address the needs of the child, and provided opportunities for the teaching of crafts, music, dance, painting, fine arts etc, in the curriculum at Shantiniketan. He welcomed the movement of scientific thought and included scientific subjects in the curriculum. He emphasized teaching through the medium of mother tongue but was not against the teaching of English at higher level. He recommended a curriculum satisfying the spiritual, the creative, the aesthetic and vocational aims of education.

The structure of education and the curriculum in the Indian society in earlier times thus drew largely from its own cultural heritage, and also from the outside influences to which it was exposed to. While greatly influenced by its traditions rooted in the past, it also tried to adopt a contemporary perspective.

However, formal education introduced by the colonial government was essentially based on abstract knowledge systems - scientific knowledge - that evolved in the western industrialized world. Formal education systems had little place for indigenous knowledge or indigenous methods of education. The experience of colonialism is often seen as the beginning of the decline in importance of indigenous knowledge.
Early Childhood Education Curriculum: Opportunities and Challenges

The review highlights the variety of assumptions pertaining to early childhood education. These assumptions play a significant role in giving direction to the design, implementation and experience of educational experiences for young children. Early childhood researchers themselves seem to assume different perspectives related to the significance of early education for young children. These different expectations reflect the social, political and economic contexts of particular countries, communities and organizations. This impacts the nature of and provision of early childhood education, and guides the thoughts related to what is regarded as important for young children.

Visions of childhood

Ball & Vincent (2005) portray early childhood education as a service that enables parents to remain in the workforce, which in turn helps alleviate poverty and deprivation within families. Dahlberg & Moss (2005) recognize early education as an economic imperative which is seen to contribute to the future benefit of society by producing a competitive workforce.

Cuban (1992), Seefeldt & Wasik (2002) consider early year’s education as a context for children to engage with and explore their worlds, without pressure and to engage in formal learning or instruction. It is also seen as an investment linked to future savings in terms of special education and rehabilitation services (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2003; Dickens et al., 2006; Ludwig & Sawhill, 2006; Schweinhart et al., 2005), and a site for preparing children for later stages of education (Bertram & Pascal, 2002; Moss & Petrie, 2002).
**Visions of effective pedagogy**

Sylva et al. (2004) evidence effective pedagogy in the early years through the following conclusions:

- Warm and responsive interactions of teaching staff with children result in better child outcomes.
- A higher qualified staff links to greater quality of service for young children and improves the service provision.
- The nature of experiences offered in early childhood education, with adequate provision for numeracy, literacy and science experiences, with a focus on catering to diversity is linked to higher quality outcomes.

Sylva et al. (2004) characterize the following pedagogical approaches for effective early childhood settings:

- Provision of balanced child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities.
- Views play as a potentially instructive activity.
- Demonstrates a complementary focus on social and cognitive outcomes.
- Requires educators to have a good understanding of curriculum areas and content.
- Has a strong focus on educators planning and initiating group work.
- Involves educators providing feedback to learners.
- Expect educators to draw on a repertoire of pedagogical practices as appropriate.
- Implements social and behavior policies focused on conflict resolution.
Moyles et al. (2006) highlights the following components of an effective early years pedagogy:

- practice-based
- dependent on reflective pedagogical perceptions
- informed by consciously articulated principles and philosophy.

Moyles et al. (2002) suggested that early childhood educators tended to be more comfortable describing what they do (their practice) than they were describing what guided their own interactions. This inability to engage in discussion about pedagogy is regarded as a constraint to promoting effective pedagogy.

The review of literature highlights the following:

- Need to engage educators, early childhood teachers and parents of young children in discussions about pedagogy for early childhood education.
- Worldwide recognition of the need and importance of incorporating indigenous perspectives into the development of early childhood education curriculum.
- There is a need for analysis of current curriculum thought which is influencing early childhood education curriculum and practice by mapping the curricular philosophies preferred by or influences the views of primary stakeholders, namely policy makers, educators, early childhood teachers and parents of young children.
- Need to critically examine the assumptions of early childhood policy documents, educators, early childhood teachers and parents of young children regarding purpose and aims of education, views of children, perspectives on learning, concepts of teaching, conception of knowledge and
beliefs about assessment and explore the profound influence it can exert on thought and practice with young children

- Very few researches in the Indian context have tried to examine how and in what ways curriculum beliefs are related to curriculum building and to instructional practice

- There is a need to better understand and attempt to explain the origins of the curricular disagreements that occur amongst stakeholders.
Rationale for Study

An overview of the existing literature reveals the importance of understanding early childhood education curriculum from an indigenous perspective. There is a need to gain deeper insight into understanding the way in which indigenous knowledge enters into thinking about children and which guides practice with children. Reviews indicate that little attention has been paid to a critical analysis of curricular assumptions/ideologies as evidenced in rational early childhood documents. There is also a dearth of researches which examines the curricular beliefs/ideologies and assumptions of educators, early childhood teachers and parents of young children and the crucial role these might play in conceptualization of early childhood education curriculum in context.

There is a need to analyze current curricular thought and understand the ways in which it influences thought and practice with young children. Examination of conjectures surrounding early childhood education curriculum from a broader conceptual scaffold would throw light on where educational goals and practices come from, the purposes they intend to serve and whether they are functional in a local context. There is also a need to better understand the origins of curricular disagreements that occur amongst stakeholders and attempt to explain the reasons for the same.

The present study was thus conceptualized to examine the assumptions underlying ‘early childhood education curriculum’ from a broader conceptual scaffold. It aimed to examine the perspectives of Indian thought, select national early childhood
documents and views of educators, early childhood teachers and parents of young children with respect to the following:

- purpose of early childhood education
- views on children
- perspectives on learning
- concepts of teaching
- conception of knowledge
- beliefs about assessment

Concerns about education for young children are not new and have been debated for long. However, the study attempted to portray how underlying assumptions, personal educational/curricular philosophies shape beliefs and thinking and consequently impact the education of young children in myriad ways.

The study tried to go beyond highlighting the varied visions of education for young children as they might exist today and tried to consider them from the historical context in which they emerged. The study further attempted to understand how these assumptions might be utilized to conceptualize an indigenous early childhood education curriculum framework.

The research questions that emerged from the literature review are highlighted in the following section.
Research Questions

The following are the research questions that emerged from the literature review.

- What are Indian thoughts pertaining to purpose and aims of education, views on children, perspectives on learning, concepts of teaching, conception of knowledge and beliefs about assessment?

- What are the assumptions of national early childhood documents with respect to purpose and aims of education, views on children, perspectives on learning, concepts of teaching, conception of knowledge and beliefs about assessment?

- What meanings are implicit in the views of educators, early childhood teachers and parents of young children with regards to purpose and aims of education, views on children, perspectives on learning, concepts of teaching, conception of knowledge and beliefs about assessment?

- Which are the preferred ideological positions of educators, early childhood teachers and parents of young children in relation to purpose and aims of education, views on children, perspectives on learning, concepts of teaching, conception of knowledge and beliefs about assessment?

- What implications might be drawn for conceptualization of early childhood education curriculum framework?

Meanings of terms which represented the perspective of the research inquiry are highlighted in the next section.
Meanings of Terms

The following are the meanings of important terms which represented the perspective of the research inquiry.

*Curriculum:* interpreted from a broader conceptual scaffold to include assumptions regarding purpose and aims of education, views on children, perspectives on learning, concepts of teaching, conception of knowledge and beliefs about assessment.

*Indigenous:* Indicated construal of phenomena by the people in a context. A model of conceptualization that emerges from the language and practice of people in concrete interactional or transactional situations (Misra, 2000)

*Indian thought:* represents an overview of the insights available from Indian philosophical systems like Vedanta and Yoga; as interpreted by scholars of Indian psychology and education. These thoughts developed continuously over thousands of years, and are found to be valid from Indian epistemological perspectives. The overview focused on ideas regarding purpose and aims of education, views on children, perspectives on learning, concepts of teaching, conception of knowledge and beliefs about assessment as they existed in ancient India.

The conceptual framework of the study is described in the following section.
Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of the study (Figure 1) was developed from the research questions that emerged from literature reviewed. The basic premises of the study included an overview of Indian thought on early childhood education curriculum from a broader conceptual platform. Selected works of scholars of Indian psychology and education were chosen for inclusion in the overview. The study further consisted of critical examination of the assumptions/beliefs of selected national early childhood documents, views of educators, early childhood teachers and parents of young children. The views were elicited on selected domains of early childhood education curriculum, as mentioned earlier and were derived from the above mentioned theories and concepts. The study further attempted to infer embedded meanings, draw comparisons and endeavored to draw implications on conceptualization of early childhood education curriculum from an indigenous perspective.

Selected literature on curricular theory and ideologies/visions helped shape part of the study which relied on mapping preferred curricular ideologies of educators, early childhood teachers and parents of young children. The framework was adapted from the work of renowned curricular theorist Michael Schiro’s (2008) philosophical approach on curricular beliefs/ideologies. The approach was subjected to a careful scrutiny and a pilot study was carried out to ascertain the feasibility of the framework within an Indian context. The framework was applied with modifications and permission from the author.
Schiro’s work highlights four curricular ideologies/visions or curricular philosophies; namely:

- Scholar academic ideology
- Social efficiency ideology
- Learner centered ideology
- Social reconstructionist ideology

The four ideologies advocate very different goals of education and very different methods of achieving those goals. Each of the four visions of curriculum consists of distinct beliefs about the purpose of education, views regarding children, views on how children learn, how children should be taught, the concept of knowledge and how children should be assessed. Each of these ideologies has a long history and have been known by different names in the field of education. These ideologies can influence people’s way of thinking about curriculum in powerful ways and consequently shape and direct curricular thought and practice with children.
Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study
The following is a brief description of curricular ideologies/visions as highlighted by Schiro’s work.

**Scholar Academic Ideology:** Scholar Academics believe that over the centuries our culture has accumulated important knowledge that has been organized into the academic disciplines found in universities. The purpose of education is to help children learn the accumulated knowledge of our culture: that of the academic disciplines. Acquiring an understanding of an academic discipline involves learning its content, conceptual frameworks, and ways of thinking. Teachers should be mini-scholars who have a deep understanding of their discipline and can clearly and accurately present it to children.

**Social Efficiency Ideology:** Social Efficiency advocates believe that the purpose of schooling is to efficiently meet the needs of society by training students to function as future mature contributing members of society. Their goal is to train students in skills and procedures they will need in the workplace and at home to live productive lives and perpetuate the functioning of the society. They believe the essence of learners lies in their competencies and the activities they are capable of performing. Teachers manage instruction by selecting and using educational strategies designed to help learners acquire the behaviors prescribed by their curriculum.

**Learner Centered Ideology:** The focus is not on the needs of society or the academic disciplines, but on the needs and concerns of the individual. They believe schools should be enjoyable places where students develop naturally according to their own innate natures. The goal of education is the growth of individuals, each in harmony with his or her own unique intellectual, social, emotional and physical attributes.
Students are viewed as the source of content for the curriculum, the concept of growth is the central theme of their endeavors and education essentially is about drawing out the inherent capacities within an individual. Learning is considered a function of the interaction between a person and his or her environment. Curricula are thus thought of as contexts, environments or units of work in which students can make meaning for themselves by active interaction with others.

**Social Reconstructionist Ideology**: Social reconstructionists are conscious of the problems of our society and the injustice done to its members, such as those originating from racial, gender, social, and economic inequalities. Curriculum is viewed from a social perspective. They believe education is a social process through which society is reconstructed. The nature of society as it is and as it should be, becomes the determinants of most of their assumptions. They consider human experience to be shaped most powerfully by cultural factors and assume that meaning in people’s lives is determined by their social experiences. The aim of social reconstructionists is to eliminate from their culture aspects that they consider undesirable, substituting in their place social values that they consider desirable, and by doing so to reconstruct culture.

The four visions of curriculum provide intellectual perspectives on how ideological struggles dominate curricular work in a social context and help understand the seeming disagreements about curriculum that occur amongst and even within the views of national early childhood documents and thoughts and practices of educators, teachers and parents of young children.

The broad and specific objectives of the study emerged as follows and are discussed in the next section.
OBJECTIVES

Broad Objectives

Locate Indian thought with reference to early childhood education curriculum and draw implications for conceptualization of an indigenous early childhood education curriculum framework.

Specific Objectives

1. Gain an overview of Indian thought on purpose and aims of early childhood education, views on young children, perspectives on learning, concepts of teaching, conception of knowledge and beliefs about assessment.

2. Analyze the perspectives of selected national early childhood documents on purpose of early childhood education, views on young children, perspectives on learning, concepts of teaching, conception of knowledge and beliefs about assessment.

