

The potential for early childhood education is enormous if designed and implemented from the bottom up with full community buy-in.



Empowering Mothers

|| Dr. Mona Younes and Nele Noe
Beyond Borders

to Leverage the Holistic ECE Picture

Traditionally, most early childhood education (ECE) programs globally focus on the role of teachers and schools or community centers as the mode of delivery for meeting children's early learning milestones. In India, Pratham Education Foundation was founded in 1995 to target issues with pre-primary and primary education in the slums of Mumbai. Since then, it has developed into one of the largest NGOs in India. In response to the critical shortage of affordable, accessible quality ECE, Pratham established numerous holistic ECE interventions, mainly focusing on a play-based approach in government pre-school centers (called *anganwadis*), and some active mothers' groups providing ECE in Pratham's Direct

communities. However, due to the pandemic, and the resulting closure of educational institutions, Pratham decided to shift its focus away from its direct ECE model in anganwadis, transitioning fully to a blended remote home- and community-based early childhood model. In this model, mothers play a pivotal role in their young children's early learning and development.

Empowering the community when implementing early childhood programs is crucial because it helps to ensure that programs are tailored to meet the specific needs and cultural context of the community. It also helps to build buy-in of the program among community members, which can increase participation and improve program outcomes. Empowerment also enables the community to take ownership of the program and continue it after external funding and support have ended.

Engaging mothers is fundamental because they are generally the primary caregivers for young children and thus play a critical role in their development. Mothers are also often the gatekeepers of family resources and therefore able to influence the decisions made within the household. By engaging mothers in early childhood programs, they can gain the knowledge, skills, and support needed to provide the best possible care for their children, and serve as ambassadors for the program in the community.

Additionally, mothers who are involved and empowered are more likely to prioritize their children's development, and to understand the importance of education, health, and nutrition, which all have a significant influence on the overall well-being of the child and the community.

The Power of Mothers

Based on this rationale, Pratham strongly believes that supportive learning environments at home and in the surrounding community can be substantial contributors to the overall development and growth of a child. However, in many households in rural communities and urban slums, parents lack the guidance, know-how, and time to appropriately engage with children themselves. In addition, in



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the *anganwadis*, children's well-being, health, immunization, and nutrition are prioritized over school readiness.

To improve the growth of a child, especially as it relates to learning, it is crucial to increase young children's exposure to developmentally appropriate activities, both in institutional settings such as *anganwadis* and at home. In India, the mother is typically the one who spends the greatest amount of time with young children; therefore, she is the long-term influencer in the child's developmental journey and carries the potential to be a strong pillar of support for furthering her child's learning outcomes.

The Engagement of Mothers

The objective of Pratham's mother engagement work is to empower mothers to play a more active role in their children's development, improve developmental outcomes, influence the household environment to make it conducive to their learning needs, and engage other family members to become effectively involved in the children's development. An active mother can potentially also support the *anganwadi* by strengthening its school readiness activities.

In particular, Pratham aims to:

- Improve mothers' understanding of a child's developmental needs and build mothers' awareness regarding the broader issues affecting child development
- Sustain active interest and participation of mothers in the child's learning process

- Encourage mothers to interact in groups that support each other as they engage in developmentally appropriate activities with their children
- Support learning activities periodically in *anganwadis* whenever feasible
- Strengthen the conducive learning environment in community and family, engaging other family members in the learning process.

What It Is

The mothers' groups program is facilitated by Pratham and implemented at the local level with the support of primary schools, community centers, community leaders, and the local government. The aim of the mothers' groups is two-fold:

- Provide holistic development of children age 3 to 6 years, through the use of low-cost local resources and age-appropriate engaging materials
- Involve mothers and the entire community in preparing children for school while at the same time empowering mothers, families, and communities to become involved in their children's development and education.

The mothers' groups consist, on average, of 5 to 6 mothers with children age 3 to 6 years, led by a "Lead Mother" in a local neighborhood. They support each other to conduct simple play-based ECE activities using local materials that focus on the four domains of Physical Development, Socio-Emotional

Development, Cognitive Development, and Language Development. The goal is to create strong foundational learning, prepare their children for entering primary school, and support each other through sharing ideas and thoughts and engaging in discussions about broader issues of overall childcare, health, nutrition, and hygiene.

How It Works

The mothers' groups program consists of several components:

- Pratham Education ECE division creates paper-based activity cards, called "idea cards," as well as audio/video clips with demonstrations and explanations of the play-based activities in local languages.
- Pratham Education ECE division distributes the educational materials to the Lead Mothers via SMS text messages or WhatsApp messages. The Lead Mothers can also contact

Pratham mothers' group staff and volunteers with questions.

- Mothers meet weekly in their groups, led by the Lead Mother, to watch a short video clip with a demonstration of an activity and learn to follow the steps of the weekly activity from an idea card. They receive instructions for the weekly play-based activity, discuss experiences, and give feedback.
- Whenever needed and upon request, mothers' groups can also receive some practical messages (e.g., simple tutorials) to enhance digital literacy (e.g., how to use YouTube to find information such as a rhyme or songs in local language).
- Mothers individually spend at least one hour a week doing the ECE play-based activity with their child.
- Pratham ECE mothers' groups program staff and volunteers maintain the daily running of the program by visiting mother groups and providing support via WhatsApp and radio program broadcasts.

आइडिया कार्ड 19
ऑगनवाडी के बच्चों की माताओं के लिए
हिन्दी

स्वागत और शुरूआत

■ नमस्ते, आज की मीटिंग में आप सभी का स्वागत है। चलिए, आज के काम की शुरूआत करते हैं। पिछले हफ्ते की खड़ी तथा आड़ी लाइनों को जोड़कर चित्र में मन पसंद रंग भरने की वर्कशीट तथा आयोडिनयुक्त नमक के वीडियो पर आपके अनुभव ज़रूर बताएँ।

करके देखते हैं

सभी माताएं गोले में बैठें। कटोरी में खुशी-दुःख-गुस्सा आदि भावनाओं के चित्रों की चिड़ियाँ बनाकर रखें। कोई एक माता तालियाँ बजाए। चिड़ियाँ रखी हुई कटोरी; बैठी हुई माताओं में घुमाएँ। ताली रुकने पर जिस माता के हाथ कटोरी होगी वह माता एक चिड़ी उठाकर जो भावना आई है उससे संबंधित अपना एक अनुभव बताए।

कुछ नया सीखते हैं

बच्चों को गणित की गतिविधियाँ समझाने के लिए अंक कार्डों का इस्तेमाल होता है। आइए इस विडियो की मदद से अंक कार्ड कैसे बनाए समझते हैं।

बच्चों के लिए अंक कार्ड बनाना

घर जाकर बच्चों से करवाएं

वर्कशीट - एक से पाँच तक अंक जोड़कर बिल्ली के लिए रास्ता बनाए। चित्र में मन पसंद रंग भरें। घर जाकर बच्चों को वर्कशीट दें। बच्चों के साथ बैठकर वर्कशीट पूरी करें। ज़रूरत पड़ने पर बच्चों की मदद करें।

www.prathamopenschool.org
ece@pratham.org

Idea Card 21
For Mother's of Anganwadi Children
English

Welcome and Beginning

■ Hello everyone and welcome to today's meeting. Let us know your experience on last week's picture quiz and coloring worksheets and how this app can help us with google lens to share your experience on this video.

Let's Try

Draw squares on the ground with numbers 1 to 10 for the Stapu game. Start the game. The mother has to jump and get to the number that comes on throwing the stone. Coming to that field, you have to give the mother an addition question so that the answer is the number they are on. For example, the question of addition when 6 marks come $2 + 4 = ?$ (6). Every mother plays this game.

Let's learn something new!

How to make flag rangoli in front of the house on the occasion of Republic Day? Let us understand with the help of this video.

Rangoli for Republic day

Do it with the Children

Worksheet: Give information about Flag of India. Ask the child to fill the colors. Give the worksheet to the child. Encourage and help the child to complete the pattern.

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- Pratham ECE mothers' groups program staff, volunteers, and local primary schools organize two annual big fair-like events, called MELAs, where children have the opportunity to share and show what they have learned. During the MELA, positive, constructive feedback about each child's developmental progress is provided through the use of a report card that shows their success and offers clear action points for further work. At the end of the second fair (MELA), focused on learning, children are provided with their school readiness certificates.



Uniqueness of the Program

Organizing ECE through mothers in local communities is a unique, sustainable, and cost-effective model that offers a blended holistic approach to learning. The program is **cost effective** as it uses existing local educational community infrastructure and local learning materials readily available in the home context and relies largely on volunteers. There are two models of program delivery, and the

cost depends on how the program is delivered. In the direct delivery model, where Pratham deploys a team to mobilize, form, and activate mothers' groups, the approximate cost is \$250 per group per year, including program and support costs. In a partnership model, collaborating with local education authorities, this cost may be reduced to \$70-100 per group per year, depending on what mentoring and monitoring mechanisms are put in place.

The program targets **sustainability** by working alongside existing educational infrastructure within local communities, and providing support and training for mothers. Moreover, the program is **inclusive** as it aims to reach all mothers with children who have no access to quality ECE provision and even caters to mothers who are illiterate or have had limited formal education. The highly visual idea



cards and the YouTube-based activity presentations in local languages ensure this accessibility. Additionally, the program was constructed recognizing the common lack of digital devices or digital literacy within many Indian households, especially those in remote rural areas. The program ensures that the Lead Mother at least has minimal access to WhatsApp or SMS; otherwise, no technological devices or requirements are needed to run the program. Local radio channels are effectively used to introduce the program to the community, encourage mothers to take part in it, and ensure they stay motivated in their endeavors to support children's holistic development. The program is free, which means that it is accessible to all mothers, even those with very limited economic means. All program materials can be consulted at any time free of charge on the Pratham website (Pratham Open School).

Implementation and Growth

While mothers' groups were functional already in some of Pratham's Direct Communities prior to the pandemic, from March 2020 onwards, the government of Maharashtra State, India and other states picked up the idea. Since then, they have been scaled up as result of Indian states' requesting a roll-out of the programs in their territories or asking to partner with Pratham to implement these programs. Currently, mothers' groups have been put into practice across 20+ states in India through Pratham's Direct Communities and in partnership with the education departments of state governments.

In addition to partnering with the State Education Department (Samagra Shiksha) in Maharashtra State, Pratham is collaborating with the Education Department (Samagra Shiksha) for Pre-Primary Education and Foundational Literacy and

Numeracy (FLN) in Himachal Pradesh, the Education Department for Pre-Primary program in Punjab, the Education and Women & Child Department through their convergence program—SALT in Andhra Pradesh and the *anganwadi* program with the Ministry of Education in Delhi. To date, there are approximately 20,648 preschool age, *anganwadi*, mothers' groups in 13 states, with 98,565 mother members.

Pratham has developed over 10,000 idea cards and short video clips in 11 Indian languages and these can be accessed free of charge on their online Open School educational website. The collection is constantly being expanded as the program reach expands to Functional Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) in early primary grades and the 0-3 age group.

While mothers' groups were initially set up for ECE, due to their success, Pratham scaled the approach to include children in grades 1-3, providing a support network focusing on Functional Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) working in tandem with primary schools that struggled to catch up children after the pandemic school closures. In order to achieve the FLN goals, Pratham supported setting up 58,286 primary grade 1-2-3 mothers' groups with 295,841 mothers in 19 states. In Maharashtra, the State Government scaled up the idea of mothers' groups for FLN by forming 252,676 mothers' groups, with 1,145,130 mothers and 1,614,961 children in grade 1-3. The national government of India has rolled out guidelines for FLN with a clear mention of the mothers' groups and MELAs.

In addition, Pratham has started expanding the initial program further by targeting children in the 0-3 age group in 1,400 communities of the four states of Maharashtra, Odisha, Gujarat, and Bihar, with the aim of not only providing early child care/education support but also helping mothers and families nurture babies and toddlers appropriately by delivering ideas on health, nutrition, early stimulation, well-being, etc.

About Pratham Education

Pratham Education Foundation was founded in 1995 to target issues with pre-primary and primary education in the slums of Mumbai and is now one



of the largest NGOs in India, working in both urban and rural areas throughout the country and also internationally. Pratham is an innovative and outcome-driven organization that works alongside and in partnership with other NGOs and State Ministries of Education or local education authorities on the broad goal to eliminate illiteracy from India and break the cycle of poverty. The focus of the organization is on high-quality, low-cost, and replicable interventions to address gaps in the education



system from age 3 to 18 and beyond, from early childhood development to schooling and life skills. With the mission “Every child in school and learning well,” Pratham’s work today focuses on the broad scope of formal and non-formal education dealing with issues such as low learning levels, high drop-out rates, child rights, youth unemployment due to lack of skills, and digital literacy. The organization’s ability to achieve lasting wide-scale success throughout the Indian education landscape is based on its low-cost replicable models whereby Pratham trains and supports volunteers to implement learning interventions at the grassroots, community-based level. www.pratham.org