

Early Childhood Education (ECE)-Sustainable Development through Sustainable Education

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Early Childhood Education (ECE) refers to the education and care of children from birth to age of 8 years. This is a somewhat diverse and bit complex field which includes children's parental care, their home, community and pre – school educational settings, the early years of schooling and related services. Childhoods early years are called as the foundations for future success in learning, it also develops the Childs capacity to become the active participate in a community, workplace, and society. The myth of early childhood itself states that the foundations of fundamental attitudes and values are put into place, including attitudes and values towards learning. Hence we can conclude that optimal early child development is a prerequisite for sound human and national development. Unfortunately India has problem of childhood under development, under nutrition and under development, under nutrition and under attainment of goals of EFA and early childhood education standards and quality has remained one of the most discussed and challenging issues.

Education is motor for change that is why in December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly, through its resolution 57/254, decided a decade of education for sustainable development (2005-2014). It also designated UNESCO as the lead agency for the promotion of this decade. As we know the importance of preschool learning, the years when the child brain is growing and developing. These are the years when nurturing and appropriate stimulation will reap lifelong benefits as children develop self worth and host of new skills that will serve them for a life time. Children enter into preschool life with a significant background of learning experience within their family and outside home.

Quality engagement with children is directly dependent on the adult who engages with children. Several adults within micro system of the child interact with children. Apart from parents, grandparents and very close relatives, teachers /caregivers /day-care or crèche workers become the most crucial adult in a child's life. Today's world is full of violent extremism, terrorism and related humanitarian crisis. These are the challenges for developed and developing countries facing today. The blooming buds of the nations are to be pruned to possess values and life skills along with their pedagogic knowledge and skills. The effective domain has to be addressed with due importance as that of cognitive domain. It has become the need of the hour of any nation to nurture a generation upholding humanitarian values. This is possible only through incorporating reflective practices in education.

Access to quality education is the fundamental rights of every children and quality ECE and services places children in a better position to reach their highest potential and participate in the achievement of more sustainable world. These children with their existing capabilities are the foundation stones of sustainable societies. Young children are both present and future citizen needs great investment that builds their awareness, values, knowledge and capacity for sustainable development will serve to set the world on more sustainable pathways now and into the future. The focus of ECE in both developing and developed world due to one or another reason not on ESD and if it is there, it is not reflected in practices. And you can see the twist in strategy better called as paradigm shift in our strategy of imparting education to develop citizens who have strong beliefs in sustainability and equipped with skills that are foundations to civic engagement, creativity and productivity.

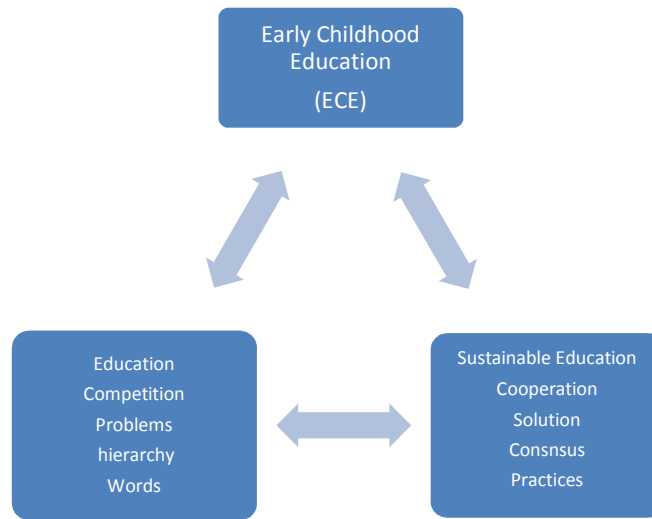


Fig: 1. Education and stakeholders characteristics of convergence.

The concept of convergence is nothing but the strategy for sustainable development in ECE can make to prepare children for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead .Convergence aims to bring together the different groups and individuals that are working to promote social justice, enhance our and Mother Earth Health or help us to live in a more environmentally sustainable way. The convergence should be applied in different teaching and learning strategies which can be used to enhance qualitative and sustainable outcomes for development. The researcher has reviewed many articles and research papers showing implementation of different convergence styles in ECE, few are discussed as below.

A powerful convergence: Community schools and early childhood education, Written by David Jacobson, January 24, 2018 outlined the most successful elementary schools partner with community organizations to support young children and their families beginning in early childhood in USA.

“Elementary schools are forging deeper partnerships with families and community organizations well before children arrive at kindergarten. The aim of this work is to improve children’s experiences and family engagement and support along the entire continuum from prenatal care through grade 3 and beyond”.

They used potent combination of educational supports and family services as the single best strategy to address pernicious opportunity gaps and raise achievement for low-income children. This approach tackles persistent poverty, family instability, the hollowing out of the middle class, and the demand for a more highly skilled workforce.

Updated model, new movement

The Chicago Child-Parent Centers, one of the most successful educational interventions of the past half century, began with Title I money in 1967. Children experience four to six years of high-quality learning and care that starts at a preschool center and continues through 3rd grade at a nearby elementary school. The original model included structured curriculum components, high teacher-to-child ratios, and staff development opportunities along with home visitations, health and nutrition services, and extensive activities to promote family engagement (Reynolds et al., 2011).

Research done by University of Minnesota professor Arthur Reynolds shows the stunning progress of children who attended the centers in the mid-1980s — they had reached age 28 by the time of the study. Compared to children in a control group, they exhibited significantly higher academic achievement through high school, advanced further in their education, and had higher earnings as adults. They were less likely to need special education services, be involved in the juvenile justice

system, commit crimes as adults, or experience abuse, neglect, or depression. A cost-benefit analysis of the program yielded a return on investment of \$10 for every \$1 invested (Reynolds et al., 2011).

Several years ago, Reynolds and his team updated the child-parent center model as a school reform strategy. Becoming implementers as well as researchers, the University of Minnesota team now supports 35 sites in three Midwestern states with tools, guidance documents, and technical assistance. Child-parent centers combine a strong academic program, extensive family engagement, and coordination with community organizations to promote both child and parent development. It is a community school model that also creates an aligned continuum of teaching and learning across early childhood and early elementary education. In doing so, the child-parent centers bring together two reforms, one bridging education and health and social services, the other bridging early childhood and K-12 education.

Cincinnati, Ohio

All schools in the Cincinnati Public Schools district are community schools, known as Community Learning Centers (CLCs), and most have full-time resource coordinators. The district's devotion to this strategy came in response to declining enrollment and an exodus of families in the 1990s. Ensuring that all partner supports are targeted toward meeting each school's specific academic goals is central to the district's approach to CLCs, as is an emphasis on community engagement and input. Since implementing CLCs, Cincinnati has gone from being one of Ohio's worst-performing districts to becoming the state's first urban district recognized as "effective." It is now regarded as a national leader in community schooling.

Cincinnati's CLCs have expanded to serve also as hubs for children and their families before they enter kindergarten. First, the district has begun increasing the number of preschool programs housed in elementary schools, giving younger children access to the same supports as K-12 students, including health clinics and vision and dental services. Second, a nonprofit has begun piloting early childhood resource coordinators at CLCs, assigning them to reach out to families with young children and organize networks of early childhood providers that are anchored by an elementary school CLC. These networks share instructional practices and work on transitions, resource referrals, and hosting joint events for children and families.

Multnomah County, Ore.

The Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Service System supports 86 community schools across six districts in Multnomah County. The county is the managing partner for the system and, in that role, contracts with nonprofit agencies that hire and support full-time site managers at the community schools. The site managers work with school staff and community partners to align resources, including afterschool programming, with the school's academic and social-emotional goals. They support family engagement and advocacy and coordinate resource referral for family basic needs and other services.

In recent years, Multnomah County has also extended its work to include early childhood programs. In addition to increasing the number of preschool classrooms in its schools, the county implemented a highly regarded three-week summer early kindergarten transition class across many of the community schools, launched a vigorous kindergarten registration campaign, and supported home visits by kindergarten teachers. SUN is also implementing a new pilot project in eight schools. Facilitators in these schools reach out to families with young children before their children start school and engage them in school activities such as play-and-learn groups in school buildings. SUN is now working with these schools on how they will begin collaborating with the family childcare providers located near each participating elementary school.

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, Greater Omaha, Neb.

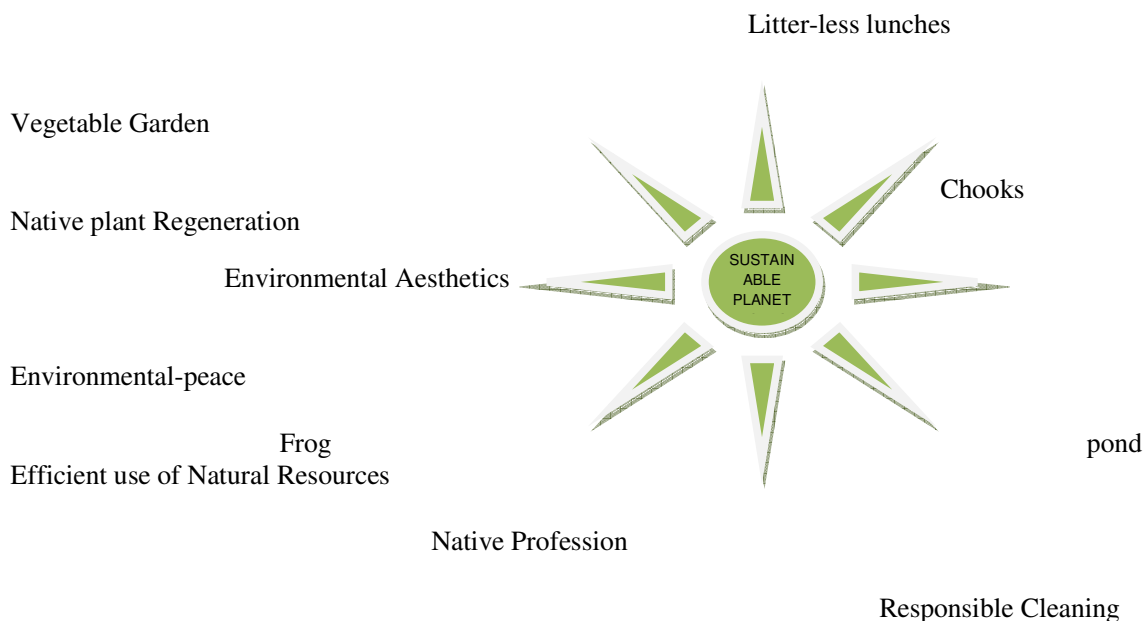
Eleven superintendents in the Greater Omaha area have signed on to the Superintendents' Plan, which is financed by a half-cent levy in two counties, while the Buffett Early Childhood Institute provides technical assistance to the participating districts. Currently, 12 schools from across six districts participate in the plan's full model, which builds on the idea of the school as hub and includes three core components:

- **Birth to age 3:** School-based home visitors provide high-quality home visiting services, organize parent-child activities in the schools, and serve as bridges to principals and staff.
- **High-quality preschool:** Family facilitators provide an array of supports to families and guide them through the transition to high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds.
- **Kindergarten through 3rd grade:** Family facilitators support families as children transition into aligned, developmentally appropriate kindergarten through 3rd-grade experiences.

In addition to the linkages across home visits, preschool, and early elementary school, schools maintain partnerships with community social service providers, and some have onsite health services.

What might education for sustainability look like in early childhood? A case for participatory, whole-of-settings approaches Julie M. Davis, Australia quoted about the sustainable planet project in UNESCO 2008 *The contribution of early childhood education to a sustainable society*.

The Sustainable Planet Project The environmental focus at this long day care centre – with children aged between 2½ and 5 years – originated in 1997, the outcome of a staff team-building exercise to encourage homework linkages. In looking for a shared project, 'the environment' emerged as a common interest. Under the banner of the Sustainable Planet Project, staff members sought to add value to their roles as early childhood educators by including their personal interests – such as gardening, wildlife conservation and recycling. From the start, the project had an action-oriented focus, encapsulated in its subtitle, 'Saving our Planet: Become a Conscious Part of the Solution'. Initially, the staff worked with the children on a number of mini-projects allied to their own particular environmental interests, as identified in the diagram below. As time passed, these mini-projects became embedded into the everyday practices of the centre and, increasingly, the children have been the main initiators of new projects.



It could be said that this centre has developed a ‘sustainability ethic’ where thinking and acting sustainably permeates deeply into the centre’s culture. This is also an ethic that supports the view that even very young children can critically respond to environmental issues and can be proactive participants in educational and environmental decision-making – as initiators, provocateurs, researchers and environmental activists.

Vital Didonet, Brazi in his paper quoted,

“To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace”. The Earth Charter, Preamble.

The first years of every human being’s life are the most favourable ones for developing the *attitudes and values* that form the basis of their personalities. The structure of values and attitudes built in the early years are the strong and permanent roots for one’s entire life. They will always be used as References for main decisions that challenge men and women. Those first values determine ethical and moral behaviours throughout life. When a person has to face difficult and complex situations, or when a new challenge demands important decisions, those values that originally carved the personality will guide options and resolutions, reactions or behaviours. Therefore, if we desire that adults, in the next generation, respect nature and care for the planet, it is important to include now, in the early childhood education curriculum or programme, the study of nature, and the interdependence between human beings and the environment. Everything deeply lived, practiced and felt in the early years of human development remains for the rest of one’s life.

Lenira Haddad, Brazil has given a very beautiful expression for Specific dignity of ECE in following way.

“By a ‘specific dignity’, we mean the emergence of ECE as it tries to build its own particular identity. Early childhood education as it is understood today, services for children up to 6 years’ old, and is a recent phenomenon, present in most societies, and born from the dialogue between the needs of civil society, in an accelerated process of change, and resources available for children and their families. This is a dialogue that touches dimensions of human existence not considered by modern science – such as gender roles, the relationship between working life and family life, the upbringing of children in an extra-familiar milieu, and the everyday intense relationships of young children. Its legitimization is closely associated with the need to break old paradigms – such as the exclusive family responsibility for the care, upbringing and education of young children, and the model of formal education that does not correspond with the playful, affective, imaginative and inquisitive nature of young children. These paradigms have been supported by common sense, as well as scientific knowledge. The context in which ECE builds its identity is also a context that inaugurates new meanings for parental roles, relationships between men and women, family and state, and education for young children. ECE can be at the same time: (a) a place where children live their childhood; (b) a space for meeting friends, enlarging experiences, improving knowledge and carrying out their projects; (c) the first step of basic education; (d) an important support system for fathers and mothers who are working; and (e) an important mechanism to foster social and gender equality. Thus, the ‘specific dignity’ of ECE is expressed in its multifunctional and multidimensional feature that highlights its distinction from other levels of education.

Early childhood education for a sustainable world, Yoshie Kaga1, France. His article argues that one effective way to construct a just and sustainable world is to pay attention to early childhood: to ensure adequate care and development for all children and to teach them the kinds of knowledge, skills and values – such as empathy, sharing, respect for others, love for nature – that promotes sustainability from a very early age. Suggesting some features of early childhood education that contributes to building a sustainable society, the article points to the importance of grounding the related efforts in the local realities; using different formal, informal and non-formal settings; (re)orienting the programme content towards sustainability; ensuring supportive health, social, economic and labour policies for children and their families; forging partnerships; and investing in all

areas of education holistically, including early childhood, primary, secondary, adult and literacy education. learning for a sustainable society requires establishing a new relationship among peoples and with the environment that sustains human life – a relationship that enables societies to pursue development ‘that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’, to use the phrase in the 1987 Bruntland Report. It is neither a luxury nor a lofty. It is a necessity (UNESCO, 2006a). If we do not invest in sustainability now, our children will necessarily pay a far greater price, both financially and in the quality of their lives.

Eveline Pressoir, France presented in UNESCO programme and meeting document 2008 “Preconditions for young children’s learning and practice for sustainable development”.

The three pillars of sustainable development:

- **Environment and ecology:** awareness of natural resources and fragility of the physical environment.
- **Economy:** Sensitivity to the limits and potential of economic growth and its impacts on society and environment.
- **Society and culture:** understanding of social institutions and their role in change and development. Ways of being, relating, behaving, believing and acting differently according to context and history. These three pillars are interrelated and interconnected (interdisciplinary approach). This is a new way of thinking and acting in a world with a decline of resources, declining equilibrium between nature and human development and increasing disparities. Additionally, in considering all socio-economic measures that are urgent and necessary to change these trends in a sustainable way, we must focus on education.

Education for sustainable development:

- A new vision of education: empowering people to commit themselves to sustainability.
- An education for democracy.
- The practice of values: dignity and human rights of all people, rights of future generations and inter-generational responsibility, cultural diversity and commitment to build peace.

The pillars of education for sustainable development are:

- Learning to know: acquiring instruments of understanding.
- Learning to be: seeing oneself the main actor in defining positive outcomes for the future.
- Learning to live together: participate and co-operate with other people in all human activity.
- Learning to do: be able to react creatively and responsibly in all environments.
- Learning to transform oneself and society: develop respect for the environment, social solidarity and non-discrimination.

Tricia Herbert, United Kingdom, explained about Environment Intelligence as Research evidence of the past thirty years, (Gould, 1991; Orr, 2004) tells us, however, that simply knowing about environmental issues has little impact upon behaviour. Knowing is not enough; children have to care enough to create harmonious relationships with the Earth and with fellow human beings. The early years are the most fruitful time to forge emotional bonds with the natural world, and given enough time for outdoor exploration, develop ‘biophilia’, as described by Harvard biologist Edward Wilson (1984). Despite the affinity of young children with nature, and their fascination with the elemental – earth, air, fire and water ... only a lucky few children in the developed world (for example in forest kindergartens) are able to spend their days freely observing, exploring. These children have the opportunity to develop this sense of wonder, especially if they have the company of an attentive adult who listens and prompts the children to think deeply about what they sense and feel, so drawing together the child’s inner life and the world’s outer reality. This is ‘slow learning’ in an emergent learning culture. It can never be ‘delivered’ in a ‘scheduled programme’; its focus is not academics, but making sense of the child’s own world. It has no standardized assessments, but it is learning that engages the mind, hands, heart and spirit in equal measure.

Learning for eco-intelligence is founded upon a trust and respect for children as competent learners able to know themselves – their abilities and limitations, and gain that valuable ‘sense of place’ in a

natural and meaningful way. This is learning for life, as opposed to learning in order simply to learn further in school.

Early childhood education that prioritizes eco-literacy is facilitated by:

- Opportunity to participate in many varied learning experiences integrating many knowledge areas.
- Opportunity for unstructured time - time 'to be' and to contemplate, in a natural setting.
- Opportunity to observe changes in an environment over time.
- Opportunity to play a valued part in real life activities (e.g. gardening, cooking, building, caring for animals, producing art).
- Opportunity to use real tools and begin to develop practical skills.
- Opportunity to engage in physical challenges and test one's limits.
- Opportunity to develop collaborative, investigative and critical thinking skills.
- Encouragement of a sense of wonder about the natural world.

John Siraj-Blatchford, United Kingdom, presented his ideas under the title "The implications of early understandings of inequality, science and technology for the development of sustainable societies". John Siraj-Blatchford, United Kingdom.

The environment is considered to provide only one of the three core pillars of sustainable development, alongside the economy and society (UNCED, 1992), and social sustainability requires an ethos of compassion, respect for difference, equality and fairness (Chan, 2006). He suggests that in the United Kingdom and the United States (at least), we still have a long way to go in developing such an ethos. The research presented was commissioned for a programme in the British television documentary series, A Child of our Time (2005) and involved an experimental study of 136 children aged between 3 and 5 years, conducted by researchers at the University of Kent. It shows how gender, 'racial' equality and social class are already influencing how young children at this age understand themselves and their future lives. The study also explores the children's awareness, attitudes and expectations related to inequality in housing, and it is in this latter context that the reproductive part played by popular misconceptions of science and technology are identified.

The children were then presented with the following six positive and six negative adjectives on cards, and the children were asked to stick the word to any or all the four photographs of children. The particular words applied had been obtained through the construction and testing of an appropriate Multiple-Response Racial Attitude (MRA) instrument (Rutland et al., 2005):

Positive adjectives	Negative adjectives
Friendly	Mean
Kind	Stupid
Helpful	Nasty
Smart	Rude
Hardworking	Lazy
Clever	Slow

All the necessary controls and procedures were applied, and the study provided the following convincing results:

- Racial bias was strongest towards African-Caribbean children, but a significant negative bias was also found towards Far East Asian children.
- The 'Anglo-British' (White) children showed significantly more bias towards the 'African-Caribbean' (Black) children than the other children.
- Children who had more contact with the other groups showed less racial bias.
- The bias that was found towards the Far-East Asian children was related more closely to 'racial constancy' than the amount of contact that the children had with them.

•The racial attitudes identified were not significantly related to the children's moral judgements: the children were simultaneously presented with a vignette describing an incident of racial exclusion, and 87 per cent of them held it to be 'wrong'.

The publication also provides numerous relevant examples of 'good practice' in the more detailed guidance for practitioners. These include:

•**8-20 months.** Planning and resourcing: 'Work with staff, parents and children to promote an anti-discriminatory and anti-bias approach to care and education'.

•**16-26 months.** Note: 'Young children's interest in similarities and differences, for example, their footwear, or patterns on their clothes and in physical appearance including hair texture and skin colour'. Note: 'Young children's questions about differences such as skin colour, hair and friends'. Effective practice: 'Talk with young children about valuing all skin colour differences'.

•**40-60+ months.** Note: 'How children express their attitudes such as about differences in skin colours'. Effective practice: 'Develop strategies to combat negative bias and, where necessary, support children and adults to unlearn discriminatory attitudes'.

The paper provides an insight and opportunity to indicate how a sustainable future can be achieved with right priorities and investment for quality ECE. There is definitely a need to enhance teacher's quality, curriculum and infrastructure –the main determinants of quality Early Childhood Education. And this will ultimately lead to empower people in the community to participate for sustainable future.

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