

A Planned Approach to Meet the Needs Of

Children with Non-English Background

(Specific Reference Group: East Indian Children)

by

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The teachers, counsellors, and the Department of Research of the Vancouver School Board have expressed concern over the significantly lower achievement of the majority of East Indian Children. Briefly, the factors that seem to contribute to the problem are:

1. An inadequate or non-English-speaking background.
2. Immigrants from rural areas of India.
3. Insistence upon speaking the native language at home.
4. An attitude of dependency.
5. A lack of integration.
6. Emotional problems created where both parents are working -- possibly on shifts.

From the educational point of view, the reasons for under-achievement appear to be:

1. Subjective placement of pupils.
2. Large classes.
3. A lack of understanding of Indian culture.
4. Absence of communication with the parents.
5. The lack of systematic approach and planning to eliminate the problem.

OBJECTIVES

A systematic approach requires an outline of objectives, planned activities that may achieve those objectives, and evaluative procedures

to determine the possible outcomes.

In this proposal the basic objective is to help the child to develop the knowledge of language concepts up to his level so that he can profit from regular class placement. Diagram #1 shows the strategies to meet the educational needs of East Indian children. The approach proposed here should equally apply to all children with non-English backgrounds.

There are many well-known difficulties and problems associated with the teaching of English, and consequently of all other subjects, with English as the medium, to people with a different mother-tongue and background. However, it is submitted that most approaches have been centred on teaching English as an "academic" language, rather than as a "mother tongue", or as a "language for the living". Therefore, these procedures have not been altogether successful. Another reason for lack of success is the undue haste in attempting to bring about "integration" with English-speaking children on the assumption that this will speed up the process of developing motivation and confidence. Since in most cases the hastier integration is haphazard and unplanned, it probably achieves opposite results in the physical and socio-emotional maturity of the child.

INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAMME

The concept of an Integrated Learning Programme avoids the pitfalls of the above approaches, and zeroes in on the individual needs of a child. It is based on the assumption that the child, irrespective of his age and knowledge of English, does not know the language as a mother tongue. Through a carefully prepared, integrated educational programme, the pupil will acquire the language concepts which the average English-

speaking child develops in his pre-school education. The suggested programme can expand to take into account elementary, intermediate, and secondary education.

In this proposal, the child entering the system, or already in the system but not achieving according to his age level, would be interviewed and tested to determine his knowledge of English language concepts. He would then be put on the Integrated Learning Programme.

Let us refer back to Diagram #1. There are three levels. Under each level there will be a series of Learning Units. Level One will incorporate the programme from infancy to Grade 3. Thus learning units will be developed for each of the pre-school years, taking in the vocabulary and concepts that an average English-speaking child acquires at home. It is expected that all children, irrespective of age on the Programme, will be given selective flexible experiences to help fill in their blanks in language concepts. Similarly, learning units will be developed from Grade 3 to Grade 12, using various types of tests as evaluative procedures.

Diagram #2 presents the concept of the Integrated Learning Programme at a special centre. The emphasis at the special centre will be to ensure the development of language concepts inherent in all subjects. Therefore, essentially, it would follow a concentrated remedial programme. The special centre would be used to build necessary language concepts before pupil placement in regular classes, and also to improve language concepts at all levels of the elementary or secondary programme.

It used to be a well-known saying that every teacher is a teacher of English. The Integrated Learning Programme does not follow that dictum. It emphasizes that in every subject or course, when a particular concept

is presented to a learner, it is important that the language part of that concept is understood. Thus, before the mathematical concept of addition is understood by the learner, he must know that "addition" means putting two or more things together and arriving at a sum. The same will hold true for each subject. If this principle of Integrated Learning Programme is understood, it can easily be seen that all the subjects from kindergarten to grade 12 level are given the emphasis of using various subjects to develop language concepts rather than of teaching subject concepts. Thus the focus would be changed from teaching social studies, mathematics, science, music, art, and physical education, etc., to using these subjects to develop the use of language.

Some may counter the argument presented above by stating: "Is this not what a teacher is supposed to do? Don't you think that most teachers do this now?" However, without arguing against their claim, it is submitted that the needs of a child, with a non-English background and without the special educational programme presented here, cannot be met in the regular programme.

AN EXAMPLE

An East Indian child, aged 8, might be two years behind in terms of school achievement. His particular weaknesses, as diagnosed by interviews and tests, are in mathematics and language. When the child remains in the system as it now exists, his performance generally continues to deteriorate and he will probably quit school after grade 8 or 9, before completing his secondary education. Under the Integrated Learning Programme he would be tested at the special centre in his grasp

of pre-school language concepts of regular grade work. Suitable individualized instruction and experiences would be provided to strengthen his knowledge of language concepts. This process might take from a week to several months before he is gradually placed at an appropriate level in the regular system. Thus the time a child would spend at the special centre would be completely flexible.

From the above-stated example, it can be seen that any child who shows evidence of under-achievement relative to age can be taken through from the beginning of the Integrated Learning Programme to the level where he is supposed to be.

It is suggested that the Integrated Learning Programme could be used effectively both with the children who are already in the Vancouver School System and with new immigrants.

SUCCESS FACTORS:

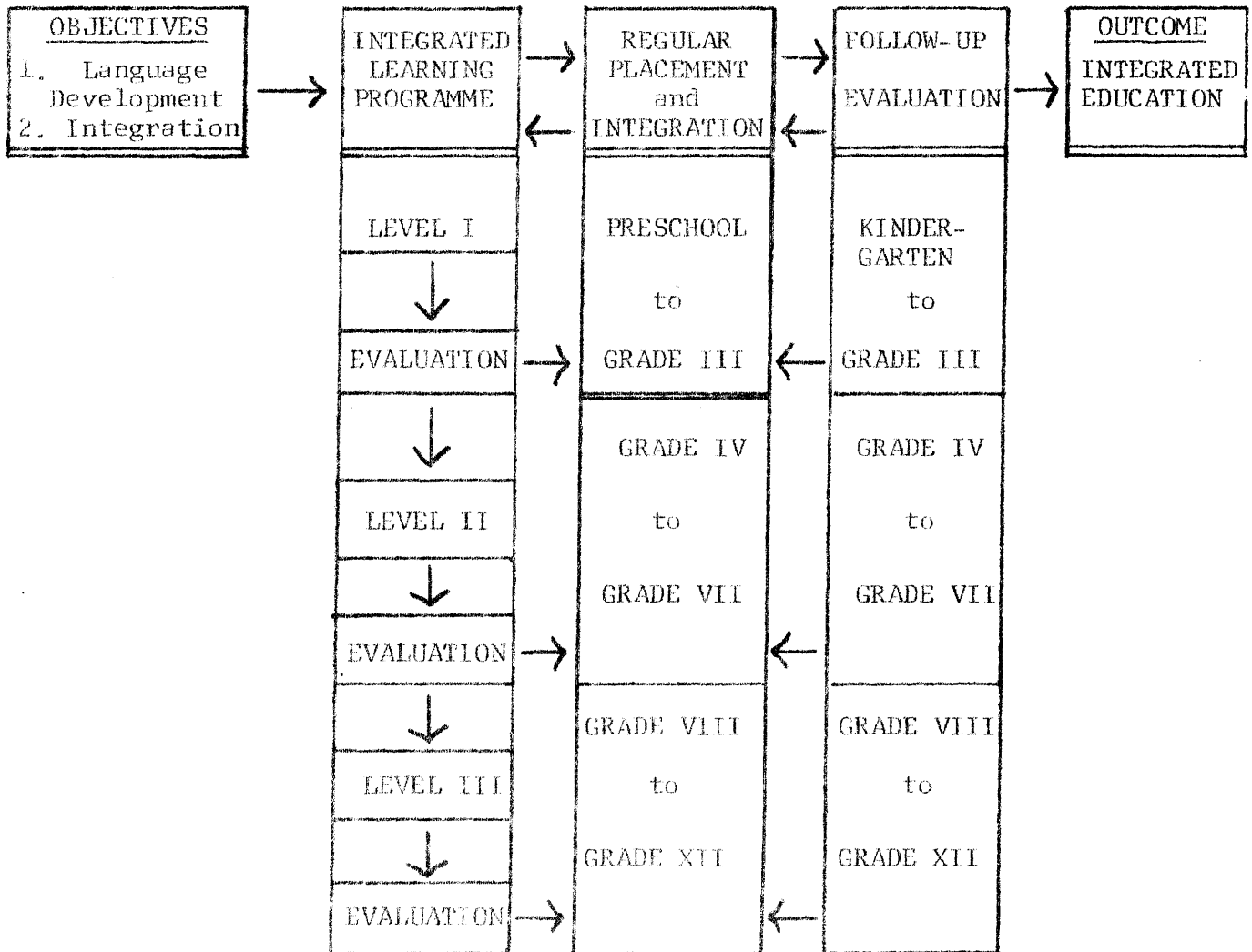
The success of the Integrated Learning Approach depends upon the following factors:

1. The development of proper learning experiences by qualified and stimulated teachers.
2. Complete flexibility in the in-and-out movement from the Programme. This will also help in ensuring planned integration.
3. Securing:
 - (a) the services of a person responsible for the development and coordination of the programme;
 - (b) a special educational centre, probably attached to a centrally located high school;
 - (c) audio-visual equipment, tape recorders, video tapes, television programmes, record players, and programmed learning materials;
 - (d) a library.

Diagram No. 1: MODELS SHOWING STRATEGIES

TO MEET EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

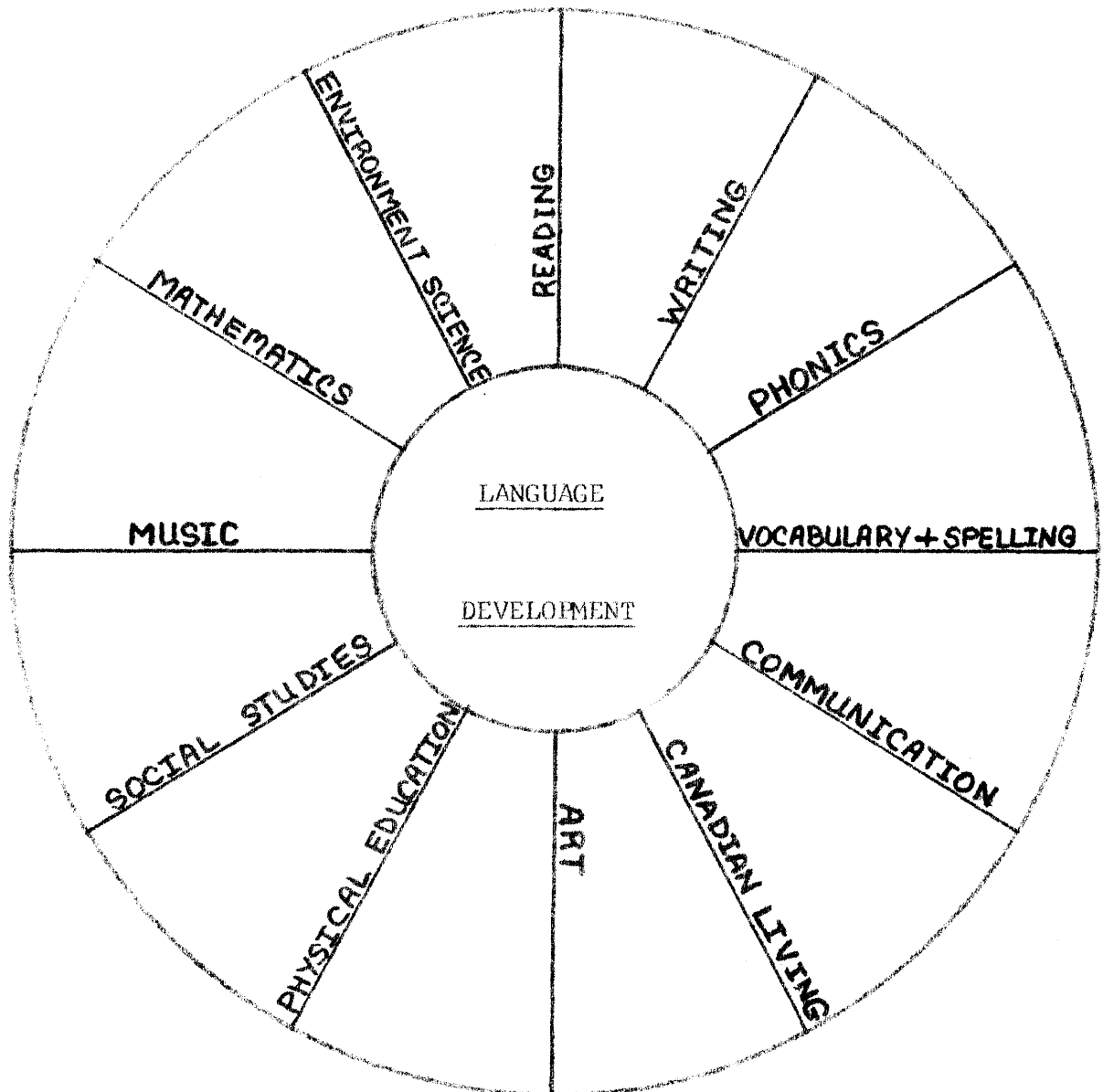
(SPECIFIC REFERENCE GROUP: EAST INDIAN CHILDREN)



NOTE:

The three levels are merely a convenient method of indicating achievement. Each level will have several learning units. The basis of the Integrated Learning Programme is flexibility - a free flow regardless of grade level.

Diagram No. 2:
CONCEPT
of
INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAMME



NOTE:

The diagram shows the interplay between the subjects and the language development. The learner is taught both the language concept and the subject concept.