**PROJECT TARA**

# UNLOCKING CHILDHOOD:
## TRANSLATING POLICY GUIDELINES TO GRASSROOT ACTIONABLES

By Ashish Jhalani

# Foreword

**Ashish Jhalani**
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I am pleased to introduce this report, "Unlocking Childhood: Translating Policy Guidelines to Grassroot Actionables," which highlights the collaborative effort between Square Panda Education and the Haridwar district administration in implementing Project TARA - Transforming Anganwadis and Renewing Abilities.

At Square Panda Education, our fundamental philosophy aligns seamlessly with the educational policies and initiatives of the Government of India. We believe in the transformative power of education, especially in the crucial early childhood years, and we are committed to making quality learning accessible to all. Project TARA embodies this commitment, and it reflects our shared vision with the government.

The Government of India has consistently emphasized the importance of early childhood education and the need to provide young children with a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Project TARA resonates with these ideals by empowering Anganwadi centers with state-of-the-art tools and resources. The provision of smart TVs, digital content, play materials, cognitive and literacy development kits, and training for Anganwadi workers is in perfect harmony with the government's focus on holistic child development.

Our partnership with the Haridwar district administration in Project TARA is a testament to our shared commitment to transforming the landscape of early childhood education. We are grateful for the government's support and leadership in this endeavor, as it reflects a broader national vision of nurturing the potential of our youngest citizens.
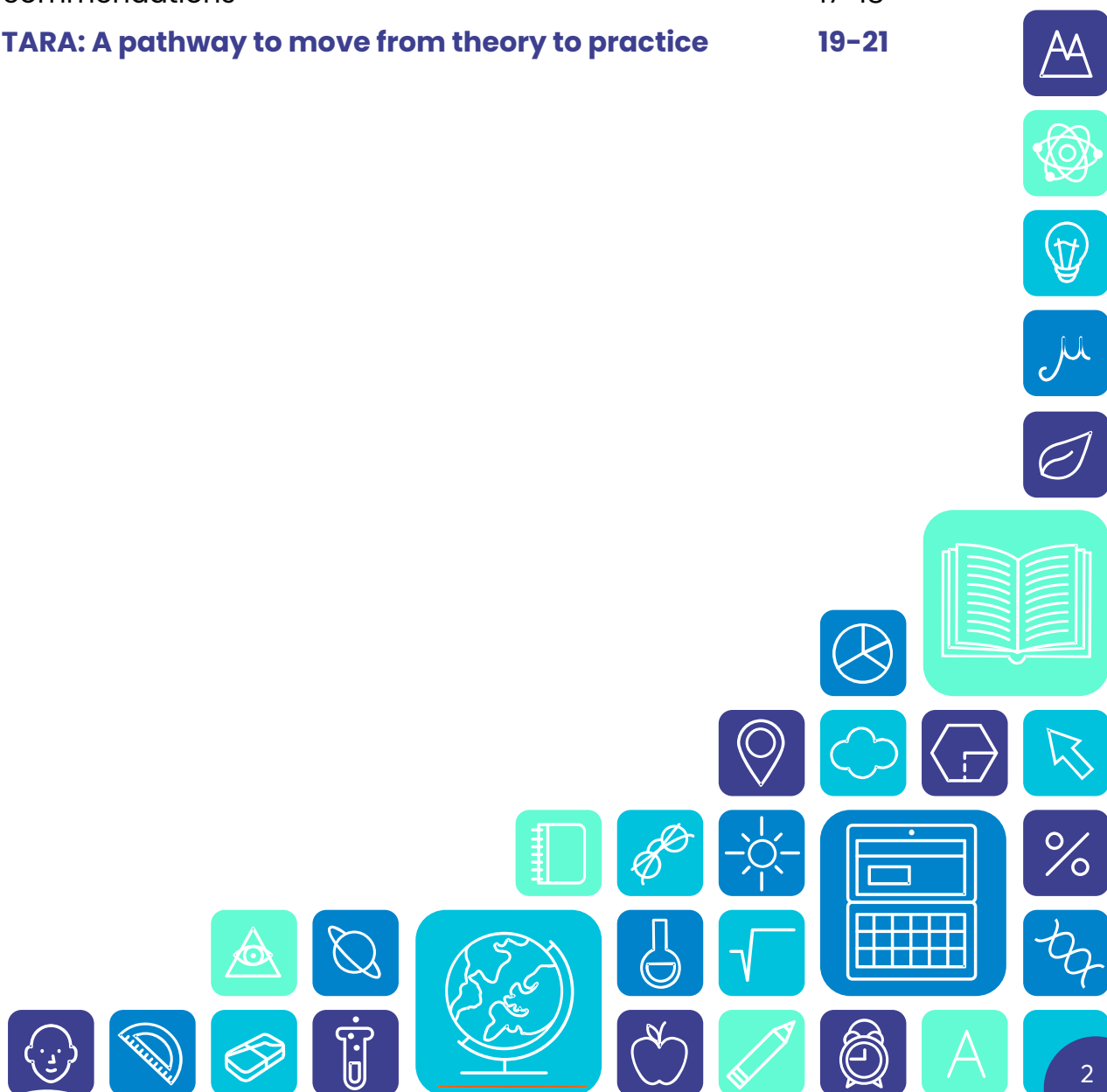
As we delve into this report, I invite you to explore how Project TARA aligns with the educational policies and goals set by the Government of India. Together, we are not only unlocking the potential of individual children but also contributing to the realization of a larger vision for the future of education in our country.

It is our hope that this collaborative effort will inspire others to join us in our mission to provide quality education to all children, ensuring that they have the best possible start in life and a brighter future ahead.

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# Executive Summary

## Unlocking Childhood: Translating Policy Guidelines to Grassroots Actionables

### Introduction:

This report encapsulates the strategic response and actionable components of the TARA program, a transformative educational initiative aimed at reshaping Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the Haridwar district of Uttarakhand. Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, TARA addresses the identified gaps and leverages policy guidelines to create tangible improvements at the grassroots level.

### Identified Challenges:

The program emerged in reaction to significant challenges in ECCE, including fragmented curriculums, outdated learning methodologies, a lack of practical learning experiences, difficulties in understanding abstract concepts, and insufficient educator training. Additional issues pertained to the underutilization of technology, inadequate focus on holistic development, and a deficient literacy culture.

# Executive Summary

## Strategic Recommendations:

To navigate these challenges, TARA introduces a series of innovative and practical recommendations:

**1**

### Curriculum Integration
Proposes a cohesive, thematic curriculum that ties various subjects into an interconnected learning experience relevant to children's real-life contexts.

**2**

### Professional Development for Educators
Advocates for robust training programs to equip Anganwadi workers and teachers with updated pedagogical skills and technological proficiency.

**3**

### Technological Advancement in Learning
Calls for the integration of technology into learning spaces to facilitate blended educational experiences.

**4**

### Activity-Based Experiential Learning
Encourages a hands-on approach to learning, utilizing active participation in educational processes to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
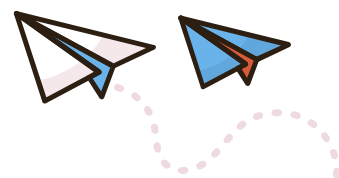
**5**

### Enhanced Literacy and Reading Initiatives
Promotes reading and literacy through the establishment of accessible reading spaces and programs designed to engender a culture of reading.

# Executive Summary

## TARA Program Highlights:

TARA's operational model is composed of key components that translate policy into practice:

### Integrated Thematic Curriculum

An innovative curriculum that unifies various disciplines around central themes, providing a holistic and engaging learning experience.

### Creative Learning Programs

Unique to TARA are its programs that promote creativity and ingenuity, moving beyond rote memorization to cultivate curiosity and exploration.

### Active Learning Focus

TARA places a premium on activity-based learning, fostering hands-on involvement and collaborative problem-solving.

### CPA Methodology

The Concept-Pictorial-Abstract (CPA) method is employed to facilitate comprehension of complex ideas, particularly in mathematics.

### Practical 'Learn-by-Doing' Activities

Emphasizes real-world application of theoretical knowledge, encouraging students to engage directly in the learning process.

### Holistic Extracurricular Offerings

TARA integrates extracurricular activities to support comprehensive child development, encompassing physical, emotional, and social growth.

### Educator Empowerment

The program includes extensive training for Anganwadi workers, equipping them to deliver high-quality education aligned with the NEP 2020 vision.

### Blended Learning through Technology

By harnessing technology, TARA introduces interactive and digital resources to support traditional teaching methods, enhancing accessibility and student engagement.

### Literacy Enhancement with Hanging Libraries

Innovative 'hanging libraries' are part of TARA's strategy to foster a love for reading among children, making books readily available and attractive for young learners.

## Conclusion:

The TARA program represents a pivotal step towards operationalizing the NEP 2020 guidelines, catering to the bespoke needs of the Haridwar district. With a focus on innovation, holistic development, and technological integration, TARA is not only addressing current educational challenges but is also paving the way for a future where every child in Haridwar has the opportunity to reach their full potential through quality education.

# Introduction

The understanding and practices of education have experienced fundamental changes over the past 200 years, evolving from being a teacher-oriented activity of transferring knowledge to being a student-oriented process of actively constructing and contextualizing knowledge. The advent of a changing world order characterized by social, economic, political, and technological advances calls for parallel transformations in the education system. Thus, making schools relevant for the present and ready for the unforeseen 21st- and 22nd-century world. Recognising this need, the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 has introduced noticeable changes in the Indian education system by firmly rooting itself in the ancient Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and blending them with modern knowledge systems of educational theories and practices.

How do we bring these lofty goals to fruition ?

How do we implement these ideas in the form of regular Anganwadi experiences ?

What changes in commitments would it require from the many stakeholders?

How can the ECCE fraternity and the larger community sustain these changes to build a dynamic and future proof system?

> " *By offering simple, **easy-to-follow, and short yet detailed actionable steps and guidelines for all education stakeholders,** the current white paper seeks to provide a scaffold to facilitate meaningful changes and long-lasting impact on the ground.* "

# Purpose of this White Paper

The current white paper is being published at a time when global education systems are in their post-COVID recovery phase, and India has already announced its National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020, its corresponding National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) in 2022, and its draft National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) in 2023.

The NEP, the NCF-FS, and the draft NCF-SE have introduced notable epistemological, ontological, and philosophical ideas for significant changes in all sectors within the indian education system. However, the ideas posited in the policy and corresponding curricular frameworks can sometimes be too abstract, challenging, and time-consuming for the stakeholders (teachers, students, and administrators) to accurately interpret and effectively implement. It, thus, becomes important to capture the multitude of on-ground challenges that these stakeholders face on a day-to-day basis, and present best practices that showcase practical ways forward to overcome such challenges, thereby, bridging the policy-praxis gop.

The aims of this white paper are:

to contextualize the current educational landscape of the country, viz., the changing world order, incoming policies, and frameworks from the eyes of the educators.

to initiate a dialogue among the educational community to identify common challenges, gaps, and opportunities for success that can further inform policy development, implementation, and practice.

to translate these ideas into straight forward, concrete, and practical roadmaps that can bridge the policy expectations to its on-ground execution.

Thus, assisting in a successful policy implementation, while upholding its transformational spirit.

This white paper was developed based on the analysis of primary data gathered during field visits by Square Panda

The data in the first phase was collected from Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) held at the Haridwar. This collaborative event was held across 2 major blocks in Haridwar, Bhadrabad 1 and 2.
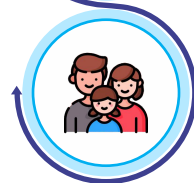
# Purpose of this White Paper

**30+** ANGANWADI WORKERS

**40+** PARENTS

Roorkee

HARIDWAR Haridwar

Laksar

These FGDs followed three main tracks: the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) track, the home based practices, and the Anganwadi Education (TE) track. The data in the second phase was collected from semi-structured interviews with leading educational administrators, mentors, and academicians nationwide. The collected data was then cleaned and thematically analysed to report the findings in this white paper. The current white paper, thus, identifies the several conundrums and gaps that create tension in the sector and proposes key recommendations and practical solutions to address these issues
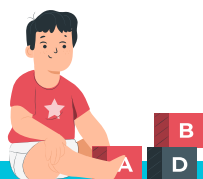
# Structure of the White paper

The white paper is organized into four chapters devoted to specific themes, including a concluding chapter on ways forward (sample integrated project toolkits).

## CHAPTER 1

the current chapter, is the introductory section that sets the context, aim, and methodology of this white paper.

## CHAPTER 2

explicates the core ideas and key principles of the NEP its focus on ECCE.

## CHAPTER 3

presents the learnings, reflections, challenges, and solutions posited by the industry experts, practitioners, and what the team at Square Panda Education picked up during their need analysis.  aThe chapter concludes with key recommendations and  calls-to-action for all stakeholders to commit to.

## CHAPTER 4

provides pathways to move from theory to practice through practical solutions proposed in the form of various components which are part of Project TARA. This chapter is especially useful for educators trying to bring alive the ideas of the NEP in Anganwadi centers.

# ECCE and NEP Recommendations

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India has embarked on an ambitious journey to revolutionize the educational fabric by prioritizing the foundational stage of learning through Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Recognizing the pivotal role these early years play in a child's life, NEP 2020 aims to fundamentally nurture the formative stages of children aged between 3 and 8 years. It underscores the importance of providing high-caliber early education and cultivating enriching learning atmospheres that significantly influence a child's growth in emotional, social, cognitive, and physical domains.

At the heart of the ECCE framework within the NEP 2020 is the desire to deliver a comprehensive and fitting educational experience for young learners in this age bracket. This aspect of the NEP is built around a curriculum that champions a blend of play and activity-oriented learning, acknowledging the profound effects of experiential learning and granting children the freedom to engage in discovery and exploration at a comfortable pace. The policy's intent is to lay a foundation that stimulates innovation, logical thinking, effective communication, teamwork, and the ability to resolve problems.

The innovative 5+3+3+4 educational structure under NEP 2020 now incorporates nursery education, implying a fresh focus on the earliest years of schooling. Consequently, nursery teachers are expected to receive specialized training that covers aspects of early childhood education, play-centric pedagogies, child growth, and the creation of supportive and inclusive educational settings for young minds.

The ECCE curriculum within NEP 2020 has several key objectives, all converging towards empowering young learners:

1 > **Comprehensive Growth:** NEP 2020's version of ECCE is dedicated to fostering the complete development of children, emphasizing not just the cognitive but also social, emotional, physical, and creative facets. It aspires to cultivate well-balanced individuals through an education that is comprehensive and inclusive.

2 > **Learning through Play and Activities:** The curriculum promotes a method of learning where play and activities are central, offering children tactile experiences, opportunities for exploration, and active involvement in their learning journey. This enables children to grasp concepts through play, experiments, and engaging activities.

# ECCE and NEP Recommendations

**3 >** **Inclusiveness and Equality:** NEP 2020's ECCE stresses on inclusivity, aspiring to guarantee access and engagement for every child, regardless of gender, economic standing, abilities, or cultural backgrounds. The curriculum is designed to build a learning environment that is inclusive and celebrates diversity.

**4 >** **Cultivating Essential Skills:** There is a strong emphasis on nurturing key skills such as creativity, analytical thinking, communication, problem-solving, cooperation, and self-expression. The aim is to furnish young learners with the necessary skills to navigate a dynamic global landscape.

**5 >** **Focus on Well-being and Health:** The curriculum also prioritizes the health and well-being of the young learners, focusing on nutrition, hygiene, physical activity, and emotional health, ensuring a secure and nurturing environment that supports overall development.

**6 >** **Embracing Local and Cultural Contexts:** Recognizing the importance of cultural and local contexts, the ECCE in NEP 2020 seeks to instill a sense of identity and cultural pride in young learners, ensuring that they value and understand their own heritage.
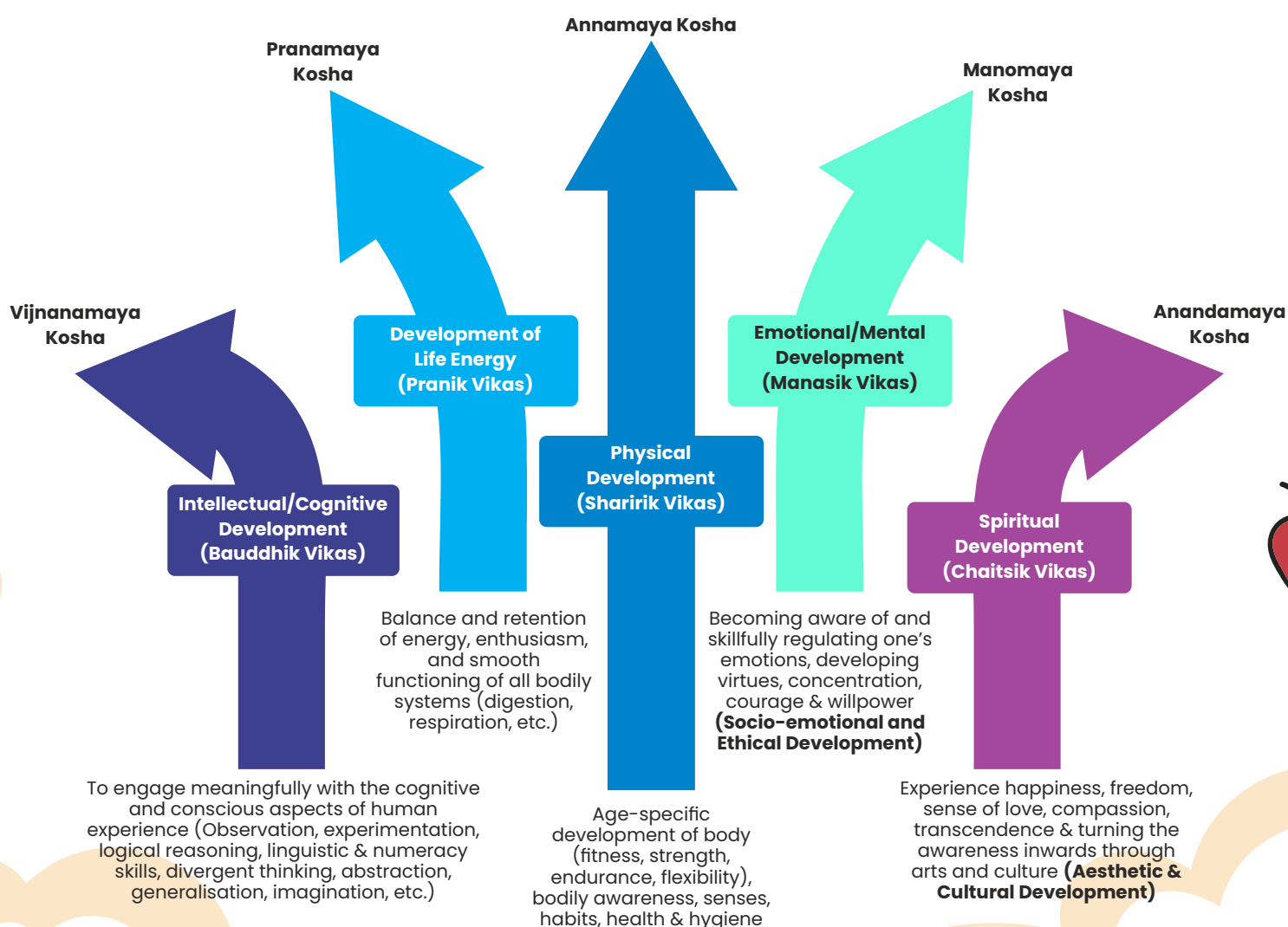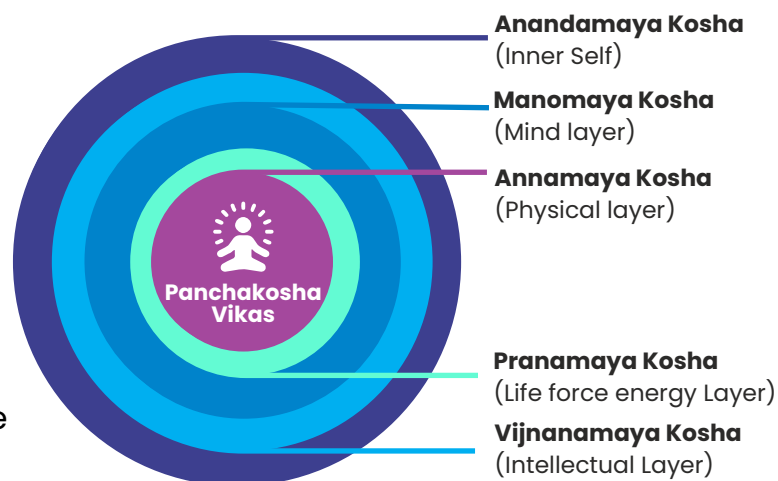
# The Essentials of Development as per NEP

The Indian vision of education focuses on both the internal and external development of the child. The Taittiriya Upanishad articulates Panchakoshas (five sheaths or layers) that comprise a human being: annamaya kosha (physical layer), pranamaya kosha (life force energy layer), manomaya kosha (mind layer), vijnanamaya kosha (intellectual layer) and anandamaya kosha (inner self).

Education should help develop these five sheaths in every child. As shown below, these sheaths can also be understood in the form of modern-day concepts of the different domains of development.



**Panchakosha Vikas**

**Anandamaya Kosha** (Inner Self)
**Manomaya Kosha** (Mind layer)
**Annamaya Kosha** (Physical layer)
**Pranamaya Kosha** (Life force energy Layer)
**Vijnanamaya Kosha** (Intellectual Layer)

**Pranamaya Kosha**

**Annamaya Kosha**

**Manomaya Kosha**

**Vijnanamaya Kosha**

**Anandamaya Kosha**

**Development of Life Energy (Pranik Vikas)**

**Emotional/Mental Development (Manasik Vikas)**

**Intellectual/Cognitive Development (Bauddhik Vikas)**

**Physical Development (Sharirik Vikas)**

**Spiritual Development (Chaitsik Vikas)**

Balance and retention of energy, enthusiasm, and smooth functioning of all bodily systems (digestion, respiration, etc.)

Becoming aware of and skillfully regulating one's emotions, developing virtues, concentration, courage & willpower **(Socio-emotional and Ethical Development)**

To engage meaningfully with the cognitive and conscious aspects of human experience (Observation, experimentation, logical reasoning, linguistic & numeracy skills, divergent thinking, abstraction, generalisation, imagination, etc.)

Age-specific development of body (fitness, strength, endurance, flexibility), bodily awareness, senses, habits, health & hygiene

Experience happiness, freedom, sense of love, compassion, transcendence & turning the awareness inwards through arts and culture **(Aesthetic & Cultural Development)**

# The Essentials of Development as per NEP

The NCF-FS (2022) recommends Panchaadi as the five-step learning process that a teacher should adopt while planning instruction. Below is a brief description of Panchaadi, the 5 steps that should be there in an ideal lesson plan.

Use students' prior knowledge to introduce a new opic/ concept. Students are encouraged to ask questions, explore, and experiment with ideas and materials to gather more information about the new topic.

Students practise through different activities to reinforce their conceptual understanding and strengthen their skills.

Students share the acquired knowledge and understanding with others to strengthen their learning.

**1** **Adhiti** (Introduction)

**3** **Abhyas** (Practice)

**5** **Prasar** (Expansion)

**2** **Bodh** (Conceptual Understanding)

**4** **Prayog** (Application)

Teachers guide students to build an understanding of the core concepts through play, enquiry, discussion, reading, experimentation, etc.

Students, through various projects and activities, apply the understanding gained to their everyday life scenarios and contexts.

*Source: Adapted from the NCF-FS (2022) document*

# The Essentials of Development as per NEP

Teachers are better able to choose appropriate content, pedagogy, and assessments to achieve the aims of education when they have a deeper understanding of the nature and means of knowledge. The draft NCF-SE (2023) document cites the following six traditional ways and means of learning (Pramanas) that are considered accurate, reliable, and valid sources of knowledge.

## Pratyaksa (Perception)

Direct perception of something through five senses (i.e., direct experience) Two types of *Pratyaksa*:

a) *Anubhava* (direct, external perception)
b) *Smriti* (remembered, internal perception)

## Anumana (Inference)

Applying reason or prior knowledge to observations in order to reach a new onclusion

*E.g., inferring fire after observing smoke*

## Upamana (Comparison & Analogy)

Knowing through analogy and comparison: Relating to existing knowledge, observing similarities and differences to know about new things/experiences *E.g., Similes and metaphors*

## Arthapatti (Postulation)

Knowing through circumstantial implication, i.e., the presumption of a fact derived from circumstance or an already established fact

## Anupalabdi (Non-apprehension)

Perception of non-existence or non-recognition (knowledge of a negative as proof to derive further knowledge)

## Sabda (Verbal Testimony)

Knowledge is gained from the poken/written word of an expert (the highest authority/an authentic source) since we have limited time and energy to learn all knowledge first-hand.

# Learnings and Recommendations

The following challenges were identified via the FGDs:

The TARA program, as detailed previously, appears to be a response to specific educational needs and challenges in the Haridwar district of Uttarakhand. Working backward from the components of the TARA program, we can infer several problems that may have been observed in early childhood care and education (ECCE) in this region, leading to the development of such an initiative:

## Lack of Integrated and Thematic Curriculum:

Before TARA, there might have been an absence of a cohesive curriculum that integrates various subjects and learning domains. Education could have been fragmented, with little connection between different areas of learning, making it difficult for children to apply knowledge in a broader context.

## Insufficient Creative and Innovative Learning Programs:

Traditional methods of rote learning and lack of innovative teaching practices may have stunted the creative and intellectual growth of children, prompting the need for TARA's distinguished and creative programs.

## Limited Activity-Based Learning Opportunities:

There might have been an over-reliance on textbook-centric pedagogy with minimal opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning. This can lead to disengagement and a lack of deep understanding among young learners.

## Difficulty in Grasping Abstract Concepts:

The existing education system may have been failing to effectively convey complex ideas, necessitating the CPA methodology that TARA utilizes to bridge the gap between concrete experiences and abstract thinking.

# Learnings and Recommendations

**Theoretical Learning Over Practical Knowledge:**

A possible gap in practical application of theoretical knowledge could have been observed, highlighting the need for TARA's Learn-by-Doing activities.

**Limited Scope for Holistic Development:**

The absence of extracurricular activities suggests that prior educational approaches may not have addressed the physical, emotional, and social development needs of children, focusing narrowly on academic achievements.

**Inadequate Training for Early Childhood Educators:**

Anganwadi workers and early educators might not have been receiving adequate training to deal with the evolving landscape of early childhood education, which TARA seeks to address.

**Low Utilization of Technology in Learning:**

There may have been a lack of technological resources in educational settings or insufficient knowledge about how to effectively integrate technology into early learning, leading to TARA's emphasis on blended learning.

**Inadequate Focus on Literacy and Reading Habits:**

Children in Haridwar may have had limited access to books and reading materials, or there may have been an absence of a reading culture, necessitating innovative approaches like hanging libraries to foster a love for reading.

Given these inferences, the TARA program appears to have been crafted to address and resolve specific deficiencies within the ECCE framework in Haridwar, with the aim of providing a more holistic, engaging, and effective early education experience that aligns with the principles and objectives of NEP 2020.

# 5 key recommendations

To address the challenges inferred, five strategic recommendations can be made:

**1**

## Develop and Implement an Integrated Curriculum Framework:

Collaborate with educational experts to design an integrated curriculum that interlinks various subjects through thematic units, ensuring that learning is interconnected and reflective of real-world scenarios. This framework should be culturally relevant and tailored to the local context of Haridwar, utilizing familiar settings and themes to make learning more relatable and engaging for children.

**2**

## Invest in Teacher Training and Professional Development:

Establish regular and comprehensive training programs for Anganwadi workers and early childhood educators to update their teaching methods and pedagogical strategies. Focus on modern educational techniques, early childhood development, inclusion practices, and effective use of technology in the classroom. Such training should also emphasize the importance of nurturing creativity and critical thinking in young learners.

**3**

## Enhance Learning Through Technology Integration:

Allocate resources to equip educational centers with the necessary technological tools and provide stable internet access where possible. Train educators to utilize digital resources and blended learning models effectively. Launch initiatives like digital literacy drives and establish partnerships with tech companies to create localized educational content.

# 5 key recommendations

**4** **Strengthen Activity-Based and Experiential Learning:**

Create learning environments that encourage exploration, discovery, and hands-on activities. Introduce learning materials and kits that enable children to engage with their lessons actively. Facilitate regular workshops, science fairs, and art exhibitions where children can showcase their projects, thereby solidifying their understanding through practical application.
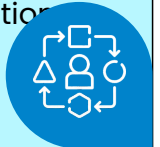
**5** **Promote Literacy and Establish Accessible Reading Spaces:**

Set up well-stocked and inviting library spaces within schools and community centers. Implement programs like book fairs, reading clubs, and storytelling sessions to cultivate a culture of reading. Partner with local authors and illustrators to produce engaging children's books in local languages, and create mobile libraries to reach out to remote areas where access to books is limited.

These recommendations can help address the specific needs identified in the Haridwar district, ensuring that the foundation of early childhood education is strong, inclusive, and conducive to fostering lifelong learners.

# Project TARA: A pathway to move from theory to practice

Aligning with the objectives of ECCE in NEP 2020, TARA could be an educational initiative in Haridwar that shapes the future of its learners with the following:

**1. Integrated, Thematic Curriculum Rooted in Multimodal Learning Experiences:**

TARA's implementation of an integrated curriculum means that teaching does not occur in isolation. Subjects and skills are interconnected around themes, creating a web of learning that reflects real life. This thematic approach is complemented by multimodal learning, which caters to various learning styles—visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and more. For example, a theme on 'Environment' might integrate science, art, and literature, where children engage with the subject through hands-on experiments, storytelling, and creative expression.



**2. Distinguished and Creative Programs Unique to Early Education:**

The programs TARA introduces are designed to stand out by incorporating innovative teaching methods that foster creativity and curiosity. These programs involve creative arts, music, and movement, and are intended to engage children in ways that traditional rote learning cannot. For instance, a creative program might use puppetry to teach language skills or use music to understand mathematical concepts, thereby enriching the educational experience.

**3. Emphasis on Activity-Based Learning:**

By emphasizing activity-based learning, TARA ensures that children are actively involved in their education. This approach is hands-on and experiential, allowing children to learn by doing. It can make abstract concepts tangible and often involves collaborative projects, games, and practical tasks. Such engagement helps solidify learning as students can see the real-world application of their lessons.

# Project TARA: A pathway to move from theory to practice

**4. Utilizing CPA (Concept-Pictorial-Abstract) Methodology:**

CPA is a highly effective approach to teaching complex concepts. TARA might use this method to help children grasp mathematical ideas, for example, by starting with concrete objects (Concept), moving on to pictorial representations (Pictorial), and finally to abstract symbols (Abstract). This progression aids in deep understanding and retention.





**5. Learn-by-Doing Activities:**

This approach reinforces the idea that children learn best when they are directly involved in solving problems and executing tasks. TARA might facilitate activities where students build models, conduct simple experiments, or use learning kits to understand scientific principles. These activities solidify theoretical knowledge through practical application.

**6. Incorporation of Extracurricular Activities:**

Extracurricular activities are critical for the all-around development of children. TARA might offer sports, arts, and other skill-based activities that foster teamwork, discipline, creativity, and physical fitness. These activities often provide relief from academic rigor and can uncover hidden talents and interests.





**7. Comprehensive Training for Anganwadi Workers:**

To support the NEP's vision, TARA's training for Anganwadi workers could be expansive, covering modern pedagogical techniques, child psychology, health and nutrition, and the use of technology in education. Well-trained workers are better equipped to implement the curriculum and handle the diverse needs of children.

# Project TARA: A pathway to move from theory to practice

### 8. Harnessing Technology for Blended Learning:

TARA might deploy technology in Anganwadi centers to facilitate a blended learning environment. This could include educational apps, interactive games, digital storytelling, and online resources that complement traditional teaching methods. Technology can make learning more accessible and engaging for children, especially in remote or underserved communities.

### 9. Promoting Literacy with Hanging Libraries:

To instill a love for reading, TARA's innovative 'hanging libraries' could be spaces within classrooms where books are displayed attractively and are easily accessible, even in small or resource-constrained environments. These libraries encourage a culture of reading by providing a diverse collection of books that are both educational and enjoyable for children to explore.

Each of these elements plays a vital role in realizing the transformative vision of ECCE as envisaged by the NEP 2020. They contribute to creating an ecosystem that is conducive to the comprehensive development of every child, equipping them with the necessary skills to thrive in their future educational endeavors and beyond.