

## **ODL for Parents & Carers: Unexplored Possibilities**

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### **ABSTRACT**

#### **CONTRIBUTORS:**

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#### **PREFERRED LENGTH OF SESSION:**

90 minutes

#### **GROUP SIZE:**

20 to 25

#### **1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

Open & Distance Learning as a strategy for reaching carers is a neglected area. Parents & carers are typically in long term contact with children. If they can be helped to acquire needed information and skills, we can make a critical difference to the development of children. It is difficult to determine the focus of inputs, as it is unclear how to provide access to inputs to carer groups that may not be literate, and have limited access to technology in terms of resources and familiarity. It is important for practitioners in the field to consider how ODL can be provided in effective and interactive ways.

#### **2. SESSION OBJECTIVES**

The session will

- A] Contextualize the discussion through a presentation of the contributor's experiences
- B] Facilitate discussion amongst participants drawing upon their experiences of enabling development of parenting skills in varied carer groups, including those of children with special needs
- C] Use these experiences to arrive at suggestions for ODL initiatives

#### **3. HOW IT WILL BE ORGANIZED:**

- 3.1 Brief presentation to contextualize the discussion
- 3.2 Sharing from 4-6 participants of their experiences in working with parents / teachers
- 3.3 Listing priority themes
- 3.4 Work in pairs/small groups to identify priority efforts related to appropriate technologies, learner support, and themes
- 3.5 Sharing in group and 'listing' suggestions for all 3 areas.
- 3.5 Wrap up

#### **4. INTENDED OUTCOMES:**

- Identification of relevant themes for carer group ODL programs
- Suggestions for enabling outreach in locations where facilities for carers are limited
- Identification of appropriate technologies in the context of listed themes

## OUTLINE OF DISCUSSION SESSION

Duration – 90 minutes.

Number of expected participants 20 to 25

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Open & Distance Learning as a strategy for reaching out to parents/carers is a neglected area. Parents & carers [including teachers, social workers, recreational & child care centre workers, pediatricians and other medical professionals] are typically in intimate and long term contact with children. If they can be helped to acquire needed information and skills, we can make a critical difference to the education and development of children in their care. It is not always easy to determine what the focus of such inputs should be, nor is it clear how best one can provide access to these inputs to carer groups that may or may not be literate, have relatively limited access to technology both in terms of resources involved as well as the unease possibly experienced because of its unfamiliarity. It is important to consider how ODL can be provided to facilitate interactivity and achieve the 'real' purpose for which parents / carers may opt for such programs. This is the basis for planning the discussion session amongst practitioners in the field.

### 2. SESSION OBJECTIVES

- A] Contextualize the discussion through a presentation of the contributor's experiences
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### 3. HOW IT WILL BE ORGANIZED:

3.1 Brief presentation, Summary as follows, to contextualize the discussion – 15 minutes.

#### **Presentation 1: My interest in ODL for parents**

- How it all began
- My first attempts
- Related experiences
- Other initiatives
- ....in the pipeline
- Some insights
- Ongoing Questions

#### **Presentation 2: How it all began**

- Professional training... and a sense of 'dissatisfaction'
  - Training as a 'counselor' leading to limited reach
  - Recognition that parents wanted help
  - Lack of acknowledgement from formal educational system that 'partnering' was crucial to children's achievement
  - Recognition that parents are a rich resource
- Experiences as a parent...and some reflection
  - Becoming a parent and recognizing of my own vulnerability especially as the mother of child with a disability
  - Need for the 'formal' system through schools or other professions to reach out proactively to ensure that children are enabled
- Working with parents and teachers ...f2f...and a few handouts...
  - Wider definition of parents to include carers and setting up the Centre for the Development of Parenting Skills
  - Workshops with teachers and parents focusing on skill development
  - Preparation of handouts
- Wanting to reach out...and some dreams...
  - Studying Parent Needs systematically – doctoral dissertation

- Parents need for information on varied topics, through the media!

### **Presentation 3: My first attempts**

- Opportunities
  - Working with my own parents provided the first formal opportunity to prepare distance learning material
- YCMOU ... A course in 'child development' for parents & teachers...
  - Preparation of regional language -Marathi ODL material (YCMOU 1998)
  - Simultaneous and conscious attempt to address teachers and other child care professionals along with parents
  - Field tryouts reiterated the need and potential for ODL
  - Course remained unutilized and unknown...
- IGNOU...a course on 'Guidance' and another on 'Integrated Education'
  - Certificate course in guidance for primary school teachers (IGNOU 1993)
  - Issues that remain to be addressed include balancing academic requirements with ground realities of teachers' job situations, addressing obstacles caused by diversity of language, social-cultural backgrounds, literacy levels etc.
  - Course outreach to teachers remains limited (UNESCO 2001) (UNESCO 2002).
- In the distant horizon...
  - Exploring alternative ways of reaching parents and carers that didn't look at certificates or degrees as the 'be all and end all' of learning experiences

### **Presentation 4: Related experiences**

- Involvement with films
  - Student Films developed at the Dept. of Communication Media for Children [SNDT Women's University] on various issues e.g. children's developing interests, stresses related to assessment systems, acceptance of individual differences, and enabling effective use of media and the internet
  - Stories developed by students [Department of Human Development, Nirmala Niketan & Department of Communication Media for Children, SNDT Women's University] had themes such as sibling rivalry, adoption, hospitalization, self esteem, death etc.
- Resource Packs for 'Grips' plays...
  - Enhancing the potential of children's plays through resource packs containing a blend of information, stories, pictures, exercises, and games
  - Enabling parents to dialogue with their children on issues raised in the plays on themes related to power and authority relationship amongst parents and children, physical disability, environmental pollution, and communal riots
- The unknown parent/teacher
  - Attempt to reach parents through a column in a children's magazine (Super Junior Times) and through a now defunct website ([www.maverickids.com](http://www.maverickids.com))
  - Parenting issues included developing independence, helping children prepare for their first day at school, sibling rivalry, making journeys pleasant, handling children when they are ill, creating reading environments, selecting services for children, children with special needs, values.
  - Recognition that internet facilities still very limited
- Some research and some field work ...
  - Research and field level work continued to build insight and ideas about parental needs and strategies used by families to help the children and making their lives easier. (Kulkarni 1999) (SRTT 2005) (Kulkarni 2006)
- A key question remained unanswered.
  - How does one get this material to the people it was developed for? It remains unpublished, unknown, used only with very small groups
- What about TV?
  - Exploring popular mass media, viz. television
  - Chat show for parents and children on television

- Parents from different walks of life, rural and urban settings, varied socio-economic levels saw the episodes over and over again
- Need to produce more programs for parents

#### **Presentation 5: Other initiatives**

- The National Trust
  - Set up for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation & Multiple Disabilities, under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India.
  - A recently begun initiative involves developing material for uploading on information kiosks to be set up in often frequented places like hospitals
  - The objective is to provide basic information on disabilities to parents who are often overwhelmed by the first recognition of disability
- Jnana Prabodhini Institute of Psychology [JPIP]
  - Requests came from across Maharashtra from people who can not access regular courses.
  - The goal is to reach those who are in positions through which they can support children's development and education
  - Distance learning material was prepared for the course - CAPEP [Child & Adolescent Psychology: Enhancing Potentials] (JPIP 2006)
  - ODL is a 'new medium' for many course writers involved and its potential is also being explored

#### **Presentation 6: ....in the pipeline**

- Jnana Prabodhini Institute of Psychology...
  - Vocational courses are being planned e.g. like 'caring for the elderly', 'guidance & counseling'
  - Personal Growth courses to address quality of life issues and focus on human relationships, readiness for parenting
  - Exploration of the potential of their website to facilitate interactivity
  - Remaining aware of cultural issues in the context of, for example, intervention strategies, counselor roles, as well as constraints (for example, providing skills based training) that need a creative, innovative response.
- Forum for Autism...
  - A parent organization with a very specific target group, viz. the family of, and the person with autism
  - Recognition that the internet is unavailable in many remote parts of India
  - Exploring the idea of ODL through an interactive CD in combination with a workbook
  - Focus on providing self study material to a motivated group with no need for formal certification

#### **Presentation 7: Some insights**

- Some obstacles
  - Common impediments include low levels of literacy, remote areas, limited access to technology, unfamiliarity with technology, cultural and language diversity, lack of information about available courses
  - Lack of professionals for developing ODL material
- Vocational training
  - Many ODL courses planned for parents and carers have tremendous potential for developing into vocational courses
  - The same material could address different groups simultaneously
- No 'one' strategy is sufficient...
  - Diversity in the groups that need to be reached requires using different strategies, methods
  - Combinations of technologies and media that facilitate interactivity
- Opting outside formal 'certification'

- Motivation for learning may not be related to employment requirements
- Success of open and distance learning programs needs to be considered from outside the formal system framework
- Partnerships and Collaborations...
  - Professionals need to be enabled to develop distance learning material
  - Premier organizations need to provide collaborative support, from preparing material and creating awareness to dissemination of the material
  - Parents and carers are resources too...

**Presentation 8: Ongoing Questions**

- Beginning with more collaboration - Arriving at concrete suggestions from shared experiences
  - Which themes / issues should be handled on a priority basis, and how? [not just themes but assessment and methodologies for interaction & feedback as well]
  - How does one reach and support learners? Getting the ODL program, with all its components, to remote areas
  - What technologies, what combination of media would be most appropriate? [effective, viable from infrastructure/access perspectives, financially feasible]

**3.2** Sharing from 4-6 participants of their individual/country experiences in working with parents /teachers – 20 minutes.

**3.3** Brainstorming to list priority themes – 5 minutes

**3.4** Work in pairs/small groups to identify priority efforts in terms of appropriate technologies, ways of establishing learner support, and clarifying ideas related to curriculum and assessment that should be the emphasis of ODL programs. Each of the groups will focus on one of the 3 areas indicated. A brief, as follows, will be given to each group to help focus attention on aspects within each area. 20 minutes

**Common Introduction to Briefs: Assumptions**

- ODL has untapped potential for use with groups viz. parents and other carers including teachers that indirectly yet powerfully, influence the development of young children and youth.
- ODL could serve to achieve many different purposes going beyond certification in order to meet requirements for employment or maintaining/upgrading skills to retain employment. Viz. we recognize that many carer groups may choose to develop skills that they need to work more effectively with children in their care in formal settings such as schools / child care centres/ recreational centres or at home.
- ODL programs developed for these groups need to address a variety of diversities for example, cultural, economic, language, literacy levels, access to and familiarity with technology. In addition, we may be considering very large numbers that need to be reached.

**Brief 1: Appropriate technologies**

There are many things to consider about developing an ODL program. Your group will focus on identifying appropriate technologies.

Although the choice of 'technology' goes hand in hand with decisions regarding curriculum & content, as well as existing or feasible learner support systems, you are encouraged to list the range as well as combinations of technologies that are most likely to meaningfully address the circumstances described in the assumptions.

**Brief 2: Networks and resources for learner support**

There are many things to consider about developing an ODL program. Your group will focus on identifying networks and resources for learner support. List your ideas about how these networks can be created and made operational in the context of the circumstances described in the assumptions.

There may be other assumptions that you make while developing your suggestions. Do indicate these clearly.

You may also consider the following while making your suggestions:

- How will you address the needs of learners who may be 'unfamiliar' with the technology you plan to use?
- How will you ensure interactivity? – frequency / kind / purpose /

**Brief 3: Innovation in curriculum and assessment**

Among the critical aspects to consider while developing an ODL program are issues related to curriculum and assessment methods.

Your group will focus on identifying relevant innovations in curriculum and assessment that are, or can be made viable. Do put down your ideas about how these innovations can be incorporated in the development and implementation of ODL material in the context of the circumstances described in the assumptions.

There may be other assumptions that you make while developing your suggestions. Do indicate these clearly.

You may also consider the following while making your suggestions:

- What collaborations are necessary in course development?
- How can one get formal systems [even Open Universities] to recognize the purpose with which parents / carers opt for such courses and become genuinely flexible in terms of program duration, objectives, assessment and so on?
- What assessment and feedback strategies are possible?

**3.5** Sharing in the whole group and coming up with a 'listing' for each of the 3 areas which seems acceptable/feasible to all the group members. 25 minutes

**3.6** Wrap up (5min)

**4. INTENDED OUTCOMES:**

- Identification of most relevant themes/topics for parent group ODL programs with rationale for focus
- Suggestions for enabling outreach in remote areas or in locations where facilities for parents/families are limited
- Identification of appropriate technologies in the context of listed programs/themes

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