

Implementing Changes in the Preschool Classroom
An Action-based Case-study
July – October 2004

Early Childhood Care and Development Program
Plan Bangladesh

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List of Abbreviations

CCCD	Child Centered Community Development
CLP	Community Learning Program
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ICDDR'B	International Centre for Diarrhea Diseases and Research Bangladesh
SBK	Shishu Bikash Kendra

**Implementing Changes in the Preschool Classroom:
An Action-based Case-study from Bangladesh**

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Introduction

Plan International, is an international, humanitarian child centered development organization without religious, political and government affiliation. Plan works around 42 developing countries with the fundamental principal “children are at the heart of everything we do.”

Plan Bangladesh, started its operations in Bangladesh in 1994. Today Plan works in five districts (Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, and Gazipur) and Metropolitan City (Dhaka) with a commitment of reaching poor people deprived from their rights through a highly participatory process called Child Centered Community Development (CCCD), the core work process for Plan Programs in Bangladesh.

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is one of the key program package of Community Learning Program (CLP). Preschool interventions Plan started in 1997 following a curriculum developed by Early Childhood Development (ECD) Unit (a joint project of Plan Bangladesh and Save the Children-USA). In the year 2001 when ECD Unit evolved then Plan designed a curriculum for their own. After two years of running the preschools using the curriculum the evaluation took place and there were some strong recommendations in some specific areas for improving the quality of the program.

In the year 2004 Plan Bangladesh has decided to evaluate their all intervention program on ECCD. The Evaluation was done by an external investigator Professore Frances Aboud with collaboration with ICDDR”B. The evaluation was done in qualitative aspect for all of the interventions e.g. Parenting, Shisu Bikash Kendra and Preschool. Key areas of the preschool evaluation were- curriculum and syllabus, activities for the children, teacher-child interaction etc.

Considering the major recommendations Plan decided to incorporate some changes in preschools in various aspect. Initially Plan decided to implement the changes as per recommendation in 10 schools of different program units and it was also decided that a successful piloting will spread out to all the centers in years 2005.

Through this action based research major focus was given to the areas of quality of teacher-child interaction, cognitive development, linguistic development, motor-skill development and development of emotional, social and inter-personal communication skills.

Over the six months of planning-acting-observing-reflecting there was some significant changes observed in the classrooms and the researchers came to the conclusion that those activities caused the positive changes could be considered for incorporation in the preschool curriculum in the coming years.

Chapter-II

Study Procedure:

The study was carried out through July to October 2004. The key method for the study was observation. But how to observe in a quality perspective it was important prior to the study begins. So a group of people were selected as research assistants for observation to collect the data, those were mainly the ECCD Technical Officers of Plan Bangladesh.

Training on action research was organized and imparted for the Research assistants and were facilitated by Professoer Frances Aboud. After the training an action plan was developed for data collection through July to October. The data were collected through observation by following a check lists.

We have done some activities with the teachers and technical officers in every month under the supervision of the principal investigator of this study Mahmuda Akhter in every program such as reflections and dialogues regarding the data we have collected through observation and changes were made after the discussion in pilot preschools with the consent of ECCD specialist.

From the beginning of the observation, we focused on all of the children's play and interactions in the classrooms so that we could understand the classroom activity, interaction and teachers behaviors with the preschoolers. To avoid the biasness we deployed the research assistants for not the schools of his or her own programme unit but for another.

In early July for the purpose of the study, we began to observe in ten Pilot preschool classrooms. The Classrooms observation of the study began in July and Ended in October. We spent two and half hours to three hours in the classroom observation including transition time, when children were starting and ending the school day, observing interactions and play that occurred among the children. Children arrived at the school between 8:30 to 9:00 in the morning and left around noon.

Through the process of data collection by observation classroom in our action research, the focus was obtaining a complete understanding of the preschoolers classroom activity, interactions among the peers, with the teachers and teachers activity and input on children were focused more closely by observations.

Methodology:

Tools for data collection through observation included field note. Observations in the classroom were recorded in as much detail possible for analysis. Field notes came up in many forms but in general they included descriptions, direct quotations and comments as observer. During the study we tried to function as a complete observer during the class time. However, since our presence itself might have had an impact on the context unaware that we were not aware of. For the whole of the study, our roles were like an observer. When we had been in the study for longer period, we became accepted part in the classroom as observer.

Study Sample:

In year 2004 there were 180 preschool running in the different program units and by the partners. To experiment the recommended changes a decision was taken by principal investigator of this study Mahmuda Akhter to select 10 preschools for piloting the recommendations. Discussing with management and technical people the following 10 schools were selected for piloting and doing the action research. The name of the pilot preschools are given in the table 1. We observed all the children of these ten pilot preschools for our study.

Table: 1

Program Unit	Name of the Pilot Preschools
Jaldhaka	Koimari Bandar Madrassa para
Khansama	Bala para Nurul M Para
Chirirbandar	Isamoti Palpara
Gazipur	Atlora Shahjahanpur
Dhaka Urban	Bawniabadh A Block
Hatibandha	Ketkibari

Chapter Two:

Khoshal Khabor:

Generally teachers begin this session with preschoolers with a specific topic for discussion. It may be a topic related that what they have seen on the way when they were getting back to home after their school. They may tell news what they have seen to be happened around them. It needs to have a description. The preschoolers will describe an event and episode to share their experiences which is a creative movement to increase their vocabulary. We observed in all pilot preschools the children are saying their news by one sentence. For instance we are describing one episode from our one pilot preschool how they share their news:

Teacher: What will we do now?

Student: we will read "khoshal khabor"?

Student1: My grandmother said that take bath and go to school.

Student2: Two boys quarrel with each other?

Teacher: who else want to say news today?

Students: Apa I want, Apa I want.

Teacher: All right, you will say tomorrow.

Another example of "Khoshal khabor"

Child1: I fall down from rickshaw and I got pain.

Child2: My father bought two pants for me.

Child3: I saw a snake.

Child4: We will go for outing on Thursday

Child 5: One unknown man was going by a van; he offered me a "Datai gota" to eat. I did not eat that goota.

Needs to Improve:

These "chats" are an opportunity for the preschoolers to learn how to organize their thoughts. As they talk about their experience, children learn how to tell a story with a beginning, middle and end. But in our pre school the children are not describing an event or episode. Most of the children in all pilot preschool talk by one sentence. The teacher always start like what will we do now? Then the children tell their news by one sentence. Children learn their language and increase their vocabulary by talking and listening to the people. So the teachers have to encourage the children to talk in descriptive way to enrich their vocabulary.

Story Telling:

As per the evaluation recommendation we have brought changes in both in quality and quantity aspect of the story telling class. About fifty story books were included in all pilot preschools. To select the books we have considered the issues of the content variety of the stories, pictures and texts, vocabularies, etc. To develop the rereading skill among the preschoolers we have introduced big books and small books in the class room. On the other hand we have rearranged the way of story telling, children's participation and explaining the characters and words.

As it was observed, story telling is fun but it is important to the children to make sense of their world. In this study we have found that all the children like the story telling

class. They enjoy this class very much. This is the time when we have found that all the children sit patiently, sit quietly to listen the story for long time. We have found that all the children are actively involved in the story telling class. When there were laugh in the story the children laugh, when there were motion in the story our children started to move their body. The teachers made the story telling class alive to all children acted out by talking, moving, laughing and crying.

For instance:

Teacher asks: Do you want to listen story?

Students replies: Yes, madam (Loudly).

The teacher sat on high tool so that all the children could see her and the book.

Teacher: What is the name of the stroy?

Children: Opu r Biral (Opu's Cat).

Teacher: She read out the book loudly.

Teacher: Opu has a cat. Apu loves the cat so much. Then the teacher shows the picture of Opu and his cat. In one episode of this story the grand mother of Anu had bitten the cat and the teacher acted out the episode like the way it was described in the book. The face of all the children became sad when the teacher showed that the grand mother was biting the cat.

In this study we have observed that most of the children don't ask questions spontaneously. Most of the teachers in all preschools also don't ask opened questions to the children. Most of the teachers also do not explain the difficult words and sentences to the children. We also observed that sometime the children ask question but the teachers forget to give answer of the question asked by the children.

Strengths of the Story telling class:

!) The teachers sit on a high tool close to the children. Maintain eye contact with the children. This is important. The teachers use facial expressions to refled the mood of the story. During the story telling time if the teachers ask questions that help to create participation of the children in the story. Our teachers ask questions "then do you know what happened?" The children gave answer of the question.

!!) In our study we have found that after telling a story the the teachers ask questions to the children "how was the story?" The children reply "it is very good."(Loudly). All the children learn best when they are actively involved. During our observation we have seen that the teachers by making facial expressions and asking questioned make the children active in the story telling class.

!!!) The teacher rotate the book frequently, so the children don't feel bore. We have found during our observation that when the teachers asked to the children "why do you like the story?" The children reply "The story is new." Teacher again asked "what else?" The children replied "there are lots of picture in the books."

!V) There are lots of books which has colored picture of different animals, big houses, jungle and human being and we have seen that many children like the picture and they spent time by seeing the pictures. The pictures are bright but simple. Some of the stories

have hidden/mysterious character (for example, the magic porridge pot) the children like to know the hidden character.

Needs to Improve:

!) Story telling helps children to develop their literacy. It is also helpful to ask the children to retell the story. Retelling does not mean memorizing it means narrating the story in the child's own words. So the teacher can invite the child to retell the story as though telling it to a friend who had never heard it before.

!!) Teachers need to explain and discuss the intensions of the character in the story.

!!1) Teachers need to give answers of questions asked by the students.

!!!!) The teachers need to discuss difficult words and sentences to the children.

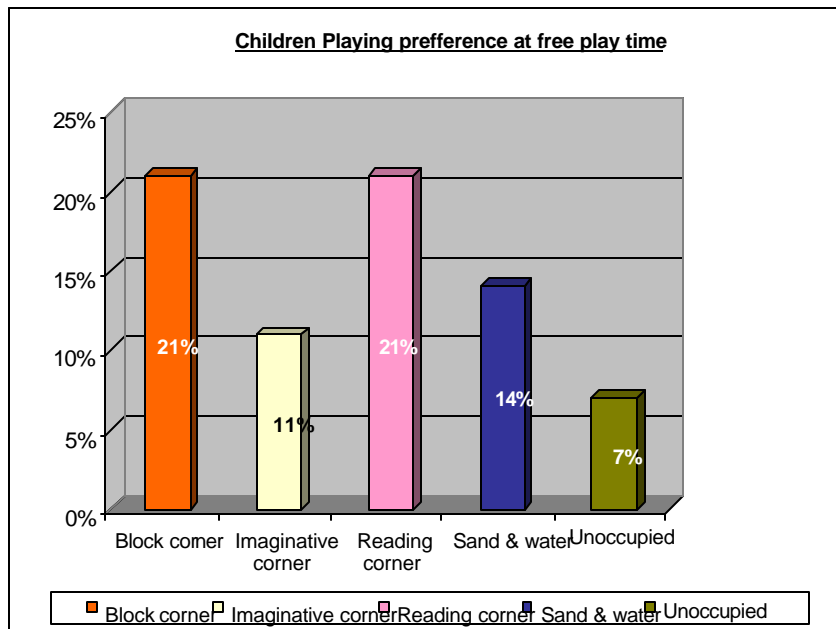
!!!!!) The teachers need to pronounce words correctly and clearly.

Chapter Three:

Free Play:

Play helps children to develop her social, emotional and intellectual development. In this study we observed that the children have freedom to choose among many different activities. The teacher has created the classroom environment and arranged the choices they will find. Free play is not time off for the teacher. On the contrary, she should be paying close attention to the children, interacting with them, offering guidance and help where necessary, noting progress and difficulties.

Our pilot preschool has brought lot of changes in the different corners to make the play time enjoyable for the children. The changes has brought to the pilot preschools the blocks are well measured, so the children can manipulate the blocks, incorporation a bulk of pattern blocks, cubes, puzzles and other many manipulative. Lot of new games such as Bingo, Tara Dorar Khela, Memory game, Puzzles, Aasho manush Banai, has introduced in the class room to make the play time more enjoyable.



Block Corner:

There is so much going in the block corner that it is easy to understand why it is often the most popular area in the preschool classroom. Sometimes groups of the children begin to act as if they own the space. In this study we have seen that most of the time boys dominate the area, making it difficult for girls. If a teacher positions herself in the block corner for part of the day, girls are more likely to enter and use the area. There are different colors of blocks. In the block corner 21% boys played in this corner out of total 280 children. We have seen that Atloa, Shahjahan and Dhaka Urban in these three Pilot Preschools in an average 2 girls played in the block corner. So the involvement of girls in the block is very less. This is one of the popular corners for the children during free play. Building with blocks is lots of fun and it teaches many skills that children will use later. Many of the concepts learned from block building for example children learning about the gravity, stability, weight, balance and systems building with blocks. Through trial

and error, they learn inductive thinking, discovery and the properties of matter and the interaction of force.

Dramatic Play:

This is the domain of girls. In this study we have observed that in all pilot preschools most of the girls are occupying this corner and they are playing with pans and pots, stuffed animals, dolls (soft and unbreakable), toy telephones, tea sets, doll beds and carriages. All the girls like to play in the dramatic play corner rather than boys. In this corner in all pilot preschools we have seen that 11% girls played in this corner out of total 280 children. In the imaginative corner the children develop a game. They first set up a house; cook the pretend cans of food, offer foods to friends and the boys are made a market and they become a seller and they are selling vegetables, fish and sometime the girls come to buy foods from the boys.

All of these actions help children to learn about sequential acts. The children have a story in their mind that helps them to perform each of these stages in a coherent way. We watched them to scold a doll for being naughty or gets angry because he doesn't want to eat. Dramatic play helps children to think abstractly, which is important for the children to develop their cognitive level. This is the only corner where we have seen cooperative play.

Sand and Water Corner:

This is one of the popular corners to our preschool children. In our observational research we have found that 14% children played in this corner out of total 280 children which is more than one tenth of the totality. The children who are playing in the sand and water corner they always play in this corner. They play whole 45 minutes in this corner. Some time become milk seller who sells milk, the children make pitha with sands and they offer foods to their friends to eat. Sometime the children catch fish with the fishing nets. They don't change their corner. It is the corner which is outside of the classroom.

In this action research I have seen that the most popular games are to the children:

Name of the Games	Name of the Popular game	Name of not popular games
TaraDhorar Khela	TaraDhorar Khela	Aaso Manosh Banaoi
AasoManosh Banaoi	Bingo	Rongin Boyam
Bingo	Memory Game	Puzzles
Rongin Boyam		Geo Board
Memory Game		Pattern Bolcks
Puzzles		
Geo Board		
PatternBolck		

Reading Corner:

During the study time we have watched that the book corners have books reflecting the range of levels. There are simple books as well as picture books with story line. We have observed that this place where young children come and look through books by

themselves. This is one of the very popular corners to the young children. In all pilot preschools 21% children both boys and girls out of total 280 are looking through the books almost all 45 minutes. We also observed that they looked at the books individually or reading as part of group. The children see the pictures of the books few minutes, then they change the books from book basket, they laugh when they see any interesting pictures, after seeing the pictures the children also request the teacher to read the story for them during the free play time and the read the story for the children. So the books are getting a part of young children day, it will set the stage for lifelong interest in reading.

The most popular corners to our preschoolers are the block corners, which is dominated by the boys and it is also matter to concern because we need involve the girls in this to play at this corner. Another popular corner is the reading book corner. One thing is important here is that in this corner the boys and girls both are engaged in reading books.

In all preschools we have observed that two to three children remain unoccupied, they don't play. We have observed that sometime they play five to ten minutes and then spend time without playing. Sometime they observed others playing, sometime they did nothing. Teachers need to notice when a child get unoccupied and need to try to engage them. In all preschools 7% of out of 280 children are remain unoccupied.

In this study we have observed the types of play behavior during the free playtime. We observed that most of our preschoolers prefer to play parallel play and solitary play (especially in the block corner). When they play parallel play they played side by side without interaction, it seems to us that two are not playing together, when the teacher separated them the children got upset. We have also observed that many children were playing solitary play.

Strengths:

- !) The Classrooms has a pleasant environment.
- !!) There are lots of materials for the children e.g. books, blocks, puzzles, patterns blocks, color pencils.
- !!!) The children enjoy the whole 45 minutes of freeplay time.
- !V) Most of the children remain engage in the freeplay time to enjoy the play.

Needs to improve:

- !) Free play work well and this the most enjoyable time for the preschoolers. They like to play in the free play time. But few things are need to improve. During our observation we have observed that in ten pilot preschools most of the children are playing parallel and solitary play. They are not playing cooperative gave themselves. Need to improve cooperative or group game for children social development.
- !!) Children are interested in materials that help them understand spatial concepts such as puzzles and blocks. We have seen that the children are interested to play with blocks but not with puzzles. Because they don't know how play with puzzles and quality of the puzzles are not good as well. We have watched that many puzzles lost its color and get older.

!!!) Teachers struggle with the puzzles themselves. They need know how to play with them. They should have introduced the easier ones first.

!V) The all pilot preschools has big play ground in front of the schools. We need to encourage the children to outdoor play which will help physical development of our preschoolers.

!!!!!!) The teachers were generally engaged with the children. But they need try to involve in playing during free play those children who are unoccupied.

Maths:

In maths class we tried to give the concepts in a way so the children can realize the real life use of the concepts. To make the class realistic and entraining in the pilot preschools we incorporated math manipulative bags and maximizes the use of real materials in the class rooms. In the math class teacher distributing the math bag around the circle. Children are taking out the sheets and lay them in front of them on the floor.

Teacher: What will we do now?

Children: We will do math now.

T: What we have learned yesterday?

S: 16

T: Momtaz, bring 17 cubes. Then Momtaz starts to count from 1-17 by cubes. While Momtaz were counting, other children were watching her counting.

Malek another child came with seeds to count from 1-17. He counts from 1-17. After completion his counting the teacher said him thanks.

Rashed brought leaves and he also counts from 1-17 with leaves.

Azreena brings sticks and counts from 1-17. The teacher with her students clapped her and said her thanks.

Teacher had drawn seventeen balls in the black board and all children counted loudly from 1-17 along with teacher in a rhythmic voice.

Teacher again had drawn seventeen sticks and the children counted loudly from 1-17 along with teacher without rhythmic voice.

Teacher called one child near to the black board and said her to count the sticks herself. The child had done.

Teacher: Now the teacher wrote the number 17 and said that this is sataro (17). Then the teacher asked the students to tell her that how does the sataro (17) make? All the students remain quiet.

Teacher replied that 1 and 7 together is seventeen. Then the teacher said that now all of you will 17 on the side black board. The teacher asked the students to open their math book.

Children: Take out their math bag and they opened their page number 17. Some of the children cannot open their pages and the teacher helped them to open the page. Then

the teacher starts to count the picture of Bananas from the math book from 1-17. Then the children again starts to count the picture of the Aero plane from 1-17.

Teacher: The teacher instructed the children to put their finger on the number 17 on the math book. The children had done it accordingly.

Teacher said to shut up the book and the children close their books. The teacher said the children to write 17 on the side black board and the children starts to it. All the children wrote the number 17 except two children. The teacher did not help those two children who did not write the number.

Teacher: We have finished our write up. So what will we do now?

C: Some of the children said that now we will work with the math bag.

T: Call the group leader to distribute the math bag.

T: open your math bag and stretch the mat.

C: Again all the children starts to count number from 1-17 by buttons, match sticks and with thread.

T: Teacher goes to all children to observe their activity. She sees the time and said that close up the math bag. The children close up math bag and the group leader starts to collect the math bags from the children.

The math session is too long for the children. They are doing the same thing again and agin everyday. It is repetitive.

See the counting at a glance:

Maths:

Counting with seeds	1-17
Counting with blocks	1-17
Counting with leaves	1-17
Counting with sticks	1-17
Counting with balls	1-17

Handing the math books to the all children and they count pictures in the maths books 1-17 (twice). The children also counted out matchsticks, buttons from the math bag. That the why the get irritated, the child get bored, the time is running short and sometime we have seen that for the short of time the teacher and teacher assistants snatches bags from the child.

Areas need to Improved:

!)Children love to count. In our pilot preschools have lots of materials for counting, there was much variety in the concepts e.g. counting 1 to 17 probably so many times using buttons, matchsticks, crayons, flowers, in pairs, as a group, individually but still the activity was the same. The children will get bored in the long run. So teaching methods relied on a lot of rote learning. Emphasis needs to give on rotating the materials to make the class more pleasant for the children.

!!) How are the math bags being used? They should be used for more than just counting.

!!!) The children need to use the concept of number and math outside math class.

!!!!) This is not the problem only in math class also we observed in other class that the children give answer of the question asked by the teacher by repeating not by thinking.

Could the play time be scheduled for a run around outside?

Journal Writing:

In the journal class all the children sit and five of the children distribute the journal khata to all the children and the teacher write sentences on the Khata of the five children by rotating. The teachers write "Amadar barite akta bagan achca" or " Amader barite akta pukur accha. Pukur a onek mach accha." The children can draw whatever they want to draw in the journal Khata. We have observed in three pilot preschools that the teachers have conversation with the children about their picture. For instance Rabbi and one of the teachers enthusiastically having conversation about their pictures:

Teacher: What are you drawing?

Rabbi: I have drawn a pond with fish.

Teacher: What are name of the fish?

Rabbi: Rui, Iccha and Tangra.

Teacher: What will you do with fish?

Rabbi: I will seel it.

Teacher: Where do will you sell it?

Rabbi: In the market.

Teacher: What will you do with the money?

Rabbi: I will buy chocolate to eat.

Teacher: Do you like Chocolate?

Rabbi: I like chocolate. My father don't buy chocolate for me.

In this conversation, Rabbi shared his thought through picture. He wanted to get money by selling fish and with the money he wanted to buy chocolate. However, the conversation above demonstrated efforts that the children and the teacher showed to understand Rabbi's intentions by asking questions.

However, our findings in this study reflect that children can only draw five to six pictures. They are drawing those pictures regularly. I observed that most of the children can only draw in their journal khata one type of flower, fish, flag, scribbles and house, leaf; represent a person with circle for head, two vertical lines for legs and lines for the hands. Few of them can draw above mentioned pictures as well as boat, pond, tree. Most of the children get stagnant on these pictures. Most of the teachers can not have conversation with children about their picture due to lack of time.

The teachers attempted to do too much in the time available-some activities would have benefited from more time. E.g. the teacher wrote in the journal about the pictures that the children had drawn there was not much discussion. The child could have told the group what the picture was about.

Chapter Five:

Teacher Interactions with Children:

In this chapter I attempted to describe the relation between the children and the teacher. In this study we have observed the interaction of the teachers with the children during the class time. The teachers are generally positive and give individual honor to the children. The teachers are motivated and working hard during the session. They take good attempt at varying the teaching methods-e.g. group activities, pairs, individual work, small group work.

The teachers express appropriate expression of emotions to the children, both positive and negative e.g. joy, pleasure, excitement and negative e.g. anger, frustration, sadness.

We have watched that the teachers express affection through behaviors such as physical affection, eye contact, tone of voice and smiles.

We have not seen during our study time that teachers use any physical punishment such as hitting or slapping, teachers never use verbal abuse, threats or insulting remarks.

Needs to improve of the teachers:

In all preschools we have observed that two to three children who are not attentive in any class. They don't follow the teachers instruction. They exhibit at least two to three anti social behavior each day. One thing is important that majority of preschools children don't show any aggressive behaviors. We have also observed that boys exhibit higher anti social behaviors than girls. The preschoolers who exhibit anti social behaviors they usually:

- Hit or kick other children,
- Push and shove other children
- Grab others kids toys
- Pinch with pencils and bite other children
- "Boss" around other children.

Our teachers can not control these hyper active or inattentive children during the class time. Interact with children without using any physical punishment make job difficult for the teachers. The teachers need to know how to handle these children who interrupting the other children.

Our teachers need to have skill to help children to resolve their conflict by talking or sharing toys with each others.

Our teachers need to facilitate positive peer interaction for children who are isolation and very calm children.

The teachers needs help children to develop friendship to play with and learn each other.

The teachers are the essential part of this programme. They are the people who are conducting communication with children, who are using all the materials and dealing with children and with the community closely. So we have kept it our mind that children get benefit most when their teachers have high levels of formal education and

specialized early childhood professional preparation. We know the educational limitation of and lack of skill of our teachers. With all these limitations we have to try to increase the knowledge and skills of our teachers.

These teaching assistant were good at being involved and anticipated the materials the children were going to need (e.g. she sharpened the pencils) but she was rather intrusive with her discipline.

There was too many activities crammed into a short time. It is a fine line between having activities and not doing enough. The teacher got stressed as she ran out of time despite regular checking her watch and timetable.

Participants:

The participants in this study were 280 children, 10 teachers in ten pilot preschools. Graph 2 presents the number of the children in each schools and the gender ratio in all schools. We observed that Uttar Isamoti and Koimari bandar differences between boys and girls high, the number boys higher then girls. The number of boys and girls are equal in Hatibandha, Palpara, Nurul member para and Shahjahanpur pilot preschools. The number of girls is little higher then boys only in Dhaka urban schools.

