

**A New Strategy for Child Development: A Study on Montessori
Educational System and the Film *Taare Zameen Par***

VINU C. JAMES

M.Phil Scholar

CMS College

Coimbatore

Abstract

The child development is expandable and its potential may differ with the environment. Every child is different and hence, special. The distribution curve shows that most of the children who undergo dyslexia seem to be average in many traits. Few children deviate from the generally accepted norms in many ways. These deviations may give rise to multi factorial problems of adjustments at home, school and social setting and thus, leads to addition of problems in divergence. Deviation can be in terms of physical, social, emotional and mental characteristics. In the film *Taare Zameen Par*, the director Aamir Khan tried to disclose the present scenario of education. The director enhances his vision and mission through the film and he teaches about unconventional Montessori teaching. Teaching should not force the student to conform to the existing pattern of the world. The students should be equipped to think out of the box and define their own goals instead of fitting their ideas with the prevailing ones. Curricula and assessment should be flexible and encourage critical thinking on the part of the students so that they become compassionate and sensitive human beings.

Keywords: Child development, dyslexia, traits, Montessori teaching, curricula

**A New Strategy for Child Development: A Study on Montessori
Educational System and the Film *Taare Zameen Par***

VINU C. JAMES

M.Phil Scholar

CMS College

Coimbatore

“The aim of education is life itself, not preparation for life.”

Maria Montessori

Taare Zameen Par or Like Stars on Earth is a 2007 Indian drama film produced and directed by Aamir Khan. Darsheel Safary stars as 8-year-old Ishaan, and Aamir Khan acts his art teacher. Creative director and writer Amole Gupte primarily developed the idea with his wife Deepa Bhatia, who served as the film's editor. The film discovers the life and imagination of Ishaan, an 8-year-old dyslexic child. Although he excels in art, his pitiable academic performance directs his parents to send him to a boarding school. Ishaan's new art teacher suspects that he is dyslexic and helps him to triumph over his disability.

Nandakishor Awasthi, the protagonist's father in the film gives education to his son as mechanized, repeated and only for preparation of life. However, the method of education given by the substitute art teacher Ram Shankar Nikumbh (Aamir Khan) is entirely different from that of Ishaan's father. Nikumbh acted as a perfect, compassionate, sincere, heart touching teacher and he believes that life itself is an education process. Education is not only a process of high ranks and status but also a process of making man a real human being.

In *Taare Zameen Par*, the child Ishaan Awasthi is ridiculed at school and at home for not being able to write and read properly. Eight-year-old Ishaan is a happy-go-lucky child with a fertile imagination that can see fish flying but fails to grasp the difference between B and D. He has development dyslexia. He seems to be of average intelligence and his

spontaneous speech is fluent and meaningful. From the very beginning of the film, his facial expression appears very innocent, but it is tinged with stupidity.

Most of his mental trauma is expressed in a rigid way of facial expressions. In fact, though he is 'stupid,' he has the intelligence to get his letter requesting absence from school written by his elder brother Yohan. Ishaan cannot read, and his writing contains several spelling mistakes and the use of inappropriate letters and words.

He is frustrated and this is evident through his behavior at times kicking flowerpots when other children on the playground beat him up. However, he has no other conduct disorder. He shows his alienation in his paintings especially in the flicker book that shows he was separated from the adult world, the world of facts. His apparent hyperactivity (shown in a scene of his taking a shower) is perhaps a normal phenomenon in children of his age.

When Ishaan understood that his father Awasthi wants him to join a boarding school, he started having nightmares and the very thought of being separated from his mother traumatized him. The shock of alienation disturbed him always. Even his mother for a certain extent supported his father's decision, since she felt it was for his own good. Ishaan undergoes mental agony and frustration.

He certainly lacks motor skills (as is known to occur in dyslexia) as he cannot knot his tie or tie shoelaces properly. His inability to perform simple arithmetic is a bit of a puzzle; this is unusual in dyslexia. When asked to solve his three times table, he confidently picks up his pencil and sees a war of planets on the firmament of his mind where planet 3 smashes into planet 6 and beats it into smithereens. Naturally, the answer of 3×6 is 3 for our little genius. At school he goes through a series of embarrassing events that crushes his self-confidence altogether. The repressive incidents take him away from his fantasies and imaginations and ultimately it shatters him.

According to the critical thinker Reshma Parveen "The film *Taare Zameen Par* by Aamir Khan has undoubtedly attracted the attention of educationists, teachers, parents, administrators and others interested in education. It is almost the first film, especially in Urdu/ Hindi speaking context, which may contribute to the educational theory and practice tremendously. A film can change the thinking, attitudes, behaviours, and practice of people easier than any other technique. The film gives some very important messages for parents and teachers alike. The role of the parents shown in the film is a typical role existing in our

society, may be in a different form. For instance, most fathers believe that they are responsible for earning money and therefore the internal responsibility of the house including child development is of the wife. This is a very dangerous notion, because the children may develop an indifferent attitude towards their fathers.

Aamir Khan's *Taare Zameen Par* takes an empathetic look at the denial of opportunities to children affected with learning disabilities, the resulting despair in these children, and lucidly drives the need for understanding these special children by adopting appropriate learning strategies. Aamir Khan's debut directorial film *Taare Zameen Par* gives the child more footage and captures every emotion deftly thereby focusing on its root cause and maintaining its significance throughout the movie. A number of sequences left the people misty eyed and felt deep attachment to the child. The lyrics of the songs are sheer poetry and contribute to the narrative.

The film *Taare Zameen Par* interconnects most of Montessori methods in order to ensure an empathetic look at the denial of opportunities to children affected with learning disability. Government departments and NGOs dealing with special schools think that "Special Education is Inclusive Education," so they turn to special educationists to operationalise the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act from six to fourteen. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), a regulatory body of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE), says that only special teachers can teach children with disabilities (CWD) which is contrary towards the art teacher's arrival and teaching. According to the RCI, if an uncertified person teaches disabled children, it constitutes a criminal offence. Regular teachers can never teach disabled children if they do not get an RCI certificate.

This is a violation of the RTE Act and tedious to forget. The RCI has to be amended, special education demystified and the qualifications prescribed in the model rules and regulations for RTE schools should be applied to "all children" so that teaching them does not need a separate certification from the RCI.

Learning disability is a disorder that is caused by innate or family background. According to one estimate, 12.5 percent of school children have learning problems of varying degrees. Boards such as the CBSE and ICSE offer concessions to LD students like extra hour to complete the paper, scribe and waiving of the second language apart from allowing

calculators for mathematics exam. While many schools use this facility, some are hesitant to use the same fearing stigmatization. The Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamilnadu Boards of Secondary Education too offer concessions to students suffering from dyslexia. While one is not sure of the extent to which schools actually use these concessions and their awareness on this aspect, there is a need to sensitize the teaching community to the needs of the children with learning disability (LD).

The insensitivity of our schools towards children with LD could do more harm to the society, not to speak of the precious human resource that is wasted. Perhaps, it would be interesting to study the loss of self-worth of the lakhs of children with LD thanks to the unhelpful attitude of our educational institutions and the frustration that it generates in these unfortunate children. It would come as no surprise if this study reveals that these children are attracted towards anti-social activities after they drop out from the schools. They give vent to their anger with the society that deprived them of a chance to become responsible human beings. It would be no exaggeration to state that we as a society are contributing to the misery of these children with LD by not equipping the schools to take care of the needs of these special children.

Many famous scientists, composers, and artists were dyslexic. A short list of famous dyslexics includes Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Edison, Pablo Picasso, Beethoven, and Albert Einstein. They are brilliant in spite of their dyslexia. Many very successful people in today's world have dyslexia, including Tom Cruise, Jay Leno, the actor Henry Winkler, and the playwright Wendy Wasserstein. If we read interviews with them, they will all report that they became successful because of their dyslexia – it motivated them to work harder than other people because they were told so many times that they would never amount to anything. They worked to prove their detractors wrong.

The cornerstone of treatment of Special learning disability is remedial education. Because of the central nervous system's higher plasticity in early years this should ideally began early, when the child is in primary school. Using specific teaching strategies and teaching materials, the special educator formulates an Individual Educational Program to reduce or eliminate the child's deficiencies in specific learning areas of reading, writing, and mathematics identified during the child's educational assessment.

The child has to undergo remedial education sessions twice or thrice weekly for a few years to achieve academic competence. During these sessions, the child with dyslexia undergoes systematic and highly structured training exercises to learn that words can be segmented into smaller units of sound (“phoneme awareness”), and that these sounds are linked with specific letters and letter patterns (“phonics”).

The child also requires practice in reading stories; both to apply newly acquired decoding skills to reading skills to reading words in context and to experience reading for meaning. For dyscalculia, remediation involves rote learning “number sense” or its access via symbolic information. However, even after adequate remedial education, subtle deficiencies in reading, writing, and mathematical abilities persist.

Montessori focuses on the development of each person as a complete human being from birth to maturity, which encompasses everything, from establishing order of the mind and environment to individual academic achievements. This could be the reason for rapid popularity of the Montessori system and the consequent adoption of this system in various educational institutions.

It is a matter of concern that our education system is more inclined towards the textbook exercises. Only a few develop the habit of thinking over a problem in their own way. Further, school authorities are not encouraged to have creative ideas. The current system of teaching and evaluation does not provide any opportunity for this purpose. Starting from the primary to the higher education, the present emphasis is on maximization of the quantity of information instead of leaving room for imagination or recreation of minds.

We forget that the creative mind always has no problem in acquiring information on its own. The complete division between the cultures of science and humanities and deviation of science from philosophy has reduced the sphere of scientific thought. Science educators may ponder over this problem and to a certain extent try to provide an opportunity to enlarge the sphere of scientific thoughts.

Montessori methods and teachings can cure children with LD but the fees and materials are too costly and not affordable to common people. It is anti-thesis to the system but it is the reality. Most of the universities in India have planned to start Montessori Schools in their curriculum not only for helping ordinary people but also for providing advance level of teaching within affordable prices. The popularity of Montessori methods and schools are in

a budding stage. However, it takes some more time to play in the main field. Such films like *Taare Zameen Par* familiarize Montessori Methods of innovative and thought provoking ideas into the mainstream of society.

Education is not merely learning of various subjects and increasing your quantum of knowledge. Knowledge is necessary, but not sufficient. It is important for a child to grow into a well-developed personality who knows how to live a healthy life in every aspect of human existence.

Generally, films are meant for entertainment. Nevertheless, this type of films are informative and introduces new genre of schools to the society. *Taare Zameen Par* sensitizes the educational planners and other stakeholders to the needs of the children with learning disability. Above all, we need to restructure the curriculum of the whole educational system so that it may motivate teachers to empathize with the frustrations encountered by these special children.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1.Reddy, G S. *Taare Zameen Par Aamir Khan Shows the way to the Academics*. Edu Tracks. 07.06 (2008). Print.
2. Parveen,Reshma. *Taare Zameen Par a Critical Analysis*. Pamir Times Voices of Motain Communities. N.p. 25 June 2008.Web.08 March 2013.
- 3.Abbey, Susannah. *Teacher Hero: Christa Mcauliffe*. Teacher Heroes. My Hero. 15 Jan 2013. Web.03 Feb 2013.
- 4.Montessori,Maria. *The Absorbent Mind*. Italy: Henry Holt, 1995.print.
- 5.Arjunan, N.K. *Philosophical and Sociological bases of Education*. Palakkad: Yuga, 2009.print.