From the Editor

We have been overwhelmed by the positive response to our previous issue of Learning Curve, devoted to the theme of Science Education. We have just translated that issue into Hindi so that we can reach it to education functionaries and teachers in Hindi-speaking states. There is a demand to translate the issue into other Indian languages too; a daunting task ahead!

Meanwhile, we are ready to share with you the XIII issue of Learning Curve. This issue is devoted to the theme of language learning - an amazingly wide canvas and our challenge was to bring at least some key facets to readers. These range from the centrality of language to all learning, the uniqueness of the human race and language, the appreciation of how much language a five-year-old child brings into the classroom to how important the reading habit is, the challenges of language learning and inclusivity in as diverse a country and society as India is.

A vivid recollection of my early years is that of my sister, elder by four years, passing on to me every thing that she read. People who have elder siblings are truly blessed! The reading bug though is quite lethal - later in college Thomas' calculus books could never compete with the more interesting books and the reading bug extracted its price. A mad passion for cricket from the age of six meant that I hunted and devoured everything written about cricket in English, Tamil or Hindi. It also meant listening to Australian, English, Indian and West Indian accents and expressions. I think quite a few authors have described the import of all this in more scholarly detail in this issue.

We are fortunate to have expert contributions from educationists, linguists, teacher educators, school teachers and students. It is because of these contributions that Azim Premji Foundation has been able to discuss these facets of language learning within the framework of a magazine like Learning Curve. Our contributors have to ride a fine line between being informative and incisive while not being overwhelmingly academic in their writing. We achieved this in the Science Special and hope that readers will also find this true of our Language Special. We can never adequately thank our contributors for making this possible.

We have four articles that have been translated into English from the original Hindi. One of them is extremely poignant. Hemraj Bhat, a fine teacher in a small rural government school in Uttarkashi associated with the Azim Premji Foundation program since our work began there, died in a road accident last year. He was just 36. He was a prolific and gifted writer in addition to being a wonderful teacher. Here, in homage to him, we have translated an article by him that describes his efforts in teaching language to his students. As you read this piece, you will realize that Hemraj Bhat was indeed an extraordinary teacher.

Your views and candid feedback on this edition of Learning Curve are most important. They will help us improve subsequent editions which we plan on the themes of Social Science and Mathematics.

S. Giridhar, Head, Programs and Advocacy, Azim Premji Foundation

Special issue on Language Learning

CONTENT

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The Reading Disease

Indira Vijaysimha

"Reading is like an infectious disease: it is caught not taught. (And you can't catch it from someone who hasn't got it...)

- Christine Nuttall (1983: 1927)

In my own case I was infected very early and managed to infect my first born before her first birthday! No, she was not a child prodigy, nor would she have managed to pass the simplest (grade inappropriate) test for reading. But consider this: she could perform a series of actions corresponding to the text of the story, (Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit) no doubt an imitation of my own actions as I read aloud the story to the infant. In a short while she would toddle off to the book shelf stuffed with sundry books of all sorts and unerringly pick out her book. Neither of us is clear about when or how she picked up the actual mechanics of reading. We have complementary memories of experimenting with Doman's 'whole' word approach that was quickly abandoned. In the years that followed, this child seemed to go through her days absorbed in reading, managing chores with one hand while the other held a book. At meal times I invoked my mother's rule for us when we were children, "No reading while eating." As you can see the reading disease has to be managed in order to allow vital functions to take place. It is possible, of course, to combine some of these functions with reading and many times, during my school days, I have wished for little wipers on my spectacles and plastic pages so that I could read in the shower. The challenge for "Reading Infected Persons" (RIP) is to not allow their schooling interfere with their reading. RIPs resort to strategies like reading the novel hidden beneath the thick physics text, concealing magazines within the covers of long notebooks, reading off the textbooks before the start of the new term and thus freeing classroom time for surreptitious perusal of the latest thriller, hiding up the branches of a friendly tree in order to read uninterrupted, disappearing into the bathroom for long stretches...

It is possible for young children to catch the reading infection from various sources - parents, grandparents, relatives, friends and teachers are the most likely vectors of the infection. Libraries and bookstores are veritable incubi of the infection. I present before you a few illustrative case studies that serve to bring home the ease with which resistance to the disease can be overcome - cautionary tales if you like.

A girl, all of four years old, was brought to school and for almost six months remained resistant, despite her parents being carriers and displaying full blown symptoms of chronic infection. The little girl's teacher began a series of phonic exercises to help children with the sound-symbol connection which allowed the infection to take root in the child. Within a span of about three months, the mother reported that the child had refused to enter a certain room in a holiday resort ,and on being questioned, she had pointed to the sign above the room that spelt 'GUEST ROOM' and said "Ghost Room - I am scared, mummy!" The leap from symbols to meaning had been made and the disease was well established in the child and progressed rapidly thenceforth.

The next case study concerns a young boy aged five who seemed completely immune to the infection. The immunity in this case seemed to arise from a fascination with television cartoons featuring a character called 'He-Man.' One day, as the child accompanied his mother grumpily to the library, he chanced upon a book featuring the same character and asked if he could borrow the same. The mother acquiesced to the child's request and years of acquired immunity to reading began to erode from that moment on. Fearing that the supply of 'He-Man' books in the library would run out soon, (once infected, the reader has to be supplied with books at a steady pace) the mother wisely persuaded the young boy to pick up another book each time he chose a book related to the series and was able to pre-empt the impending crisis.

Records indicate that this boy moved from series to series, each time persuaded by the mother to choose a book other than from the preferred one as the series began to end.

The last case study that I would like to present also concerns a young boy who seemed to have some sort of natural immunity to the disease. The family had deliberately chosen not to own a television set and there seemed to be no other cause that could be said to be responsible for the immunity. It is of significance to note that, in this instance too, both parents were severely infected. A sibling of the young boy also had caught the disease. The teacher at school could not break down the immunity and perhaps this was because this child would often prefer to play outdoors rather than spend time in the classroom doing phonic exercises. One day, as he wandered into a class of older children, the teacher there happened to point out a bush-chat singing on a fence just outside the classroom window. Entranced, the little boy told his mother about how his teacher had shown him a "bush-chatter." The mother met the teacher and jokingly spoke about the boy's imagination about a bird called a 'bush-chatter,' at which point the teacher showed the mother and the child a picture of the bird from Salim Ali's field guide to birds. The young child asked for the book and was soon able to match the birds that he saw to pictures in the book and would often request the teacher to name them. Before long, he knew the book better than the teacher and could quickly turn to the appropriate page to show his friends a picture of the bird that they had all seen and which the young boy had confidently identified. The desire to read for himself the names of the birds proved much stronger than the boy's immunity and alas, this child too, soon fell prey to the infection. During a follow-up study, it was found that the boy, now a young man, had not quite kept alive his interest in birds, but was fully infected with the reading disease, which showed no signs of abating.

So, fellow, RIPs, I leave you to ponder these case studies and urge you to document some from your experience so that we may better understand and manage the spread of this contagion.

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The Capability of the Child

Hriday Kant Dewan

Language teaching and teachers in the primary classes often ignore the fact that the child in the class is an extremely capable being. A child of four is a linguistic adult in the sense that she is able to communicate, conceptualise and reason in her own language. The child of four can do many other things as well including physical tasks, competently using spatial relations and transformations; visualising, estimating and having a sense of number and quantity. She has acquired all this through a natural engagement with the world around her.

Among all these acquired skills, the best known is language. Language is central to human beings and to learning in the human child. While it is debatable whether her perception of the world is shaped by her language, it is certainly affected by the language she uses. There is no doubt that language is a very important part of our being and is constitutive of our identity in the sense that it both defines us and shapes our development.

A Child can Deal with all Linguistic Situations

In order to understand the capability of the child coming to the school, we must recognize that she capably interacts with the whole community around her and competently participates in all activities at home. She is able to communicate with and be actively involved in all complex components of her social, cultural and linguistic environment. She can use language in and for any context that she is a part of or has an experience of. She can suitably adjust language to make it appropriate for the context keeping in mind the persons she is speaking to and the occasion for it. It is not that she would not make a mistake or err in choosing the manner of interaction but the mistake is because of her inappropriate reading of the situation, rather than a lack of appreciation of how she should interact in a particular situation. She knows that if it is somebody older than her or if she has to make a request, she has to be polite and if she chooses not to be polite she has a reason for it. She is able to sense hierarchy and how to manipulate situations in her favour. She uses language fluently to express her desires, talk about her experiences and communicate her emotions. These are all fairly complex tasks and if analysed in detail to bring out what they require, the list would be astounding.

Concepts and the Child

The child uses language to acquire new ideas and to build her concepts. All kinds of concepts relating to different disciplines, albeit arising from her experience have been acquired by the four-year-old child. For example: concepts about all kinds of social and family relations, the difference and hierarchies among them; concepts related to agriculture, plant life; concepts related to festivals, household work, etc. The child absorbs information like a sponge. We may consider some of this information inappropriate and some information important for her to know. But she learns it all. Once she becomes capable of all this and of conversation there is no stopping her. Be it names of people, utensils, trees, plants, animals, seasons or about who is coming and when, who is going and where, what is the relationship between one person and another, the conversations that happen in the market and many other things; the child knows about all this. Besides this, the child uses language to build arguments, defend her rights, analyse situations as well as build her imaginary world. Using words that she knows, she constructs a description of the world and builds her dreams.

Syntax and the Child

It is not only important to understand the ability of the child in terms of the concepts that she knows, the intonation and the systematic processing of conversation but also her unconscious knowledge of syntax. The child uses all forms of the verb correctly depending upon the situation she is describing. She

also uses the correct form of the noun and pronoun, if there are multiple forms of these in the language. In her own language, she will not make a mistake in using the correct tense, the appropriate singular, plural or gender as well as the right connectors. If we take a few (say ten) varied sentences in English or Hindi and analyse them, we will realise that these sentences, chosen from a variety of contexts that the child participates in, require phenomenal ability to organise words and 'sub-conscious' knowledge of how to combine words. The sentences used by a three-four year old suggest the capability of making minute distinctions.

We also need to consider that the child comes across new words regularly. Once she knows a word and its broad meaning she uses it in different contexts to develop a deeper understanding of the word. Without prior exposure to all forms of the word she is automatically able to construct all these forms using rules she is unconsciously aware of. Many of these rules are recognised by linguists and some of these are included in grammar books, but many are not yet extracted and identified. Linguists are always trying to construct a better grammar for a language and formulate rules that are able to incorporate different contexts. Much before these rules can be formulated and articulated, all native speakers of that language use them through their shared understanding. The implicit understanding of all these rules including the new changed ones is available to the child.

How has this been Acquired?

There is enough evidence to suggest that in the absence of human interactions language does not develop. There is also ample evidence to suggest that children from different backgrounds and communities acquire different abilities and that their experience influences their knowledge. Though learning is not identical, there are some broad common features and somewhat common stages of learning. We know from our own experiences that adults try to support children in their process of learning. This they do in the manner they think best. In some cases it could be either

speaking like children to make them feel comfortable or trying to simplify sentences by breaking up what the children have to speak and requiring them to copy and repeat many times; or by correcting mistakes made by the child and asking her to repeat the corrected sentence a few times. The importance of these corrections can be discussed and debated but what is clear is that there is an expression of concern for the child and the recognition of making the child feel important. This recognition as well as the encouragement may be very important for the child to learn.

It is, however, clear that not much can be learnt by this prompting, goading and guiding. The knowledge and the ability that the child has is much more than what can be developed through such a process. How many corrections can we help the child make? How much do we guide the child to learn? We also know that children learn what we do not want them to learn very quickly. Children learn many things that we do not consciously know about. The amount that the child knows leads us to argue that it is not active pursuance but natural interaction and immersion in society that makes it possible for a child to learn. Just the fact that the human environment exists for the child and the child is in interaction with a variety of concerned human beings is crucial for constructing this ability in the child.

Do Children learn by Imitation?

Once we recognize that the child learns in interactions with the human world, we can also recognize that the nature of the interactions could influence her learning. There is a widespread belief that "children learn by imitation." It is important to take a view on this as it influences the kind of experiences we construct for the child. If human beings do learn by imitation, then the process of learning can be formulated as follows: Simply allow children to observe what you are doing, ask them to imitate you and make corrections whenever they make mistakes. This could be continued by asking them to repeat the task they have erred in again and again. It is, however, clear by looking at the

knowledge that the child has already acquired before coming to school that this is not an appropriate process. The child cannot participate in conversations and construct all the sentences she does based on what she has heard from somebody else. Most of the sentences that she uses have never been heard by her before. The contexts in which all of them have been produced could not have arisen. While we cannot show that this process of learning is entirely irrelevant at the present stage of our understanding about human learning, it is clear that only a very small part of what the child knows could have been influenced by these kind of processes.

Characteristics of the Learning Child

The key aspect of the process of learning includes the desire of the human being to explore the world. In this exploration, she wants to experience more and more of the world and widen the relationships she has with it. There is an inner urge to experience new things, to do new things and to become capable of comprehending challenges.

The second key aspect is the determination and will to do things and not give up easily. A child while learning to walk, tries to stand and falls but does not give up. A child while learning to converse finds that nobody understands her and even though it is not clear how much she understands, she continues to challenge herself to learn. There is, therefore, the determination to continue the struggle to learn things that they want to learn.

The third key characteristic is wanting to do things on her own and expressing everything herself. The outcome for the human child is not as important as what her role in the process was or is going to be.

The fourth characteristic is boundless curiosity. - about what is happening, to whom and why. The human being right from childhood wants to learn about everything around her. She wants to acquire the ability to deal with the world more efficiently and therefore is extremely curious. This curiosity is perhaps the underlying trait that results in the urge for exploration as well as wanting to do things herself. It is this trait that makes the human child seek new experiences and engage in new situations, challenges and adventure. She is not afraid to explore what her parents are unwilling to explore and exercises her curiosity with determination and independence.

Implications of these Characteristics

These four characteristics suggest the kind of interaction with adults that would help children learn. This would include a concern for the child to allow her to explore, do things on her own, recognize her will and determination as well as respect her ability. It implies that the adult needs to recognize that the child will learn by absorbing her experience and while exploring more. The adult can provide opportunities for the child to do that and ensure that the child is only taking challenges and risks that are not hazardous. The classroom is a place which is different from the home and is the other environment that the child is placed in. It is important to underline the difference. The classroom is a place where learning is organized for a group of children not necessarily of the same background and experience. There are expectations of learning that the child is supposed to reach and often teachers do not understand or appreciate the culture and the language of the children. The relationship between the teacher and the children is very different from those of adults at home and their concern is also of a different kind. The time and opportunities available in school are limited. Every child cannot be allowed to explore whatever she wants to and learn whatever she is keen to at that point. These differences need to be appreciated for us to be able to think about possible implications for classrooms.

The four characteristics of the human child - boundless curiosity, the urge for independence, the need to explore and experiment as well as wanting to do things herself - have to be the basis for providing children learning opportunities in school. These would express themselves in different ways for different disciplines.

In the context of language learning, we need to recognize that the child is already capable of using her

home language, has a large vocabulary, uses complete syntax and has the ability to engage in dialogue. We also need to recognize that the child needs the opportunity to do things on her own which means express her ideas, use language differently and build arguments to defend her point of view. Mechanical copying of the teacher and copying from various sources does not help as it does not challenge or interest the child. Building of language ability needs to ensure that the child is capable of engaging with a variety of situations, build more complex arguments, deal with more complex ideas and sustain a dialogue for longer periods including those on abstract concepts. Our classroom processes, therefore, need to provide children space for acquiring this.

Allow Children's Languages

We need to recognize that the child would learn best when exploring things around what she knows and therefore can relate to. Constructing new sentences, participating in new kinds of situations require from her a certain degree of confidence and ability in the language being used. If the language of the classroom, therefore, has nothing to do with the language of the child and is not based on the words that she knows, there is no way that she can feel the confidence to explore and take up new challenges. From being a confident participant with a reliable learning process, she has to play a catch up game without adequate opportunity or time.

The classroom generally has children from different language backgrounds. The key principle, therefore, for the teacher is to identify one language which is a link language for all children and learn it. The dialogue in the classroom needs to be in that language so that it will strengthen the abilities of using language (logic, imagination, self-confidence, communication, widening of knowledge etc.). The challenge of removing barriers to communication has to be met by the teacher.

Children need to be allowed to use their own language and to play with all the languages present in the class. They can use words from various languages to express themselves thereby developing an enriched capability to dialogue.

Children need Respect and a Positive Self-Image

The second critical point in the child feeling confident is a positive self-image. The culture, language and the identity of the child has to be respected. It is only when it is respected that she will learn to explore, exercise her will and her curiosity. In the absence of the confidence that what she says or feels will be respected, none of the critical characteristics of learning can be seen in her behaviour.

In order to understand the implications of this and what can be done in classrooms, consider these possibilities: draw a picture of an object on the board and ask children what they would call it. All names suggested by the children are written on the board. Children can then be asked to talk about everything that they know about it in their own language. The class would have children who can explain what has been said, if the speaker herself is not able to speak the other or link language fluently. There, however, must be a clear understanding that the child can speak in her own language and for as long as she wants. There can be many exercises of talking about an event, an activity or anything else. Children could be asked to describe someone they like or a moment in their lives that they cherish.

We must remember that language is far more than words and syntax, it is our entire being and therefore allowing the child to use her own language, means allowing her to express herself and present herself the way she is.

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Importance of Language

Rohit Dhankar

The central importance of language in primary education and the child's command over it is widely accepted. It's not difficult to see the reasons for this wide agreement.

It's obvious that language is essential for communication, for the child as well as for everyone else. So is it essential for gaining understanding of all disciplines be it mathematics, sciences or any other. Indeed the child links to all aspects of education only through language. In fact, the child thinks, makes decisions and acts through and with language. Language is central to the child's (as everyone else's) existence as a part of society.

The above perspective is clearly necessary - in fact mandatory - if one has to appreciate the centrality of language to the child's education and growth. However, this is still a limited perspective. The limitation of this perspective is in viewing language as a "tool;" a "tool" to understand Mathematics or a "tool" to take decisions. Language may indeed be a tool, but it is also a lot more. This "lot more" is perhaps even more determinant of the centrality of language to the child, in education and in human life in general.

We humans not only see and feel the world around us, we also give meaning to everything that we see and feel around us. Thus when I observe the dark monsoon clouds, the effect on me is not merely the effect of seeing some shapes. It's the complex consolidated effect of relating and linking the dark clouds to rain, to dancing peacocks and to my discomfort of wet clothes. If I were not to make these connections and links, the dark cloud would mean nothing to me, will have no effect on me; it will just remain as a shape that I sensed.

It is this 'linking' that gives meaning to everything in this world. It is this infusion of meaning that changes the status of things (especially in our consciousness) from merely "being" to "being meaningful."

This meaningfulness we infuse through concepts. To develop and flesh out these concepts we construct a number of symbols in our psyche and develop relationships and links between the symbols and the concepts. Mental activity on these symbols ("symbolic transaction") is the process of this construction.

Language is the foundation of this symbolic transaction and is in fact an indivisible and integral element of this entire process, which leads to the construction of a "conceptual system" for any individual.

Without giving "names" to the concepts, none of this is possible. These "names" are what we know as "words" in language. The development and construction of the "conceptual system" is what we call the development and gaining of understanding. So, language and understanding are dependent on each other. The existence of one is not possible without the other.

Thus, language is not merely a "tool." It is an integral and inalienable part of understanding. It is capacitative of the human mind and self-consciousness, as, what is the human mind but the totality of understanding! It develops with the development of understanding, and is constrained when understanding is constrained. This conclusion is of critical importance to primary education.

It is possible that after a certain stage of development of understanding and language, there is enough of a foundational structure of either (or both) that understanding can continue to develop without a concomitant significant development of language and vice versa. But this "divisibility" is not possible at the primary education level, for sure. At the primary education level, development of language and development of understanding are two inseparable complementary aspects of the mental development of the child.

Let us also look at a few aspects of language.

The basic unit of spoken language is a word. The word is a combination of sounds. If this combination of sounds were not to be linked to a concept, it will remain merely a meaningless combination of sounds and not become a word. The linking of a particular combination of sounds (word) to a particular concept has no logical grounds or rules. This linkage is arbitrary. While the linkage is indeed arbitrary, it is stable and universal within the user of the particular language. "Tree" is a combination of sounds, which relates to a specific concept, this relationship remains stable. It is not as though some other combination of sounds will start relating to the concept after a while. For example, tomorrow another combination of sounds, "cricket" will not start relating to what is meant today by "tree", although the relationship of tree to that concept is as arbitrary as that of cricket.

To construct meaningful language, words are used with (and through) a system of rules. For example, the sequencing of words follows certain rules to create appropriate meaning. These rules are also arbitrary but stable and universal in nature. So, language is a rule governed system of verbal symbols through which humans create meaning. This system is well organized and is entirely man - made. While the number of sound combinations in (any) language is limited, the ability of the language system to construct meanings is infinite.

To learn a language is to gain command over and use this system for construction of meaning, acquisition of meaning and expression of meaning.

The spoken language is made of sound symbols, similarly the written language is made of visual symbols; or markings on a surface. The markings are letters. The letters of the alphabet (or their combinations) represent sounds. The relationship of these "markings" to the sounds is also arbitrary but stable and universal. We always (mentally) "translate" the written language to spoken language and then derive meaning from that. So, there are more steps to reach meaning through written language in comparison to spoken language.

In spoken language interactions, there is room and scope for "non-verbal communication" (e.g. expression on one's face, gestures of hand) and also the scope for immediate clarification. This is not usually possible in written language, and hence written language also uses some additional symbols and follows a tighter system of rules.

The purpose of this brief article is not 'linguistic analysis', but simply to discuss some issues that may have direct bearing on teaching-learning at the primary level. Some of the conclusions that we have reached in this brief article are:

1. The development of understanding and the development of language are completely dependent on each other for a child.

2. The relationship between concepts and combination of sounds (called "words") is arbitrary and has no logical grounds. However, this relationship is universal and stable.

3. The rule systems for the use of words to form sentences and construct meaning are also arbitrary, however stable and universal.

4. So, language is a well organized symbolic system.

5. The ability of the language system to construct meanings is unlimited.

6. Letters in written language relate to and represent combinations of sounds. This relationship is also arbitrary but stable and universal.

7. To reach meaning from written language has one extra step vis-à-vis spoken language to meaning.

A quick hint at two of many implications of these conclusions for teaching-learning at the primary level: what is arbitrary cannot be figured out by the child alone. It necessarily needs observation of other language users, help from those who already have mastered that arbitrary relationship, demands practice and drill takes precedence over conceptual understanding. What is rule - governed can actually be mastered only by the child's conceptual engagement and conceptual understanding takes precedence over drill. Language learning may require both, though the over all learning process is marked by conceptual

understanding and meaning making; but drill cannot be discounted in certain processes like mastery over the writing system.

This small piece also has a few controversial claims; a word of clarification is in order about them. It is claimed that words are arbitrary ordered combinations of sounds. There is enough linguistics research to establish that the word formation follows certain universal rules in combining sounds. But even after adhering to those rules the overwhelming majority still retain the arbitrary character in combining sounds, and definitely in attaching concepts to them. The second claim is about the smallest meaningful unit of language being the word. There is the dominant view that the smallest meaningful unit is the sentence. While it is true that to express a knowledge claim, request, question etc. the sentence is the smallest unit; but to evoke an idea in mind the word is sufficient. And evocation of an idea has to be considered evocation of meaning.

The third claim is about the arbitrariness of order of words in a sentence. Again, linguistics research has established that there are universal patterns in all human languages that determine the order of words in a sentence. There are also claims that children never make mistakes in this order and that rules are innately grained in the human mind. Since there are more than one possible sentence structures and children do make mistakes, therefore there is the role of experience in learning it. Yes, there are universal patterns, though whether they are innate as specific language rules or are an expression of human cognitive architecture is a controversial point. Therefore, the arbitrariness here is rather limited.

At several places, association between sound patterns and meaning, etc. is stated to be 'universal and stable,' within a linguistic community. This is in the limited sense of as far as it is understood and for a certain period. Languages do change in style as well as meaning associated to words, in time as well as over the community of its speakers. But, as far as they are commonly understood, the retain a character of being 'generally acceptable and stable.'

Lastly, language is central to becoming human. This aspect is not elaborated here, partly due to lack of space and partly because the focus is to underline some points that may be of immediate use in classroom language teaching.

This article has been adapted from the original Hindi version, titled *"Bhasha ke Maine"*, published in the book, *"Shiksha aur Samajh"*, by Rohit Dhankar (2004), Adhaar Prakashan, Panchkula, Haryana.

Rohit Dhankar is Secretary, Digantar Shiksha Evam Khelkud Samiti. As a student of mathematics and philosophy, he started a small school more as a job. The school and philosophy of education proved to be very entangling. This led him to further exploration of the place of education in human life and the idea of a good school, which became the main focus. Since then he has been trying to understand how a liberating and empowering education can be pursued, and what social spaces are available or have to be created for this. He can be contacted at rdhankar@gmail.com

What do we Mean by Language?

Krishna Kumar

Most of us are so used to defining language as a means of communication that we often forget its usefulness as a means to think, feel, and react to things. This wider use of language is extremely important for people who want to work with young children, for in childhood, language plays a formative role in the development of the child's personality and abilities. It acts as a subtle, yet strong, force, shaping the child's perception of the world, interests, capabilities, and even values and attitudes.

Every child in the world - whatever his or her mother tongue - uses language to fulfil certain immediate purposes. One major purpose is to make sense of the world, and in fulfilling this purpose, language acts as a marvellous tool. Unless we are able to take the child's point of view and understand the functions that language plays in the child's life, we cannot properly determine our role as teachers, caretakers, or parents.

Language and Doing

Children's use of language is closely related to the things they do with their hands and bodies and the objects they come in contact with. Words and action go together in childhood. Actions and experiences create the need for words, and words provide access to an experience after it is over. With the help of words, children enrich their relationship with the objects they come in touch with. On the other hand, words without action or contact with objects remain empty and lifeless for the child. Words like 'cat,' 'run,' 'fall,' 'blue,' 'river' and 'rough' mean very little to the child unless these words have first been used in a context where the child was actively involved with the object or in an act. Only after such involvement do these words become associated with an image, and become available for meaningful use in future.

This relationship between words and the child's physical experiences poses a unique responsibility on adults, especially teachers. As a teacher you may expect that parents have already provided a wide range of experiences to the children who are now under your care. This may not be true for the great majority of parents. Many parents either do not feel confident enough to allow their children to come in contact with a wide range of objects in early childhood or they do not have the time to accommodate the much slower pace at which children see and do things. Often, adults find it a nuisance if the child stands at the tap with her fingers in the stream of water for half an hour, or if she puts all the utensils on the floor, or if she wants to open and close an umbrella countless times. Sometimes, in order to avoid any possibility of damage to objects or harm to the child, adults prohibit the child from all but a narrow range of experiences.

Whatever the parents may or may not have done, the job of the teacher is fairly clear. She must create an environment which permits children to make continuous attempts to link the use of language with life's experiences and objects. This can be done by ensuring :

- that children bring to school a variety of objects (such as leaves, stones, feathers, twigs, broken things) and talk about them, read about them and write about them;

- that children are asked to talk, write and read about the experiences they have had outside the school;

- that children are taken out of the classroom to see the world around the school so they can inspect ordinary objects carefully (objects such as a broken bridge, a muddy pit, a dead insect, a nest with eggs) and talk about them. Such study-visits in the school's immediate neighbourhood can provide valuable resources for language learning as this handbook will later show.

So a school where children are not doing a variety of things with their hands, where they are mostly sitting and listening to the teacher, and where there are no objects to touch, manipulate, break and remake, cannot be a good place to develop language skills.

Things They do with Language

Those who have studied children's language tell us that children start using language for a startling variety of purposes as soon as they have acquired mastery over basic abilities involved in talking. What follows is a discussion of some of the purposes.

1. Directing one's own activities

Children often talk about what they are doing at the time they are doing it. It is a kind of private commentary on their own action. Often, it seems, the commentary helps them in carrying on with the activity for a greater length of time. It helps them maintain their interest in it. It does not matter if someone listens to the commentary. For example, in a group of small children making tunnels or castles with damp sand, each child may make a separate commentary and often it may be no more than an audible mumble.

2. Directing others' activities and attention

Children use language to draw attention to something that they find curious or attractive. They expect the listener to show interest in what has attracted their own attention.

The importance of this use of language lies in the expectation it expresses. The expectation is that 'others would like to see what I have noticed.' This expectation is based on a deep-seated assumption concerning human relationships and the pleasure of being together. If the person whose attention is being directed does not fulfil the expectation, a basic cause for the development of language gets discouraged.

3. To play

> अक्कड़ बक्कड़ बम्बे बो
> अस्सी नब्बे पूरे सौ
> सौ में लगा धागा
> चोर निकल के भागा
>
> बरसो राम धड़ाके से
> बुढ़िया मर गई फाके से

For most children from the age of two-and-a-half onwards, words serve as a great resource for play and fun. They repeat words in different tones, distort them, combine them in strange combinations, and enjoy this whole process. They like to use words in situations where they may not be appropriate. They easily learn poems that distort words in this way. In brief, young children treat words as objects to play with. Play with words serves as an enormous outlet for creativity and energy.

4. Explaining things

Children talk about things to show their knowledge of 'how' a thing happened. Stories are born out of this use of language, and in this sense all stories are explanations of things. Small children want to interpret their life's events just as much as we adults want to explain events that have occurred in the world or in politics.

5. Representing life

Children, just like adults, often use language to recall the past - to remember an event, person, or just a small thing. Words help us re-create something that is no more around, and often what has been re-created looks so real that we can go on talking about it for a long time.

Children often represent things and experiences in order to come to terms with them - to accept something at a deep emotional level. A child who has been frightened by something may talk about it many times over - until he adjusts to it.

6. Associating

When a child talks about the feelings of a metal toy, he imagines himself to be the toy. Language allows us to experience vicariously what someone else is going through.

7. Anticipating

Children express their fears, plans, expectations and what they think might happen under strange circumstances, frequently. Words allow them to create an image of the future. Sometimes such an image helps in materialising the future; at other times it helps in accepting the future as it comes.

8. Inquiring and reasoning

Just about any situation can present a 'problem' that the small child must solve by finding out 'why' something is the way it is. Many problems are of the kind that the small child can successfully solve; for example, why a bus stopped all of a sudden, or why she does not like water to be poured on her head while she has her bath. The little child of three understands these 'problems' although not all children may be able to explain the precise reason in a vocal manner. Some children who can do so are most likely the ones who have heard adults using language to inquire or argue about something and who have been encouraged to do so themselves.

Unlike the 'problems' mentioned above, there are others that a small child cannot grasp in a 'scientific' sense. For example, the real reason 'why it rains' or 'why a tree falls down when the wind is very strong' is beyond the reach of a child of four or five. Yet, even such problems present excellent opportunities for the use of language as a means to reason. It does not matter whether the reason given is accurate or not. What is important is that the child uses language as a means to reason, to inquire about something unknown. The more frequently the child listens to adults using language for this function, the more likely is this function of language to become accessible to the child.

What we say Influences us

One thing we learn about language from this discussion of its various functions in children's lives is that it is a highly flexible medium. It can be adjusted to almost any situation in life. By adjusting it according to the needs of a situation, we improve our adjustment with the situation itself. Daily life provides numerous examples of this process. When we know that someone is angry with us, we respond to his anger by choosing (often unconsciously) words and tone that might shape the situation according to our wish or intention, e.g. we use strong words if we want to fight, or we use mild words and tone if we want to cool down the situation.

We can say that our ability to use language in a flexible manner to a great extent determines our chance of standing up to the great variety of situations that life presents. At one level, our language expresses or shows our response to a situation; at another level, our language shapes the situation that we are facing. Language helps us to come to terms with things that happen around us all the time. It helps us in this way whether we are physically participating in events or simply reflecting on them.

Whether we witness an event physically or not, the language used to represent it affects our response to it. Thousands of things happen everyday at places far away from us. These things reach us as narratives in a newspaper. In a sense, the newspaper allows us to create a picture of an event. It is the same thing when a child tells his mother about something he has seen on the street. The picture created by the newspaper or the child is accurate inasmuch as the language used for the narration is accurate. Accuracy is almost always a matter of degree because any use of language reflects the narrator's intention. If the child has seen an accident and was frightened by it, he is likely to convey it in a somewhat exaggerated manner. By exaggerating it, he justifies his fear, and thereby feels better adjusted to the sight he had seen.

Finally, language shapes our expectations. Someone who likes to explain things in a patient, systematic manner expects others to do the same. Similarly, a person who likes to inquire deeply about things unconsciously expects that others are also interested in such inquiry. By using language to explain or inquire, such people create an environment in which the importance of explanation and inquiry is understood. On the other hand, if language is not used for such purposes in a community or institution, the children growing up there are unlikely to be used to careful explanations or patient arguments. If parents and teachers are using language mainly to keep children under control, then it is likely that children will see language as a means to control others. They might grow up into adults who do not want to do anything unless they are ordered to do so.

Language shapes the child's personality because the child lives and grows up in the environment that language creates. To this environment, the teacher makes a significant contribution. If the teacher is sensitive to the various functions of language in the child's life, she will be able to respond to the child's intellectual and emotional needs. The teacher's responses to the language used by the child on different occasions are extremely important. If the responses show that the teacher understands the child's aim in using language in a certain way, such responses will enhance the child's use of language in that mode. On the contrary, if the teacher's responses are based on pre-conceived ideas about what is appropriate or correct, such responses will obstruct the child's independence of expression and communication.

This piece is an excerpt from Chapter 1 of the book, "The Child's Language and the Teacher - A Handbook", authored by Krishna Kumar and published by National Book Trust, India. (ISBN 978-81-237-2863-6)

Krishna Kumar has been Director, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), since September 2004. During his tenure, NCERT has brought out a new National Curriculum Framework and a new set of textbooks in all subjects for primary, secondary and senior secondary classes. Significant steps have also been taken during this period to provide assistance to the States to initiate curricular reforms. He can be contacted at krishnak.ncert@nic.in or director.ncert@nic.in

Understanding Learning at the Primary Level

R. Amritavalli

"The syntax reminds us that 'I am taught' by a teacher; but 'I learn' from a book (or an assignment ...)" - L.C. Taylor

Teachers at the primary level may not be subject specialists, but they need to be specialists in two important respects: they need to understand what it means to learn, and they need to understand what it is to be a child. Today I wish to share with you some of my understanding about these two topics, in order to address the question of how we can bring about learning (including language learning) in our classrooms.

There have been times in history when the child has been viewed as a miniature adult, and as an imperfect adult. Quite opposite to this is the romantic view of the child as "the father of man," as a free spirit with a spontaneous and unconditioned response to the world, a state of mind which the greatest artists such as Picasso have aspired to.

Coming to the schoolroom, under the first view, children are taught as much as possible of whatever adults know. The adult store of knowledge is poured into the child's mind as quickly and in as large a quantity as possible. Learning means to learn what the adult knows. Under the second view, represented by Jean Piaget and Maria Montessori among others, the child has her own perceptions, and her understanding develops in its own time. Learning means the mental activity of a child: it is a change in the way a child thinks. Let us look at a couple of real-life anecdotes to see what we mean.

A primary school-teacher of English holds up her hands and says to the class, "I have two hands and ten fingers." Her intention is that the children should repeat this after her. Before she can say so, a child exclaims: "Even I also!" This child was punished. Why was the teacher upset with the child? Can we say, from the child's response, that the child was indeed learning something? Had she in fact already learnt what the teacher was trying to teach? What was the teacher trying to teach?

A child is kept back after school every day as punishment for some sort of failure in the class. On the third or fourth occasion, the mother asks the child what exactly the problem of that day was. The child says: "Amma, I can understand what stomach pain is and what leg pain is, but I don't understand what window pain (pane) is." This mother took the child out of that school and started what is now one of Hyderabad's most prestigious schools. I refer to Shanta Rameshwar Rao and Vidyaranya High School. A very similar anecdote, incidentally, is told by Michael Howe in his book, "A Teacher's Guide to the Psychology of Learning." Little Johnny goes to school and is told by the teacher to "sit here for the present." He comes back home unhappy: the teacher didn't give him a present!

Once we think of learning as a mental activity, as something that the child does in her mind rather than what we do to the child by asking her to write or speak precisely what we teach her, we must allow that there may be genuine problems of understanding between the teacher and the child, which the teacher must look out for (window pain, the present). A child may not always learn what you are trying to teach (Even I also) . So, all children may not learn the same thing at the same time .

This last point is especially true of the primary school, and especially true of subjects like language, which are said to "grow" in the child under certain conditions, rather than to be "taught," like physics or algebra. Just as we expect all young children to grow physically into adults, there is a mental growth in all children. Just as physical growth can be nurtured and encouraged but cannot be forced externally (by stretching a child to make her look tall), so also mental growth cannot be forced externally (by making children copy the teacher, recite from the book, copy from the blackboard...). Early mental growth, like early physical growth, is democratic: all children grow. They may

ultimately grow to different heights; but in their growing years we do not know who will grow how much; we simply help them to grow. So early mental growth does not differentiate between children in terms of aptitude, intelligence and so on. All children have to be given a chance to learn as much as they can. Only in high school can children start to make choices based on superior skills or aptitudes for particular subjects.

Teaching is a public activity; a teacher can prepare for a class, she can choose what to teach, she can sequence it, she can repeat it, she can test it, she can mark answer scripts. Learning is a private activity, it is unobservable when it happens, and it can happen in unexpected ways with unexpected results. Learning can happen in the absence of teaching: We say a child learns to walk, but we don't seriously teach a child to walk anymore than birds are taught to fly or fish to swim.

Similarly, we say the child "learns" to talk, but this is just a way of speaking: the child no more "learns" to talk than the sun "rises" in the east and "sets" in the west. The sun appears to rise, and the child appears to learn language; but the child is in fact recreating language, reinventing it in some way, to express its meaning. One child, describing a picture, writes: "The lion is afraiding the man." This is of course not standard English, and we hope the child will some day understand that. But in inventing a verb when she needs it, this child, a second-language learner of English in Class I, is actually doing exactly what three-to five-year old children learning English as their mother tongue do: they say "Don't giggle me," (don't make me giggle), "She goed it there," (she made it go there), and so on. Sometimes the child invents an answer which is perfectly acceptable English, but is not the "item" that we are teaching.

For language to grow in the mind, we need to provide the child with meaningful messages. This is actually what the child in our story was looking for, when the teacher said, "I have two hands and ten fingers;" she thought the teacher was sharing something about herself with the children, as if she was saying, "I have a dog, I like juice, I feel hungry …" The child naturally looks for meaning; it does not occur to the child to practice language for its own sake, except as a game, or in songs or drama. So there is a very easy way to teach language in the primary school: through songs, stories, poetry and drama. Rhythm makes the language memorable; stories keep the child interested; and language is learnt painlessly. There is plenty of research from other countries, and some research in India, about story-telling as a method of teaching children languages, and to think about the world.

So much for listening and speaking; what about reading, writing and spelling? Here again, there appear to be stages of pretending and inventing that the child goes through. If these "mistakes" are understood as efforts at approximations to the adult way of doing things, then they can be seen as evidence of learning. Every teacher likes to have evidence of learning: as feedback about her teaching, as a record of her teaching to show the principal or the parent. But mere copying of adult performance without mental activity is not evidence of learning, and therefore, error-free performance by a small child is not evidence of learning. A child who invents the spelling, "tchr" for teacher, is showing that he knows that the letters of the alphabet have their own sounds; a child who pretends to read knows that there are symbols on a page that can be spoken as language. Reading research has shown us a paradox: the child who is not reading, but is parroting or pretending to read, reads fluently without mistakes. (This may be the three-year old who has a book of nursery rhymes.) As the child tries to read on his own, his reading slows down, and mistakes occur, because now he is actually reading on his own. With help and regular effort, and with the teacher regularly reading out to and with the child, such a child can learn to read. But the transition from pretending to read to actual reading must be carefully made.

The problem is not that the child play-acts at reading or writing, but that very often the teacher and the school fail to distinguish play-acting from the real thing. The child is taught to copy down questions and answers from the board; this is called writing. One can see the

child copying words down letter by letter, not paying any attention to the meaning. But we said earlier that the child naturally pays attention to meaning. What has gone wrong?

In the name of teaching and collecting evidence of teaching, we might be interfering with the natural ways of learning that the mind has. Consider the following experiment. People are given the picture of a living room to look at for one minute. One group is told that there are some Xs inked into the picture, and they have to find them, by scanning the picture horizontally or vertically (one sub-group) or by looking at the outlines of objects (the second sub-group). Actually, there are no Xs. The second group is asked to think of the actions they can perform using the objects in the room (one sub-group), or to make mental images of the objects (second sub-group). At the end of the minute, people in the first group can recall about three - eight objects from the picture. Those in the second group can recall 25-32 objects.

The stimulus was the same, the time given was the same and the people were randomly selected. What affected the result? Different instructions given resulted in different mental activities. The first group was looking for Xs. The second group was looking at the objects and thinking about them. So although learning is an internal, mental activity, it is influenced by the kind of teaching we do.

How can we promote mental activity? To think about this, we must first understand mental activity. There are stages in learning and memory. We first have to perceive or attend to something. Then we have to put it into our memory. And we have to be able to recall it when we want (we have all experienced the 'tip of the tongue' phenomenon, when we know that we know something but cannot recall it).

Research on the very first stage of perception or attention suggests that attention should be directed to meaningful aspects of the percept. This is already evident from the experiment cited above.

Depending on our instructions or questions, our students spend different amounts of time attending to the stimulus. Are some questions more meaningful than others? Yes.

Let us take the example of a simple fill-in-the-blanks task. It turns out that a word is remembered better if the sentence with the blank is more syntactically complex. Thus 'The small lady angrily picked up the red ___' is more complex than 'The ripe ____ tasted delicious.' A word of caution: simply giving complex sentences which the children cannot understand will not serve the purpose. The point rather is against over-simplification: in order that children get the answers right, if the sentences become so simple as to be meaningless, the child does not see why or who would ever say such a sentence. At that point the child stops attending to the sentence.

Finally, a word about personal relevance. A Ph.D. student has found that a child who does not write well on other topics may write very well when asked to write about himself.

Perhaps this is the secret of all learning, including language learning: its personal relevance to us. Then the task of the primary school is to make learning as personally relevant as possible to each child: to bring the schoolroom as close to the home and the playground as desirable, for the child to naturally grow and learn. The view of a child as an imperfect adult teaches us to be suspicious of anything that the child enjoys doing, and therefore makes the schoolroom as distant from our natural playgrounds as possible. On the other view, ideas are the playground of the mind, and it is our responsibility to provide every child access to these playgrounds.

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Language and the National Curriculum Framework

Indu Prasad

Language is the medium through which children talk to themselves and to others, and it is with words that they begin to construct and get a grip on their reality. The ability to understand and use language clearly and cogently is necessary for learning to take place. Language is not only a means of communication - it is also a medium through which most of our knowledge is acquired. It is a system that, to a great extent, structures the reality around us for representing it in our minds - it is a marker of our identity in a variety of ways and it is closely associated with power in society.

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF) endorses the stand of human beings having an innate language faculty. Children come to school with communicative competence in their language or languages. They enter the school not only with thousands of words but also with control of the rules that govern the complex and rich structure of language at the level of sounds, words, sentences and discourse. Multilingualism, according to the NCF, must be used as a resource, a classroom strategy and a goal by a creative language teacher. This is not only the best use of a resource readily available, but also a way of ensuring that every child feels secure and accepted, and that no one is left behind on account of her linguistic background.

The NCF says that basic language skills are adequate for meeting situations that are contextually rich and cognitively undemanding, such as peer-group interaction. Advanced-level skills are required in situations that are contextually poor and cognitively demanding such as writing an essay on an abstract issue.

The goal of first-language education, therefore, is to hone these skills by progressively fostering advanced-level communicative and cognitive abilities in the classroom. At the basic primary stage, a child's languages must be accepted as they are with almost no attempt to correct them. From Class 3 onwards, oracy and literacy will be tools for learning and for developing higher-order communicative skills and critical thinking. By Class 4, if rich and interesting exposure is made available, the child will herself acquire the standard variety and the rules of correct orthography, but care must be taken to honour and respect the child's own language(s). It should be accepted that errors are a necessary part of the process of learning and that children will correct themselves only when they are ready to do so. Instead of focusing attention on errors and 'hard spots', it would be much better to spend time providing children comprehensible, interesting and challenging inputs.

Language education, according to the NCF, is not confined to the language classroom. A science, social science or mathematics class is ipso facto a language class. Learning the subject means learning the terminology, understanding the concepts, and being able to discuss and write about them critically. At the same time, the language class offers some unique opportunities. Stories, poems, songs and drama link children to their cultural heritage and give them an opportunity to understand their own experiences and to develop sensitivity to others. Children may effortlessly abstract more grammar from such activities than through explicit and often boring grammar lessons.

Input-rich communicational environments are a prerequisite for language learning. Inputs include textbooks, learner-chosen texts, and class libraries, allowing for a variety of genres: print (e.g. Big Books for young learners); parallel books and materials in more than one language; media support (learner magazines/newspaper columns, radio/audio cassettes); and "authentic" materials.

On language evaluation, the NCF says that it need not be tied to "achievement" with respect to particular syllabi but must be reoriented to the measurement of language proficiency. Ongoing assessment could document a learner's progress through the portfolio mode. National benchmarks for language proficiency need to be evolved. The NCF also discusses the issue of English (along with mathematics) being a principal reason for failure at the Class X level.

Most language teachers associate the training of speech with correctness rather than with the expressive and participatory functions of language. The NCF takes cognizance of the fact that "talking in class has a negative value in our system, and a great deal of the teacher's energy goes into keeping children quiet, or getting them to pronounce correctly. If teachers see the child's talk as a resource rather than as a nuisance, the vicious cycle of resistance and control would have a chance to be turned into a cycle of expression and response. There is a vast body of knowledge available on how talk can be used as a resource, and pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes must introduce teachers to this."

Teaching-learning material and activities should encourage small group talk among children and nurture their abilities to compare and contrast, to wonder and remember, to guess and challenge, to judge and evaluate. Listening resources and activities should focus on developing the ability to pay attention, to value the other person's point of view, to stay in touch with the unfolding utterance, and to make flexible hypotheses about the meaning of what is being said.

Storytelling, to the NCF, is appropriate not only for pre-school education, but continues to be significant even later. As a narrative discourse, orally told, stories lay the foundations of logical understanding even as they expand the imagination and enhance the capacity to participate vicariously in situations distant from one's life.

While reading is readily accepted as a focus area for language education, school syllabi are burdened with information-absorbing and memorizing tasks, so much so that the pleasure of reading for its own sake is missed out. Opportunities for individualized reading need to be built at all stages in order to promote a culture of reading, and teachers must set the example of being members of such a culture.

The NCF points out that most teachers often insist that children write in a correct way. The expression of their own thoughts and feelings through writing is not considered very important. Just as the prematurely imposed discipline of pronunciation stifles the child's motivation to talk freely, in his or her own dialect, for instance, the demand for writing in mechanically correct ways blocks the urge to use writing to express or to convey one's ideas. Teachers need to be persuaded and trained to place writing in the same domain as artistic expression, and to cease perceiving it as an office skill. During the primary years, writing abilities should be developed holistically in conjunction with the sensibilities associated with talking, listening, and reading. At middle and senior levels of schooling, note-making should receive attention as a skill-development training exercise. This

will go a long way in discouraging mechanical copying from the blackboard, textbooks and guides. It is also necessary to break the routinization of tasks like letter and essay writing, so that imagination and originality are allowed to play a more prominent role in education.

Why don't Children Learn to Read?

- Teachers lack basic pedagogic skills (understanding where the learner is, explaining, asking appropriate questions) and, an understanding of the processes of learning to read, which range from bottom-up processes such as syllable recognition and letter-sound matching, to top-down processes of whole-word recognition and meaning making from texts. They also often lack class-management skills. They tend to focus on errors or hard spots rather than on imaginative input and articulation.

- Pre-service training does not give the teacher adequate preparation in reading pedagogy, and neither does in-service training address the issue.

- Textboos are written in an ad-hoc fashion, with no attempt to follow a coherent strategy of reading instruction

- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially first-generation learners, do not feel accepted by the teacher, and cannot relate to the textbook.

A Workable Approach to Beginning Reading

- The classroom needs to provide a print-rich environment, displaying signs, charts, work-organizing notices, etc. that promote 'iconic' recognition of the written symbols, in addition to teaching letter-sound correspondences.

- There is a need for imaginative input that is read by a competent reader with appropriate gestures, dramatization, etc.

- Writing down experiences narrated by children, and then having them read the written account.

- Reading of additional material: stories, poems, etc.

- First-generation school goers must be given opportunities to construct their own texts and contribute self-selected texts to the classroom.

From NCF 2005

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Language and Dialect

Rama Kant Agnihotri

People 'know' quite a lot about the language(s) they speak. They 'know' how to put sounds together to make words and to put words together to make sentences that are always grammatical and acceptable; often they use language in nuanced and metaphorical ways. This knowledge, though extremely abstract, rich and complex is not conscious. This is true irrespective of whether you call what is acquired 'language' or 'dialect.' It is effortlessly acquired by every child before the age of four without any explicit tutoring; though the normal processes of socialization are central to language acquisition. At some level people are also aware that without language, no systems of language or culture may exist. Yet the same people treat the issue of language with indifference and immaturity. For them, there is a fundamental difference between a 'pure and standardized' language and a 'locally spoken rustic' dialect.

Many people hold and propagate irrational and baseless beliefs about language. They are a serious threat to peace in human societies. Our education system, especially, has been bearing the brunt of these baseless beliefs and policies based on them. In fact, it is perhaps not even their fault. Creating a scientific understanding about language is NOT a part of either our socialization or of our education.

Knowledge of Grammar

There is no doubt that all of us are quite efficient in using the grammar of the language we speak. We seldom go wrong; even if, by mistake, we produce a wrong sentence, we immediately repair it. We also immediately notice when somebody else makes a mistake. We produce novel sentences on a regular basis and effortlessly understand new sentences and words produced by others. Despite all this, the discussion on the issue of language has been restricted to the circle of linguists alone and what linguists discuss is not easily understood by common people.

For example, every Hindi speaker knows that गीता खाना खाता है। is not a correct sentence. Some of them may explain that since the subject Geeta is feminine, the verb cannot be masculine. But this rule is not applicable in the following two sentences:

मोहन ने खाना खाया।

गीता ने खाना खाया।

Both these sentences are grammatically correct. Here though Mohan and Geeta are of different gender the verb remains the same. When one says

गीता ने खाना खाई। it is wrong. If you are getting confused then look at the following two sentences:

मोहन ने रोटी खाई।

गीता ने रोटी खाई।

Now after some serious thinking one can say that when the term ' ने ' comes after the subject then the verb corresponds to the object and not the subject.

But what about the following two sentences:

मोहन ने गीता को मारा।

गीता ने मोहन को मारा।

Both these sentences are correct. We know गीता ने मोहन को मारी। is wrong, even though the subject is feminine.

All speakers of Hindi 'know' that when all the nouns in a sentence are blocked by postpositions, the verb does not agree with any of them. These are some of the questions that linguists address.

Language or Dialect?

The most common reply to the above question is the following: "Languages follow a certain grammar and have a script associated with them while dialects have none. A language is spoken by a larger population and in a larger area while a dialect is local or limited to a particular area. A language is standardized and sophisticated and used in literature, journalism, government and other offices, courts, etc. while a dialect is just used in ordinary conversation." Some also say that purity or correctness is very important in a language while dialects don't care much about any rules. There could be several other similar explanations which people give to distinguish between language and dialect.

However, from a linguistic point of view, there is no difference between a language and a dialect. Both have grammar and follow rules. What gets called a language and what remains a dialect is purely a social and political issue. A variety used or patronized by important people (powerful and wealthy) gets noticed, and in due course, is declared a language. Gradually, its lexicons, dictionaries and grammars are written. It also becomes the language of literature in that area. With time, it gets standardized and becomes the medium of instruction for children in schools. After some time, other similar modes of communication of that region are declared as dialects of that particular 'language.' It is only through such a process that languages such as Awadhi, Braj, Maithili, Bhojpuri etc. which are mothers of Hindi come to be called its dialects. Perhaps the most suitable definition of language given by Bright is right: language is a dialect with an army and a navy.

In these complicated socio - political processes, it is

the underprivileged children who suffer, as the language with which they come to school gets sacrificed at the altar of a standardized language. For example, take a look at the Hindi sentence : नन्द का नन्दन कदम्ब के पेड़ के नीचे धीरे–धीरे मूरली बजाता है।

The same sentence in Braj would be:
नन्द को नन्दन कदम्ब को तरु तर धीरे–धीरे मुरली बजावें।

and in the language of the famous Maithili poet Vidyapati it would become:
नन्दक नन्दन कदमक तरुतर धीरे–धीरे मुरली बजाव।

In the grammatical rules of Maithili, the relationship of नन्द and नन्दन can be shown with the use of just one letter 'd,' in Braj it is 'dks' while in Hindi it is shown by 'dk.' From a linguistic point of view, all the strategies are equally grammatical.

Relationship with Authority

In a school, the teacher considers herself/himself as the custodian of 'pure and standardized' language. This again is an issue of understanding and approach. One needs to keep in mind that, first, at the time of joining a school, a child knows almost all the grammatical rules of the language he/she speaks. Second, that his/her mother tongue is not the medium of instruction in the school is a political issue. Third, the errors which a child commits while learning the standardized language are not erratic and baseless; they reflect a certain pattern. Fourth, these errors get corrected only in due course, and teachers' efforts don't give any instant result. Fifth, no child learns a language without making mistakes and first language learners tend to make the same 'mistakes' as those who learn it as a second or third language.

Let us now come to the issue of literature. Generally, people believe that it is in the 'language' alone that serious writing is done. For example, Khadi Boli Hindi is the only standardized 'language' because it is used in newspapers and offices while others like Braj, Awadhi, Maithili etc. are simply called its dialects.

It is an irony that Awadhi, in which Tulsi Das composed Ramacharita Manas, Braj in which Surdas and several other poets composed beautiful poetry and Maithili which Vidyapati used for his compositions are now considered Hindi's 'offspring' and not 'mothers.' It is not just a phenomenon of our times. When Kannauj was the centre of power, Apabhramsa became the language of the elite and Awadhi, Braj, etc., in whatever form they existed at that time, were declared its dialects. Similarly, when the power centre shifted to the Braj area, Braj got patronage and the Khadi Boli, of Delhi and Meerut, was considered its dialect. In the same way when Delhi became the centre of power, Khadi Boli came into prominence and all other languages were relegated to the status of dialects.

It is essential to understand the relationship of language and power; only then we can have a balanced and constructive approach towards this issue.

Script and Language

Let us now examine the issue of script which is considered to be one of the most important desirables for acquiring the status of 'language.' This again is a big misconception. In fact, all the languages of the world can be written in any one script, or one can write any particular language in all the scripts of the world with minor modifications. For example take the Hindi and English languages and the Devanagri and Roman scripts:

Hindi (Devanagari) - मोहन खेल रहा है।

Hindi (Roman) - Mohan khel rahaa hai.

There are several languages in India which are written in the Devanagari script; Sanskrit is one language which is written in several scripts in our country. It is also not true that script is essential for the development of literature in any particular language. Take the case of the Rig Veda. For many centuries after its composition, the Rig Veda was not written, as there were no scripts at that time. Despite this, the purity of the Rig Veda was maintained by the people of that time. Language predates script and script may not have any role in the development of literature in any language.

Any group of people can invent/initiate a script of their own for their language. But how much acceptance it will get from society will depend upon the kind of political support it generates for itself. Today, Santhali language is written in several scripts - Devanagari, Roman, Bangla, Oriya and Ol Chikki. Now, which of these gets the acceptance of the larger Santhali community is a purely political issue. The struggle till then is on for all of them!

Another issue is that of the area in which the language is used. It is proclaimed that language is one which is spoken in a larger area or one which is spoken by a larger population and dialect is one which is restricted to a limited/smaller area. This is very interesting. Take the case of Hindi again. It has been continuously projected through newspapers, radio and television as one which is spoken by almost fifty per cent of India's population. It was given constitutional status by declaring it as the official language of the Union (mostly people confuse this with national language). It was also made the medium of instruction in schools. With all this backing and support, Hindi became a 'language' while others like Braj, Awadhi, Bhojpuri and Maithili became its dialects. The large population that speaks these 'dialects' has been clubbed together under the umbrella of 'Hindi-speaking' people and it has, therefore, been declared that Hindi is spoken by millions of people in India.

How many people actually speak standardized Hindi? Very few indeed. People generally use their own languages - Bhojpuri, Maithili, Awadhi, Braj, Magadhi, Bundeli, Hadoti, Bagdi, Chhattisgarhi, etc. - in their informal conversations, and hardly use standardized Hindi. Standardized Hindi is probably spoken in some parts of Allahabad, Benaras and Meerut only. But what about people in Chamba and Hamirpur (Himachal Pradesh), Rohtak and Bhiwani (Haryana), Jaisalmer and Sawai Madhopur (Rajasthan), Ara and Chhapra (Bihar), Raipur and Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh) etc - do they speak standardized Hindi?

So, it is clear that on the basis of grammar, script, literature and the size of the area, it is not possible to make any difference between language and dialect. Then why is this difference or hierarchy created? Why is Hindi or for that matter Queen's English or any other language given a superior status? This is a question which demands some deep introspection by everybody.

This article has been adapted from the original Hindi version, titled *"Kaun Bhasha Kaun Boli"*, published in Issue 13 (Annual Volume 3), pages 37-43, of Sandarbh, a publication of Eklavya, Bhopal.

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A Bird's Eye View of Language in Society in India

Dr. Jennifer Bayer

Diverse and united India is complex with many cultures and faiths, ways of life, dress and food habits, traditions and rituals. The different religions of the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, with a variety of sects, and varying tribal religious beliefs are like petals of one flower.

This diversity extends over to Indian languages as well.

This article peeks into the language scene in India, and presents research results of four recent studies.

Language Families of India

Languages in India belong to six language families:

1. The Indo-Aryan (Indo-European) - 75.30% (Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Sindhi, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Oriya, Assamese, Bengali, etc.)

2. Dravidian - 22.59% (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and a few Tribal languages.)

3. Austro-Asiatic - 1.13% (Mainly tribal languages.)

4. The Tibeto-Burman 0.97% (Mainly tribal languages.)

5. Germanic (Indo-European) - 0.02% (English.)

6. Semito-Hamitic - 0.01% (Arabic.)

There are numerous languages, with multiple dialects and sociolects. For example, within each major regional language, there are dialects, out of which, one is considered the standard language.

Languages and Dialects in India

It is said of India that language changes every 20 miles. This perhaps is because of the fact that in ancient times, people hardly ever moved from their place of birth or had opportunity to interact with other language speakers. The language and culture therefore remained uniquely their own. In pre-British India there were more than 500 small and large kingdoms and hamlets. The geo-socio scene has changed and there is cross migration of people across nooks and corners of India rendering it a living lab of language mix.

India's Socio-Political Space

The Indian political, economic and socio-cultural contexts occur under conditions of a multi-structural whole. Its economy centers on agriculture wherein feudal, pre-capitalist and capitalist structures co-exist. Its democratic political system is the manifestation of the local Panchayat system in combination with threads drawn from international political systems. Its socio-cultural make-up is the combination of Great Traditions with Little Traditions. Its industry is a spectrum ranging from information technology to small-scale industries. Its legal system ranges from the local Panchayat system and tribal customary laws to the district, high and supreme courts. Its people are composite groups, a combination of caste and class, of *'jatis'* and 'non-*jatis*.'

In such a setting where collective sharing of cultures contradicts collective rights and group identities, a discussion of language and power in the midst of cultures in transition is bound to encounter complexities.

"Language" is a social phenomenon and is conceptualized in relation to economic power, religion, ethnicity, caste, political ideology, regional and national boundaries. In addition to these categories, 'language' is an emotionally-charged phenomenon. When manipulated with a particular motive in mind, 'language' can be the cause of cohesiveness or divisiveness of social groups in a given geographic area, or be seen as cohesive structural incorporation of micro identities into a macro identity or seen as fissiparous. The language movements across the country at different times and the ongoing debate on Hindi as the national language and the role of English in education, administration and mass communication are examples. In multilingual, multicultural settings, which are composed of majority, minority and minor social groups, maintenance of group identity and national integration are in apparent contradiction.

Use of language in multilingual India is complex. In the midst of many languages the gravitational push-pull is towards learning English for upward socio-economic mobility. Just as the English language continues to adapt and borrow from other languages to suit changing scenes so also are Indian languages following its footsteps. An implication of its social complexities and cultural diversities is that home, education, administration and mass communication reflect this multi structural ethos.

Status of English in India

The Official Language of the Union of India is Hindi. The Associate Official Language is English. At the time of Independence, the Constitution declared English as its Associate Official Language for a period of fifteen years. The expectation was that all states would accept Hindi as the Official Language. It never happened. As of date the status quo continues to be maintained. Time and again this issue emerges in both houses of Parliament.

English in political India is considered a foreign

language but it is the language that everybody hopes to master for reasons of upward economic movement. In everyday use, there are different "Englishes" in India- Hinglish, (influence of Hindi); Banglish (influence of Bengali), Kanglish (of Kannada) and Malinglish (influence of Malayalam). This goes on and on considering the multiplicity of languages, language families and cultures. In other words, English in India is re-interpreted in terms of one's mother tongue.

Other Languages used in Different Regions of India

Just as India is a multilingual, multicultural whole, so also are the different regions of the country. In 1956, for administrative purposes, India was divided into different States on the basis of the dominant (major) language speakers. Over the years, newer states were created based on issues of language; many demands for additional states are pending before the central government.

All capital and metropolitan cities are multilingual. Speakers of major, minority and tribal languages migrate to these places in search of employment. They are from across the hierarchy of social, educational and economic status of society.

For example, most language groups, due to drought and other natural calamities, migrate to Mumbai, the commercial capital of the country. They are the rural poor and uneducated who cannot afford high rent rates; locate themselves in the famous Dharavi slum, Asia's largest. Each linguistic group concentrates in a particular locale of the slum. Life goes on with people maintaining their home language, following their regional cultural values yet acquiring the neighbor's and Mumbai Hindi.

Most big cities have associations based on language affinity. For example, Delhi has the Tamil Sangam, the Kannada Sangha, the Bangla Sangh, etc. These are localities where speakers of a particular language dominate and where members of these associations regularly meet for religious and cultural events.

We have in India a business community whose profession is predominantly money - lending. They are

the Marwaris. Their home language is Marwari, which they guard with pride. Their accounts are kept in a script called "Lande" which only they can decipher. However, in order to interact with their clients, they attain a high level of fluency in the local languages.

If one travels by road from the tip of the south to the extreme of the north of India or in any other direction, there is no break in communication. There is variation in terms of local language, food, dress, village dwellings etc, but effective communication does happen. Breaks in communication occur only when one hops across to places afar. One is able to guess the region of the speaker from the variety of spoken language.

Even in any single village, variation in language is found because of caste distinctions. There are villages that could comprise different religions, but they all could be speakers of the same language. For example, in Kerala or Tamil Nadu, the Muslims mostly speak Malayalam and Tamil at home and use Urdu or Arabic only in the mosque.

Conclusion

Language, both verbal and non-verbal, has all along been the means to interact and communicate face to face. People are aware of other social groups through geographical proximity and travelogues. They created literary traditions, which went on to encapsulate and spread the use of selected languages to rule and educate.

Through social acceptance, dominant languages reached heights of development. They are used in administration, education and mass communication. This process brought in inequality and discrimination. Literature in the field indicates the whole gambit of controversy of major languages undermining the significance of the minor and minority languages. This situation emerged with the race for upward socio-economic mobility. The upward economic mobility one gains through a language is the focal point of parents to school their children in. The desire to earn more money in order to lead a comfortable life side tracked the status and function of those languages whose written traditions were either too poor or were not sufficiently

developed to cater to the demands of socio - economic progress. This is an interpretation of empowering language through social acceptance enabled through political power and promoted through the education system, which is carried over in other domains, such as administration and mass communication. As time progressed, means to communicate advanced through the telegraph, the telephone and the radio. The telegraph, radio and satellite communication systems empowered the languages that were accepted and used through these systems. This is an interpretation of empowering language through social acceptance and technology in the age of globalization.

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Language, Education and Social Development
- Remembering David Horsburgh

Vijay Padaki

Opening Thoughts

The invitation for an article in Learning Curve came at a time when the subject of Karnataka's "language policy" was in the news once again. For a subject to retain the value of topicality it must reappear in cyclical bursts, make its presence felt aggressively in many directions, exhaust itself, and retire to its quarters until its next appearance. Other topicalities must be given their cyclical turns - nature vs. nurture in intelligence, elimination vs. rehabilitation of street dogs, reservation vs. merit in public institutions and so on. Not too long ago the games and pastimes of children too followed cycles of appearance, with tops, seven stones, kabaddi, kites and gilli danda following the laws of seasonality. One cannot help wondering about the cyclical nature of our engagements. There must be a scientific explanation lying there somewhere, waiting to be discovered.

The language policy season is upon us once again. In any policy debate we assume that the discussion has a solid, reliable body of facts to fall back upon, so that the prescriptions we adopt for ourselves (affecting future generations) satisfy the basic requirement of informed choice. This way we also accept in a realistic manner that no policy prescription can be perfect, satisfying everybody in all conditions. A policy debate can be expected to be emotional, and we must accept that emotionality will cloud reasoning in many ways. All the more reason to ensure that the base has both breadth and depth.

A disclaimer should be in order at this stage. It is not

the object of this essay to either stoke the fire in the already overheated condition or to take one side or the other in the debate. Rather, it is to remind ourselves that there are, inescapably, both scientific and moral dimensions to the debate. Moreover, in an issue as crucial as language we cannot easily separate the two.

Language and Development

We must begin by shifting our attention from the focus on language temporarily and ask ourselves the seemingly elementary question: What are the objectives of any development effort in a society? This appears a necessary first step, since it is taken as obvious that society's investment in education is for certain crucial societal objectives. In other words, a language policy in education can be assumed to be in line with those objectives.

Let us seek an answer through an actual case. A well established and reputed educational institution launches a rural school. Funds are mobilized for a plot of land, building, hardware, software. A curriculum is drawn up which emphasizes vocational skills, so that the village children may have gainful employment when they grow up.

Questions: Why should our children have the opportunities of becoming scientists, engineers and business executives and their children become plumbers, carpenters and tractor mechanics? Isn't opportunity unequally distributed by the differential in the schooling systems? Is the rural school not institutionalizing a perpetration of differences between the two? If we do find a justification for the differential (as we always do), are we not revealing an underlying assumption that "they are different, hence the difference in what they receive?"

It must be obvious that in spite of its philanthropic sentiment, the rural school has done very little for "development." Indeed, many would label it "anti-development" because of its system-perpetration character.

In any developmental process, not in economic development alone, the key concept is empowerment.

For instance, in child rearing we are saying: "Here is everything I know, it is all yours. You can build upon it, and be even better than I." The perspective of all this and more is essential if empowerment is to take place. If we hold back and adopt a part and selective perspective, it ceases to be development. It turns towards maintaining a difference. In essence, the rural school is exactly the same as the housewife who would provide "gainful employment" to the maidservant's little girl. She feels vaguely betrayed when the girl chooses to study further for what she sees as improved prospects in life.

In development via education, we tend to think only of the content of information as important for the development process. But true empowerment can take place only if the composite whole is transferred completely - the content plus the carrier of information, that is, the medium through which one may develop further, faster. If we release the one and withhold the other, it can only be termed part and selective development, and hence manipulative. In a society in which astonishing differences in standards of living are glaringly associated with access to knowledge and, thereby, to power, can the development objective of empowerment be ever served if there is continued one-sided control over the medium, the English language?

It must be stressed that this is not a devious argument in favour of the State freely permitting English medium schools. That would, by itself, be of doubtful value in our development effort. The real question to any "policy" formula remains: Is this in the direction of empowerment or is it perpetrating the status quo? If it is generally admitted that scrapping the English language completely is impractical, perhaps unwise, and not really intended in any vernacular policy, is retention of the language in the societal system to be only for a privileged minority?

Thus, inevitably, the debate polarizes to the for-English and against-English positions. There are the familiar arguments in favour of the English language in schools, colleges and professional education, and in

actual usage in all of our social and economic transactions. These do not require repetition here. So are the arguments in favour of a strong vernacular policy familiar. There is fierce pride, indignation, impatience with the State's leisurely pace and, doubtless, an earnestness to undo the damages from a traumatic colonial past.

Rethinking Language

Following from the above, it is of utmost importance for all of us, decision makers and bystanders alike, to constantly question the premises upon which our prescriptive pronouncements are made. The two most common fears about any other language standing up side by side with the chosen vernacular are: (a) that the progress of one is at the expense of the other, and (b) that the learner cannot cope with two or more languages at the same time.

Ironically it is in the state of Karnataka that we have had the most remarkable experience of Neel Bagh that exploded the fallacious assumptions underlying both these fears. In a rural school in Kolar District, children learned Kannada, English, Hindi and Telugu, the local mother tongue, simultaneously and with the same vigour, with no ill effects on their mental health! Indeed the cognitive cluster that the four languages formed could be regarded as a hugely positive factor in the accelerated rates of learning observed. The so-called "harm" from the "burden" of learning two or more languages is really the problem of the grown-ups. The real harm is in not meeting the child's natural appetite for language.

In Neel Bagh the fluency gained in the English language was matched by a strengthening of the local language, its literature, the local customs and traditions - in short, a rediscovery and reinforcement of the local culture. Educators elsewhere are now recognizing the Neel Bagh experience as a truly Indian alternative.

Cognitive Psychology has always known this

- Children can learn up to eight languages with ease, and with no ill effects whatsoever.
- The more languages learnt, the greater the development of abstract intelligence.

An even more fundamental question to be addressed is: What is language? We normally think of language as the codified verbal communication we engage in though speech, reading and writing, a competency very special to the human species. That, combined with the extraordinary information processing capacity of the neo-cortex, is what makes knowledge cumulative over generations in the species. But is that the only way to view language?

Another form of language that the species developed over about fifty thousand years, ever since it set out to live and function in communities, is in the non-verbal mode, recording and conveying complex experiences as artistic expression. That great music moves thousands of people in the same way is ample testimony that producing the music requires the same levels of abstract intelligence as writing a poem in the spoken language. Indeed, all of the arts can be viewed as languages in their own right. Over time, the transfer of this language and its continuous development also demands codification of its own kind, along with its unique vocabulary and grammar.

How do we view mathematics? At the beginning of the software development boom in the early 'nineties, many young Indian software engineers carried a subtle, unconscious inferiority complex dealing with the technology development partners in the West, mostly in the USA. This arose from a self-consciousness of their inadequacy in the English language, especially in the newness of the globalized business context. However, very soon they realized that the only language that mattered was mathematics and that they were as good as the best anywhere. What a difference in the way the young professionals carried themselves ten years later!

Rethinking Intelligence

This takes us to the subject of intelligence - a much misunderstood (and often maligned) term. The scientific concept of intelligence has come a long way from the earliest propositions of IQ nearly a hundred years ago.

It should not be difficult to accept the value of abstract

intelligence in all human endeavours. As a matter of fact, the higher the level of abstract intelligence in a person, the greater the ease with the person grasps conceptual interconnections across quite different products of human endeavour. The two basic (and complementary) functional components of the learning process, generalization and discrimination are sharpened to higher and higher levels of facility if the person is exposed to a wide variety of intellectual stimulation.

Viewed this way, a simple definition of intelligence would be : the ability to learn.

This definition should also satisfy scientific-technical requirements amply. The learning process is often regarded as the most fundamental of all human characteristics.

The ability to learn also differentiates the human species from all other species in the evolutionary spectrum. The appearance of the neo-cortex in the human species brought with it an enormous capacity for sense data storage and information processing. It was nothing short of a quantum leap, a major departure from the linear, incremental progression seen in other species. (It is estimated that a normal adult living a full life of three score and ten years uses about ten percent of the capacity available.) The most significant consequence of this increased information processing capacity was in determining the repertoire of behaviours in the species. In all other species, the repertoire of genetically programmed behaviours far outweighs the repertoire of learnt behaviours. In the human, the ratio is reversed. As every dog lover knows, the most extraordinarily "intelligent" tricks learnt by a dog cannot be passed on by it to its pup. The human trainer has to start on the pup afresh. And as every teacher knows (but does not necessarily admit), the children in the class one is facing know more about more things that one knew oneself at that age.

The turning point in the understanding of human intelligence was in the factorial analysis of the structure of intelligence, as early as the sixties. It took another twenty years for this to be developed further into the concept of multiple intelligences. Without going into the academic details of the subject, we need only to note the four most important lessons for education from the whole body of researched evidence on the subject of intelligence:

- Fulfillment, development and puposefulness in human endeavours require a wide spectrum of competencies that may be viewed as multiple intelligences.

- The higher the level of abstract intelligence, the greater the connectivity across the different facets of intelligence.

- The wider the exposure and stimulation, the greater the development of abstract intelligence.

- Multiple intelligences can be developed.

Theatre Studies and the Learning Process

Why do we teach physics in school? Why teach history? As elementary as the question might appear at first, the more important point is that we do not expect all the students to become physicists. We teach physics because we believe that learning physics is good in itself, and that somehow it is useful in the business of life and living. This logic applies, of course, to many other subjects. They are good in themselves. They have therefore earned their places in the curriculum.

What about theatre studies and performing arts? Indeed, all the arts?

Theatre Studies in the school curriculum is recognized in other parts of the world as a powerful avenue for

- life skills development

- cultivating multiple intelligences

- general right brain development

The explanation for this lies in the experiential methodology employed in theatre studies, rather than the left-brain oriented cognitive inputs in most other subjects. The research evidence includes longitudinal studies examining the impact on the children, the teachers, the classroom, the families, and the community.

The legitimate place of theatre studies (and all of the arts) can be appreciated only if we adopt a vision of societal development in which the galloping pursuit of economic development is not at the expense of cultural development - a sad state in many post-colonial "developing" countries, including India.

The Whole Over the Parts

Finally, we need to constantly seek the dividing lines between the responsibility of identifying societal needs and the responsibility of serving them. While the given political system may be acceptable for the latter responsibility, perhaps with more vigorous checks and balances, we need to ask if the former is served satisfactorily. The question of language appears too serious and too fundamental a matter to be left to language champions.

Political leadership, in any land, is rarely endowed with a sense of history. On the contrary, the calculation of short term gains invariably leaves wounds and scars on the societal body, with serious consequences long after the leaders have departed. In short, the politician-leader can be expected to act on a fleeting, opportunistic, sentiment-based idea, inflicting it on the people concerned, remaining unaccountable to anybody for the grave and far reaching consequences afterwards.

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Curiosity, Learning and Language

Nat Ramachandran

Curiosity is a naturally inherent and an evolving trait in all animal species amplified at its best in human beings. The innate drive in human beings "to know" leaves a residue in the brain (i.e., knowledge). Such knowledge can either be definitive (e.g. a categorical answer) or learning i.e., despite one's curiosity one can't always arrive at a satisfying answer, which in itself is learning. The fruits of such curiosity are at times deployed for the consequential benefits it confers on humanity atlarge, as typified in scientific inventions and discoveries. Regardless of the consequences, "to know" is an act of mind aimed at satisfying its urge of curiosity. Hence, curiosity, in addition to being an innate human activity ought to be nurtured primarily for its own sake; and secondarily for its potential consequential benefits.

A newborn child comes into this world devoid of any knowledge and understanding of things, people and events. But it comes gifted with curiosity, which it uses as a propellant to "learn" in order to satisfy its own curious urge. In thus satisfying its curious urge, the child "learns." However, as the newborn grows, the primary sustenance of its curiosity is expected from its caretakers, parents, custodians, family elders, etc. who provide the initial scaffolding for a child to both satisfy and sustain its curiosity. They do so typically by aiding the child to express, associate and be heard through language constructs. As a child grows and feeds its nerve cells with more associations, words, and sentences, its innate curiosity will clamor for even more learning, akin to a teething child that wants to eat and taste anything it can lay its hands on.

One could equally argue that language is not necessarily a scaffold but the first confinement of a

child's expression. Until children become familiar with expressing their wants and their feelings via linguistic constructs, they feel unfettered and grunt, moan, murmur, cry, scream, and blather. It is incumbent on the caretaker to decipher the child's needs, wants and feelings. Thus, devoid of linguistic confines, children express themselves in many different ways, which they make good use of, until they are "taught" letters and words, at which points, expressions are channeled and wants are formalized through language. However, realistically speaking, a world without a formally agreed linguistic and grammatical outlet can neither facilitate the nurturing of curiosity nor the expansion of knowledge, however constraining language might be.

Yet curiosity is a fleeting trait, for once something is "known" the curious urge is comparatively diminished, unless the residual knowledge itself springs the mind "to know more." Thus, nurturing curiosity involves not only providing answers but simultaneously sowing the seeds of curiosity that would prompt more questions. Given the valuable-but-diminishing nature of curiosity, it is incumbent on societies to nurture and sustain curiosity in children to facilitate and encourage learning.

Sadly, though, our innate curiosity is neither welcomed

nor nurtured in the prevailing educational system where children learn because they have to learn. Such a circular logic of learning has caused the de-generation of the educational process into accumulating the irrelevant. The genuine irony here is that for an inherently curious species like us, our curricula packs young brains with content that is divorced from the innate curious selves, and the "lessons" taught in schools are sporadically geared towards securing a job and a livelihood. Yet most 'learning' and the resultant 'knowledge' neither arouse our curiosity to know more nor is it deployed in the ordinary course of our life? (e.g. how often does an educated person utilize the concepts of integrals in his/her daily lives?). That is contemporary education: standing as a socially sanctioned and structured process to stuff our brains with irrelevant material and expunge those approximately in examinations, a process for which we get rewarded, graded, certified and ranked in our schools.

We ought to discard such spurious logic ("we need to learn because we need to learn") and question as to why the orientation of education should be centered on accumulating facts, definitions, principles, phrases, theories and axioms, all in the name of "learning." The downside of an indoctrinated education in children such as it is today is an utter lack of interest to learn, and its consequent outcomes in the form of accumulating the irrelevant, squandering the resources of society and a perceptible discontent with the overall educational scheme.

The focus of education ought to be channeled to "learn" by asking and thence knowing. For that is how we can align our curious selves to know and learn. Our innate inclination to ask questions ought to be channeled through language: the emphasis on teaching language should be seen as the best way to facilitate children to ask and, consequentially, to know. In doing so, language will not only serve as a scaffold to communicate one's expressions to society at large but also to realize one's own sense of wonderment within one's self.

"Curiosity killed the cat" is a bromidic sermon we often hear but are never told why. Next time we should be curious and ask, "How?"

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An Introduction

I don't know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru.
I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,
I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one.
Don't write in English, they said, English is
Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak,
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone.
It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing
Funeral pyre.

The above is an excerpt from the poem, "An Introduction", written by Kamala Das.
Source: http://lit205a.blogspot.com/2007/11/introduction-by-kamala-das.html

VOICE OF A TEACHER

Reading and Learning
My Experiments in my Village School

Hemraj Bhatt

The Uttarakhand Education Department, in November 2006, decided to create new textbooks for primary school based on the guidelines of the National Curriculum Framework 2005. I was included in the team of twelve teachers and authors who were given the responsibility of developing the book for Class 1. *"Hasee-Khushi,"* our book, was to be a combined textbook for Hindi, Mathematics and Environmental Studies. Our team had teachers with a background in Mathematics and Hindi but we were going to write a "combined" Class 1 textbook and that made the task challenging.

Our new textbook was also going to break new ground - to introduce children directly to words/sentences, rather than beginning with the alphabet and making them "mug up" the letters. No importance was to be given to writing in Class 1. Instead, children were to be given adequate opportunities to listen to and speak the language, followed by picture description and thereafter by word reading. Once the children learnt reading words/sentences, they could be taught to identify letters using these words/sentences.

Previously, the Class 1 textbook would dedicate the initial six to eight pages to the alphabet along with related pictures. This tradition of beginning with the alphabet was thus to be broken in the new book. Instead, letters of the alphabet were to be written right at the end of the book.

As a conventional teacher, I found it hard to imagine how children would be able to read words directly. I would like to explain in detail how I came around to accept this. Was it going to be possible to introduce students of Class 1 directly to words? There was a lot of churning in my mind on this issue for several days.

Clarifying the Principles in my Mind

Firstly, I understood that a child learns to speak a language on his/her own, without being 'taught.' He/she doesn't require a teacher to learn how to speak and neither does he/she need to be taught by family members. They pick up a language from the people around them very quickly by themselves and within two or three years, they exercise a good command over the language. So much so, that they are able to express their emotions to others and can also understand other people's emotions. However, even after years of hard work at school, we are unsuccessful in bringing children to the required level in the understanding of a particular language.

Secondly, it is only by learning words that one learns how to speak. In any community, a child does not have to struggle by learning meaningless letters of the alphabet while learning how to speak words and sentences.

Thirdly, there are four basic language skills that must be acquired - listening, speaking, reading and writing. These are also the roots of learning a language. Thus, when a language is taught, children must be given adequate opportunity initially for listening and speaking, followed by reading and finally by writing. However, writing is taught first in all our schools. These young children, whose fingers are not even strong enough to hold a pencil properly, have to struggle to write letters which have no meaning for them and of which they have no image in their mind.

These thoughts helped me to develop the understanding that children must learn to read words rather than struggle with the alphabet. Several articles published in teachers' journals also helped me understand this and I was thankful for my habit of reading. In the orientation programme held before we commenced our task of writing the textbook, we tried to understand how children as well as adults can go from aggregate to parts, specifically words to the

alphabet. It is easy to create an image for words in one's mind and the alphabet can then be understood subtly. For this, picture identification or description is very useful. When any child or adult identifies the picture of a cow, sparrow or a bus, they form the image of the word in their minds, and can therefore understand the specific letters more easily. In contrast, if we introduce separate parts such as horns, legs, ears, nose, etc. it will be difficult to form an image of a cow as a whole. In such a case, a child will take months to identify a cow. Instead, if a child is able to identify a cow, he/she will also be able to identify its parts with ease.

We all know that while reading, we do not read the entire word, and no matter how long the word is we cannot read every part. We read the first few letters of every word, infer the complete word and pronounce it. The more we use certain words, in thought or speech or the more we've heard it, the easier we find them to read. However, we have to struggle with letters when we read new words and several times we have to read the entire word in separate parts. We find it easier to read words in other languages when we adopt this practice.

It was with this experience that I decided the children must be taught to read words that were familiar to them. Thus, I first made a list of words. Along with Hindi words, those words that were used in a similar fashion in Hindi as well as Garhwali were also included. All these words were nouns. *(The list was as shown at the end of this article)*

I typed these words in font size 28 on an A4 sheet and took a printout on both sides of the paper. In my school, there were a maximum of 20 children in Class 3. I took 20 copies of this list and laminated each one of them so that they wouldn't get spoilt.

To conduct this experiment, I divided the students into two groups. In one group there were those students from Classes 3, 4 and 5 who could not read properly. In this group there were children who couldn't identify letters despite being in Class 5. These students could understand what was being said and even ask questions. However, when it came to reading or writing, they tended to experience inadequacy.

In the second group, I included the older children of Class 1 and all the students of Class 2. Most of the students of Class 1 were four years and a few months old. Out of all the children with whom I repeated this exercise, only a few could recognize some letters of the alphabet. No one could read the words. However, all these children could write all the letters. They were able to read the letters when written in order but were unable to identify them separately.

I made the students sit in groups and gave everyone a word list. I would read out the word and the students would repeat the word with me by keeping their finger on that particular word. In between we would discuss the words. We used to discuss goats, trees, frogs, buffaloes, etc. as these words appeared. After two or three months, when the students were given an opportunity to read the word list, it seemed like the students had memorised the order of the list. But I slowly realised that they had in fact remembered the words in the form of pictures. If I showed them a picture and asked them to find the word in the list they would be able to find it after some effort. The students of Classes 3 to 5 who couldn't even identify letters properly were able to read all the words on this list in three to four months. I had to work for a longer time with the students of Class 1 and 2. When I used to make them read the words, I would also give importance to letters. Often, I would emphasise on certain syllables and make them repeat them. I did this so that the students could understand the way letters are used to make a word.

Hemraj with a child during an informal oral assessment

Along with this, I conducted another exercise with the children. I made chits that had every child's name. All the students would wear their chits on their chest and read each other's names. We would do this every day. One day I wrote all their names on chits and put them in a box. Every child had to find his name in this box. I was surprised to see that children who couldn't identify letters a few months ago were able to find their chits almost immediately. This exercise gave me the reassurance that we were headed in the right direction.

What else did I do? I would distribute some old newspapers and children's magazines among the children. I would write some word on the blackboard and then break it up into letters. Consider that a particular student's name was Jaipal. I wrote his name on the blackboard and broke it up into two parts - Jai + Pal. Jai has J, A and I, while Pal has P, A and L. Now, Jaipal would have to find the letters J, A, I, P, A and L in the newspaper given to him and circle them. Similarly, all students would look for and circle all the letters that appeared in their names in the newspaper given to them. The children would have a lot of fun doing this activity as they liked finding the letters that appeared in their names. They would be very amused when they saw their entire name in the paper and would circle the entire word. This exercise was meant to take the children from words to letters and I was successful in doing so.

During the newspaper activity, the students were also familiarised with the use of *matras* and how they change the pronunciation of the consonant. For example, "प + अ = पा", "ल + अ = ला" and similarly, " के", "से", "मे", etc. I conducted these verbal and written exercises after a six month evaluation which revealed that 60 - 80 per cent of the students had learnt how to read words and find specific words in newspapers and magazines. The reason for some students being unable to read at the right pace was their absence in class and not their lack of ability.

Writing was not too difficult as most of the students had learnt how to write. They were unable to identify the characters which often happens at school. Students are taught how to write letters from the first day and are made to repeat them for a couple of months. But this is merely rote learning and hence they are only able to reproduce them in the same order.

I realised through these exercises that reading can be made fun for students and once they can read, writing is extremely easy. It doesn't take too much time. Once they have learnt how to read, they pick up any reading material that they have and enjoy it. They also read the boards on shops, the tag lines in advertisements etc. They try and read the sentences written on posters and try to uncover their meaning and later they enjoy reading stories and poetry.

This article is a translated excerpt from the original that was written in Hindi, by the late author, in his diary.

Late Hemraj Bhatt (Balsakha) was Assistant Teacher at the government school in Dunda, Uttarkashi. He was a prolific writer too. Many excerpts from his writings, of experiences as a government primary school teacher, are featured online on the National Portal for Teachers[1].

माँ	जंगल	नाना	टमाटर	नानी	नमकीन	दादा	चूली
चाचा	चाची	बडा	बडी	फूफू	दीदी	भैजी	भुली
पापा	मम्मी	दोस्त	दगड्या	साथी	बै	खेत	पानी
भात	दाल	चावल	रोटी	नमक	चटनी	कद्दू	पिताजी
मूली	माल्टा	आम	केला	संतरी	आड़ू	मिर्च	खटाई
बोरी	मामी	रजाई	बिस्तर	चारपाई	तकिया	सिरवाण	किताब
चाय	चीनी	दादी	मीठा	खट्टा	बिस्कुट	टॉफी	मिट्टी
पत्थर	चूल्हा	लकड़ी	लड़की	कुर्सी	मेज	दरी	चटाई
पेटी	पिठांई	शादी	बारात	खाना	प्रसाद	सूजी	मिठाई
स्वांला	पकोड़ी	जलेबी	ऐरसे	फूल	पेड़	त्रिपाल	दांई
भैंस	बकरी	बैल	गाय	गोबर	घास	घण्टी	रास्ता
बाटु	पैंट	पजामा	दरवाजा	कील	कुण्डी	बराण्डा	घर
सड़क	होटल	मट्ठा	तौलिया	छत	खिड़की	दरी	पटाल
बिजली	ऊन	भैंस	मेंढक	धान	झंगोरा	कोदा	मारछा
कौणी	टीवी	सीडी	आइना	कंघी	बाल	शैंपू	तेल
क्रीम	मसाला	हल्दी	धनिया	दूध	दही	गाड़ी	कार
दवाई	फोटो	कापी	पेन	पेंसिल	रबड़	नदी	गदेरा
धारा	पन्यारा	साबुन	तेल	उड़द	गहत	कंगन	छिपकली

Teaching Early Literacy In Indian Languages

Maxine Berntsen

When a child enters school at the age of five or six, she already has a basic grasp of her first language. She has a vocabulary of at least 4,000 words, and a mastery of basic grammar. This means she can interact with others and carry on a conversation. Moreover, she has in her head a model of the world that organizes and structures the life experience that she has had up to this point.

Once she goes to school, her major task for the first three years is to become literate, that is, to learn to read and write what she already knows on an oral basis. In the process of becoming literate, the child also takes some of the first steps in developing a reflective awareness of what she has hitherto known only on an unconscious level.

Western Debate on Teaching of Early Literacy

In western countries particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, the method of teaching early literacy has long been a matter of intense debate. Traditionally, children were taught by the phonic method in which the emphasis was on mastering decoding - that is, learning the sound-letter correspondences. In the 1930s, a new method was adopted, which started children on learning a basic vocabulary of about 50 words by whole-word recognition ('sight method'). This method came under attack in 1955 with the publication of Rudolf Flesch's Why Johnny Can't Read. Flesch argued that the sight method had produced a generation of learners who could neither read nor spell. Since then there has been a great deal of experimentation and intense debate on reading methodology, with some experts advocating the systematic teaching of phonics and others the 'whole language approach' which argues that children learn to read and write by active engagement with meaningful texts. For some time the debate became so bitter that it was referred to as the 'Reading Wars'. In some cases the debate has had political overtones, with conservatives advocating the teaching of phonics.

Lack of Debate in India

In India, on the other hand, there has been little debate and experimentation on the methods of teaching early reading. At times there has been a tendency to accept uncritically the received wisdom from the West - often with a considerable time-lag.

In what little discussion there is, it is seldom taken into account that there is a crucial difference between the problems of teaching early reading in English on the one hand, and in the majority of Indian languages on the other. English spelling is chaotic because the spelling system was established long ago. This meant that the pronunciation of the words went on changing while the spelling remained constant. As a result, a given letter of the alphabet (especially a vowel) can be pronounced in several ways, and a given sound can be represented by several different letters. In short, there is a poor fit between sounds and letters.

Sound-letter Fit in Indian languages

The situation in Indian languages is quite different. To take Marathi as an example, barring a few exceptions, each character of the Devanagari script is to be pronounced in only one way, and each sound can be represented by only one character. On the face of it, therefore, learning to read an Indian language should be a far simpler task than learning to read English.

The traditional method of teaching reading in India focused on this correspondence of character and sound. Students memorized and learned to recognize the basic characters of the Devanagari script, the *mulakshare* in the traditional order, an order brilliantly laid down by the ancient grammarians, who had analysed the place and manner of articulation of each sound. Along with each character, the child memorized a word starting with that character - the Indian language equivalent of 'a for apple.' After learning the *mulakshare* the child learned the *barakhadi* in which

an abbreviated vowel sign (along with the *anusvar* and *visarga*) is added to each consonant character. After that the learner turned to the symbols for the conjunct consonants (*jodakshare*), perhaps the one place where the script lacks transparency. Once a child had learned the code, she was introduced to words, sentences and longer texts in the form of stories or poems.

This is a very logical, systematic method and millions of Indians have learned to read in this way. However, it has its drawbacks, especially in a classroom situation where many children are first-generation school goers. There may be a considerable time period before the child is actually able to read meaningful material. Thus the process of acquiring decoding skills requires a good deal of application and perseverance. For this reason, the method probably works best in a situation where the home atmosphere is supportive of learning and study.

Common sense suggests that in teaching early literacy in India we should take advantage of the near-perfect fit of pronunciation and script. This means teaching letter recognition - phonics, if you will. But at the same time we can incorporate in our approach an opportunity for the child to be introduced to meaningful and emotionally appealing texts. This is what I have tried to do in developing the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha (PSS) approach to reading.

The PSS Approach

The approach I developed in 1987 is by no means radical or revolutionary. It is probably very much like what successful teachers have been doing for years. It has three parts:

1. A systematic teaching of sound-character correspondences (decoding)

2. Writing down experiences narrated by the children and then helping them to read the written account (organic reading/language experience approach)

3. Reading of additional material stories, poems, etc.

Decoding: The second and third parts, organic reading and reading of additional material, are perhaps self-explanatory, and their content will, of course, vary from time to time. The constant core of the PSS method is the decoding part, for which we have written a small primer titled, *Apan Vacu Ya* ('Let's Read'). If there are any special insights in my approach, they are perhaps in this area of decoding.

First of all, I realized that in preparing children to read, too little attention is given to the development of phonemic consciousness. As a child learns to speak, she unconsciously acquires the phonemes of the language. Before she can learn to read, this unconscious knowledge must become conscious. Only then does it make sense to say, for example, "This sign represents the sound 'm'."

Once children are aware that their speech consists of sound units, we can teach the graphic shapes of letters (characters), words and sentences. Among experts there is disagreement as to which of these should be taught first. What I have done is start with three letters, two vowel signs, and one word for sight recognition: *ai* - 'mother.' Then, in the same lesson, I have introduced all the words that can be made from these letters, and all the sentences that can be made from the words.

In selecting the letters to be taught, I used Sylvia Ashton Warner's insight that we should begin with words that are emotionally charged for the child. Though I made no attempt to elicit a key vocabulary for each child, I started with the words referring to the child, her mother, and her mother's brother. The words selected were: *ha/hi* 'this'; *mi* 'i'; *majha/majhi* 'my'; *ai* 'mother'; *mama* 'maternal uncle'; *mami* 'maternal uncle's wife.'

In order to use these words it was necessary to introduce some of the abbreviated vowel signs (*matras*) from the outset. This first lesson introduced the *kana* (*aa ki matra*) and the *velanti* (*ii ki matra*). By introducing two or three of these signs in each lesson, we immediately open up the number of words the child can read. After only five or six lessons the child is ready to read a short poem or connected story (at the beginning, only a few sentences long).

Role of the Teacher

Ultimately no method, no textbook is teacher-proof. I have had the excruciating experience of watching a teacher use our primer to teach her pupils to memorize the sentences in the lesson. We can give teachers well-constructed textbooks provide them with supplementary materials, but in the final analysis teachers have to have some conception of what reading is, and some skill in class management to organize instruction for children at varying levels of mastery. How to train teachers to do this is, unfortunately, is beyond the purview of this note.

References

- *Margaret Donaldson, in her classic study, Children's Minds (1978. London: Fontana) develops this idea very perceptively.*

- *Jeanne S. Chall covers this debate up to 1967 in the first chapter of her Learning to Read: the Great Debate (1967, McGraw Hill). For a more up to date survey see Robinson, Rihard D.; McKenna, Michael C.; and Wedman, Judy M. (1996). Issues and Trends in Literacy Education. Allyn and Bacon. In the United States, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2002 includes a Reading First Initiative which strongly advocates the use of phonics. One extreme fallout of this Initiative is the widespread use of a test called 'Dibels' (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). This test has been severely criticized by Kenneth S. Goodman in The Truth About Dibels: What It is, What it Does (2006). Portsmouth NH. Heinemann.*

- *The Pragat Shikshan Sanstha has produced a DVD film in Marathi titled Pragat Vachan Paddhati (the PSS Approach to Teaching Reading). A version with English subtitles will be available shortly.*

- *Today the need for phonemic awareness is widely accepted. In fact, it is included in the National Reading panel report of 2000, which formed the basis for NCLB. I hasten to add that while I would concur with some aspects of the report, I am totally opposed to the NCLB Act, which is a draconian measure.*

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Creating Graded Readers for Young Children

Kanchan Bannerjee

I would like to share my experience in developing Readers for Classes 1 and 2 in Kannada for Karnataka and a subsequent effort for Hindi Readers in Chhattisgarh. Both initiatives were on the platform jointly provided by UNICEF and the respective state education departments

A child who has stepped into Class 1, comes sometimes with some pre-school exposure or sometimes may be freshly entering the doorway of a school. Every child comes with his or her store of experience and vocabulary - the richness of the *bhandar* will vary on the base of the exposure at home and in the environment. Children from educationally deprived homes will be

handicapped by lack of exposure to the printed word, and it becomes the additional responsibility of the schooling system to provide an entrancing and delightful bridge to the world of books and reading and a print-rich environment.

As is widely recognized, reading readiness requires skills of visual discrimination, auditory discrimination, eye-hand coordination and decoding logic. Once the child is exposed to words, it is time to move to simple sentences and short paragraphs. And this is the stage to introduce Readers.

What is a Reader?

A Reader is different from a story book. Readers are graded in levels of difficulty where the number and complexity of words used increase with successive levels. Early readers begin with as little as three-word sentences, consisting largely of familiar words, and possibly a slender story line. Progressively, the Readers use a larger number of words, longer words and more complex words. A Reader could be designed such that a child reads it modeling himself on the teacher, and under the teacher's supervision. For Class 1, we tried multi-user, shared readers. It has text for the child using familiar vocabulary in large font on the right side pages of the book. The left side pages have longer text, in smaller fonts, using slightly more complex words which amplifies the story line of the child's text, and is designed for loud reading by the teacher in the class. This can also be silent reading material for children with higher abilities in Class 2 and 3.

Language in a Reader

The English language has widely accepted age-appropriate, level-appropriate word lists. There are few such lists in Indian languages. Textbooks of many States use the word method of introducing reading and these form the word-list. The Karnataka curriculum has a learning ladder of letters, which we used as the base. For initial Readers, we relied a lot on the verse form, with repetition, rhyming words and refrain. Rhyming words are not merely pleasing to the ear, but experts consider the ability to recognize and enjoy rhyming

patterns as an important developmental milestone. Nonsense words too are enjoyed by children and are a great help when there are severe limitations on the number of letters/words that the child can initially recognize.

The total number of words in early Readers hovers around seven or eight, using two and three - letter words to begin with and simple grammatical structures. Then we moved to words with limited vowel and consonant combinations and finally to words that have stresses and blends. Since both Karnataka as well as Chhattisgarh are implementing the Multi-Grade-Multi-Level (MGML) scheme, there is a seamless flow from Class 1 to Class 2 on the Learning Ladder.

Creating a Word List

If a fresh word list has to be created, here are a couple of methods which we tried out. Teachers and Cluster Resource Persons who formed the content development team, spent several days listening to children's chatter in playgrounds, at home, on the way to school and noted verbatim the vocabulary that was used. The composite list was then segregated into nouns, adjectives, verbs and so on. Our early Readers largely used nouns and then progressively included the other parts of speech. This list also gave us clues to the themes that would interest children of that age. Another method calls for a study of a variety of children's literature story books, children's magazines, textbooks - and drawing up lists of common words. This list can be analysed for frequency of letters in descending order. This has been used in some places as a guideline for creating the Learning Ladder. The writing of early Readers could be a challenging task due to the self-imposed limitation of vocabulary and length of the Reader.

During these exercises, the issue of regional variations in dialects also surfaced. Since books are centrally printed for the entire state, the least complicated way is to have uniform content; while the other solution is to print locally for regional requirements. The regional differences in language are relatively smaller in Karnataka than in Chhattisgarh.

There can be partial solutions to this and choices have to be made depending on local considerations. In the Kannada Readers, we used a 'Pictionary' technique. For example, in an early Reader we used the word *jhalaka* for 'a bath' even though it is a literary word used only in some parts of the state - we showed it pictorially along with the word. The word *snana* which is common in the rest of the state was not used because it uses a blend of two consonants and requires a child to have a higher competency and was not appropriate at that stage of the child's learning. In Chhattisgarh, it was decided to use the local dialect on the left-side page of the 'shared Reader' which the Teacher would read aloud to the class. The text on the right-side page would use the mainstream language across the state because that is the common written language that the child will ultimately use as an adult. The fact remains that modulations in tone and pitch (which are evident only in the spoken form) truly distinguish a dialect; mere printed words do not convey the subtle nuances.

Designing the Readers

Visual appeal is what will attract a child to a Reader even before she/he ventures to read it. Use of pleasant, warm colours and clearly depicted figures are appreciated by children. An assortment of styles gives richness to the child's reading experience. Artists can use cartoon style, realistic style or a graphic style. Artists should be sensitive to local lifestyles, culture, diversity and gender. The look-and-feel of the Readers should be as far removed from the textbook as possible.

Once the rough dummy of the book is ready, it is useful to test out the product with children in the intended age-group as well as with teachers. We tested our Readers in different parts of the state for the language content as well as illustration appeal. I recall an incident where I showed a Reader to a child in a village near Haliyal in north Karnataka. I pointed to the bear on the page and asked him what the bear was doing. The child turned and asked: "Is that a bear? A bear is black not brown. A dog is brown!" Our highly-qualified illustrator had rendered the typical brown bear seen in National Geographic programmes, ignoring its Indian cousin! Based on this feedback the artist changed the illustration. We also showed the Readers to children from Class 3 and 4. They enjoyed reading the longer text meant for the teacher on the left hand-side pages.

Fifty Readers were developed for Class 1 and another fifty for Class 2, which today form part of the teaching - learning material for the Nali-Kali programme in Karnataka.

Beyond Reading

Activities can be designed and developed around the Readers. It is easy to design mini-workbooks where children are asked questions on comprehension of the story as well as their interpretation of the illustration. Thus Readers could stimulate writing and comprehension skills.

Creating a Print-Rich Classroom Environment

This popular term embraces an assortment of print items that a child can interact with inside a classroom including signs, wall posters, word labels, bulletin boards, charts, poems, books. There is a writing corner and a reading corner. Multiple exposures to literature in various shapes, forms and lengths introduce children to reading in a functional way. Children must become aware that printed language is all around them on signs, billboards, labels, letters, thank-you notes, in books, magazines, and newspapers, and that print serves many purposes.

In the social context of children in India, early literacy experiences through Readers should be the starting point, laying the foundation of a love for reading. According to Sally Shaywitz, an expert in reading and child development, a child who reads, learns about seven new words a day which amounts to about 2500 words a year. And that can be the knowledge bank for life!

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Inclusive Classrooms for Children with Different Language Learning Needs

Sonali Nag

Imagine the process of language learning to be like a long sentence with many words. Now imagine a hidden hand that changes or even drops some words in the sentence. Each such intervention would change the sentence in a subtle way, but some changes would cause a bigger shift in meaning than others. Dropping words like and or this may have a somewhat less dramatic effect on the sentence than changing the word need for deed or rhyme for rote. Now imagine each of these changes as the possible ways in which genes and brain mechanisms disrupt the process of language learning. The impact on language development is just as varied: some interruptions are small and easily repaired; others leave a big gap in language learning that stay with the child well beyond the school years. Biological endowments deeply shape the pathways to later skill and talent in using language.

But biology and inherent capacity are not the only hidden hands that shape the process of language learning. Imagine again interferences in the language learning process, but this time by the methods we use to teach our children. There are the little slips in teaching that are remedied by other spontaneous, perhaps even co-incidental, experiences. However, certain programmed language teaching methods have far-reaching effects because of the manner in which they interface with the learning process. As with the fate of the carelessly treated sentence, some lapses in teaching may only slightly alter meaning and purpose, but other interventions may be profoundly destructive. The expression of the child's complete language potential is influenced by the curriculum adopted at each stage of language learning.

This then is the age old tension between nature and nurture: the potential the child brings to the learning situation and the opportunity created for the expression of that potential. What seems almost certain however is that certain approaches to language teaching can move children's language learning to higher levels of sophistication and proficiency. Decades of intervention research show that this is true also for children with special educational needs. At the most basic level, an inclusive language learning environment can be such an environment. I will define what I think is an inclusive learning environment but first, who are the children with special needs?

Shades of Educational Needs

Children with developmental disorders of language, learning and cognition are perhaps the most easily recognised for their special needs in the classroom. Depending on their profile of difficulties, these children could carry a diagnosis of Dyslexia, Specific Language Impairment, Attention Deficit Disorder, Down's Syndrome or one of the Autism Spectrum Disorders. Some of them could struggle with simple reading and spelling, others could remain unable to engage with the written word at any level of complexity or depth. Several medical conditions can also cast a shadow on the language learning process. Epilepsy, neurofibromatosis and meningitis, for example, can make it difficult for children to attend to small language details. The sensory impairments of low vision and conductive hearing loss may also interfere. And finally, children whose social-emotional lives are a struggle may feel unable to engage with the communicative and interactive aspects of language learning. The list given above is not exhaustive but is a fair introduction to the range of special needs that demand classrooms that are inclusive in spirit and practice.

There also are other educational needs that are a legacy of our everyday classroom practices. A class in Jodhpur Park, in the heart of the throbbing metropolis that is Kolkata, reverberates with an everyday routine. A language lesson is in progress and children read out a Bangla essay in unison. However, the rise and fall of the

many voices cannot hide the flatness of engagement in the lesson. The same recitation echoes through city classrooms and becomes even louder in the rural heartlands. What this and other similar routines leave behind is an unimaginably large number of children struggling with reading and writing even though they began well and were ready for learning. These are the children who fail even to read their names in Class 3, who memorise every sentence before a language test in Class 5 and miss the subtleties of reading between the lines in Class 7. These are the children who may have begun their school career with no special needs but with every turn of the pages of their textbook have accumulated disadvantage.

It is against the backdrop of the overwhelming numbers of children with such diminished expression of their language potential that I would like to define the inclusive classroom: a teaching-learning environment that supports all levels of individual differences among children, whether these differences have emerged because of their medical or their educational histories.

Attending to the Variations

Arrays of cognitive processes contribute to a child's performance on language activities. These cognitive processes may be seen as the pathways through which the brain's so- called hard-wiring manifests itself in the classroom. These cognitive processes transform complex brain functions into everyday language expression from poetry recitation and dictation tests to story writing and book reviews. Should we assess a sufficient number of children on tasks that demand one of these cognitive processes, we will find a large group that performs in the average range, with a few who are exceptionally good and a few who are exceptionally poor. Placing the expression of these cognitive processes along a continuum would ensure that the assigning of a diagnosis does not become the starting point for special educational support. Rather, any child slipping down the continuum of skill may be a child to be concerned about.

Children who carry the diagnosis of a clinical condition show deficits in some specific clusters of cognitive processes. Children with dyslexia, for example, have severe difficulties with picking out and playing with the sounds in a language. This leaves them struggling to map sounds to letters and akshara and this, in turn, causes repeated mistakes when reading and spelling. Shaky cognitive processes related to the grammar of the language and difficulties in acquiring the vocabulary to map the world with word-names, are defining features of children with specific language impairment (SLI). The weakness in these broader language skills leave the children poor in comprehension, both when they listen and when they read. In the attention deficit disorders (ADD) yet another cluster of cognitive processes play truant during language learning. A child with ADD, as the name of the disorder suggests, has severe difficulty with managing attention. This would mean not only an inability to focus on a learning task, but also a great reduction in the control needed to manage attention when there are distractors. With such a difficulty, a child with ADD may learn to read and spell better than a child with dyslexia and may comprehend better than a child with SLI, but may still make many more mistakes simply because of fluctuations in monitoring language work.

These thumbnail sketches of clinical conditions are meant to show the collection of cognitive processes that are involved in language learning and how impairments in any one of these areas can slow down learning. These sketches however, are of 'pure' cases, which are quite rare. Many children with difficulties have a profile of weaknesses that straddle diagnostic categories. What this means for an inclusive classroom is that it is best to approach children as learners who require all their skills stimulated and supported.

Some children who carry clinical diagnoses will most certainly need intensive support. Such individualized support is best offered through a pull-out programme in a resource room or assisted learning department. But establishing a pull-out programme in a school does not in any way reduce the need for an inclusive class. This is because it is only within a class full of children

with varied ability that new skills and ways of coping can be practiced. However, the inclusive classroom is not just another place where children have an opportunity to strengthen shaky skills. The inclusive classroom is indeed the only way in which a school can nurture the whole child without reducing the child to a set of learning deficits.

Practice Helps, Variety Helps More

What seems quite clear from decades of neuroscience research is that many of the cognitive pathways to new learning respond to teaching. New learning may be for decoding spellings, making out the rules of new word forms or forming inferences from unexpectedly complex passages. While there are several approaches to how these new situations may be mastered there is some consensus from intervention research that practice works best. The benefits of this simple axiom can, however, be lost when practice is equated with mechanical, repetitive exercises. Asking children to learn spelling by copying a word 25 times is one example of practice gone wrong. These are artificial routines that may begin with some gains in learning but in the long run, break the child's spontaneous wish to explore and play with language. The balance comes when innovative teachers take practice and embed practice within variety.

The inclusive language classroom is thus a teaching environment that is in tune with the strengths and difficulties that children bring to the task of language learning but, equally importantly, is also in tune with the child's emotions and motivations on a task.

Doing Things Inclusively

An inclusive classroom has flexibility built into its structure. These classrooms show openness in action, rather than a demand that all children must fit into a closed, pre-set plan. Openness in the following three areas can tangibly turn a classroom more inclusive.

1. The Right Worksheet for Every Child

When planning your lessons on a particular topic, go that extra mile and develop a variety of worksheets.

Introducing extra questions in a worksheet can challenge students who are faster than the rest of the group. Illustrated worksheets that give information through diagrams, flowcharts and mind-maps are helpful for children who get confused about how points in a passage connect to each other. Worksheets that give information in bulleted points are helpful for children who struggle to read long passages.

2. The Right Homework for Every Child

Children with special needs often end up working many more hours than other children. They tend to need more time to finish class work. They also tend to need more time to complete work sent home. Over time, the child is left with less and less free time. Teachers can help by ensuring that the length of home assignments matches the working speed of the child. When teachers monitor children's work in this manner, some children will have less homework than others.

3. The Right Test for Every Child

When written tests are the only method of assessment all children are not able to showcase their learning. Some children may perform better on an oral test. There are other children who perform poorly under the pressure of speed, but score better marks when the test is not timed. Assessments can be sensitive to the individual child's strengths and weaknesses for different testing situations. Teachers can offer children more chances to show their learning by developing a portfolio of their work. A portfolio collates children's performance in written and spoken tests; research-based work and hands-on experiential work, in self-paced tasks and timed situations.

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Academic Issues and Challenges in Teaching English in Mainstream Regional Medium Schools

Zakiya Kurrien

'How old are you? What is your father's name? When do you come to school? What did you do last Sunday?'

These are a few examples of the 20 simple questions asked in a recent test to evaluate the listening and speaking skills in English of about 100 of the 'best' Class 10 students in ten government regional medium schools in Maharashtra. The findings revealed that about 50 per cent of the students could answer only five to nine questions in reasonably correct English, and only one per cent answered 15-20 questions correctly. And this after eight years of English instruction. At the same time, there is a high passing rate in English, of 80 per cent and above, of all candidates in the Class 10 board examinations.

It is widely accepted that the situation is no different in many other states in the country. Success in board exams that test rote-learning of answers masks the true picture that our government schools, many private regional medium schools and quite a few English medium schools fail to deliver basic proficiency in English to students from disadvantaged urban and rural communities.

The response of the educational leadership in several states to increasing demands for English from the ambitious poor has been to start the teaching of English in regional medium schools from Class 1 onwards, reversing a long-standing policy of introducing it in Class 5 or 6. The National Focus Group on Teaching of English 2005, while recognising that this policy change was problematic, did not consider it necessary to mention fully the valid academic reasons for a later start, except for a brief assessment of the 'critical period' hypothesis. What are the academic issues and challenges in achieving the goal of basic English proficiency for all children by the time they leave secondary school? It is important for decision makers and educators to understand them in some detail. I shall therefore attempt to delineate two overarching issues, namely:

- the prevailing myths and misconceptions regarding second language learning

- the context of our government and private schools for disadvantaged children

I shall further touch upon certain linguistic aspects of English that pose difficulties for our students, and conclude with the tasks to be nationally addressed.

Prevailing Myths

The acquisition of both first and second languages has been researched extensively all over the world, though Indian empirical studies in the field are scarce. A major review of the literature was undertaken by Nadine Dutcher in 1995, looking at studies in countries as diverse as Nigeria and Gautemala, New Zealand, USA and Canada. The review highlighted a number of myths, along with the research evidence, of which the following are important for our consideration:

Myth 1 : The younger the child, the more he/she is skilled in acquiring a second language.

Evidence : This is only true in the case of acquiring 'good' pronunciation. Otherwise, research has established that the higher level of maturity possessed by older children and adolescents in their first language enables them to learn the morphology and syntax of a second language faster and more effectively. Earlier biological arguments in favour of "earlier the better" no longer hold ground. (See also the National Focus Group's note on the "critical period" hypothesis).

Myth 2 : The more time spent in teaching a second language, the quicker it is learned by students.

Evidence : The amount of exposure does not

necessarily lead to quicker acquisition, especially if the first language and / or the language of instruction has not been acquired at a fairly high level. The "interdependence hypothesis" has been borne out, i.e. there is a common underlying language proficiency for the two languages being learned by a bilingual student, and this helps to transfer competencies developed in one language to another.

Myth 3 : All children learn a second language in the same way.

Evidence : There is no one universal way of learning a second language. The pedagogy and teaching-learning materials promoted universally by major ELT (English Language Teaching) players from English-speaking countries need not be effective in a given cultural or socio-economic context.

It is important to examine these myths and the counter evidence in order to understand just what we are up against in taking on the policy of English teaching from Class 1 (or even Class 3) onwards in regional medium schools. As the National Focus Group has stated, this is now "a matter of political response to people's aspirations rather than an academic or feasibility issue."

The Context of our Government and Private Schools for Disadvantaged Children

To understand the real challenges in teaching English, we also have to consider the context of our schools:

- Children attending government schools and some private schools, urban and rural - belong to the poorest communities. The evidence from cognitive science that optimal development of even the first language / mother tongue is greatly influenced by stimulating, language-rich home environments already places these children at an overall language disadvantage when it comes to transferring skills from one language to another.

- While learning English at school, these students do not need to use it at all in their everyday lives. There are no opportunities to practice newly-learned skills beyond the few periods in their classrooms.

Moreover, the challenge to learn English at the primary level is mind-boggling when we consider that, for a large number of school entrants, the medium of instruction itself is yet to be learned, as the only language they know is either their own tribal language, or a subaltern version of the dominant regional language. It is estimated that a staggering 25 per cent of all school-going children in the country - amounting to approximately 40 million - belong to this group when it comes to language-in-education.

· But the greatest impediment to learning English is the grossly limited English proficiency of mainstream school teachers, resulting in a lack of confidence and motivation to teach English effectively.

Specific Difficulties for Learners

English has certain innate features that create difficulties for learners. Here are some examples:

- Orthography: English has a particularly irregular and complex orthographic system. A sound may be represented by a number of letters, and conversely, a letter may represent more than one sound. Hence, apart from the proverbial spelling difficulties, our regional medium students face overwhelming challenges when we expect them to learn to read without oral proficiency in English. For instance, would a child in Class 3 know how to read the word "row" or "bow" in a passage, unless the meaning in context has already been derived?

- Grammar and Syntax: The sentence structure of English - Subject-Verb-Object - is entirely different from our Indian languages and hence poses the greatest difficulty for students. Likewise the auxiliary verbs, e.g. the use of has in "He has a pen" is easy enough, but "He has eaten" is tricky. As for auxiliaries do / does / did these are very tricky, particularly in the interrogative. Consider: "Did she do her homework?" Definite and indefinite articles the, a, an are absent in Indian languages and therefore difficult to master. And then there

is the "zero" article, e.g. "I sleep at night (zero) and get up in the morning"(definite) or "There are trees in the park." Irregular past tense forms of verbs are problematic run-ran, give-gave, win-won, etc.

· Vocabulary: An example related to vocabulary is prefixes for opposites fold-unfold, but agree-disagree, and correct- incorrect.

The Way Forward

Considering the above delineation of the global research evidence, the language context of our mainstream schools, the innate features of English, together with the fait accompli of the introduction of English at the lower primary level in most states, how do we meet the enormous challenges in the teaching of English? Section 3 of the Position Paper of the National Focus Group has laid down several concrete directions for all stakeholders. Based on our own (Centre for Learning Resources) experience in the teaching of English, I would like to shortlist the steps I believe need to be prioritised, with some tangible examples of interventions we have attempted.

1. Enhance teachers' own English proficiency. The English syllabi for Classes 1 and 2 of most states recognise that oral fluency is a pre-requisite to literacy learning, expecting teachers to familiarize children with spoken English in meaningful contexts. But most teachers, through no fault of their own, are simply incapable of doing this, as they lack both the oral skills and confidence to use English in their classrooms. Hence the 'pseudo-production'[1] of oral language suggested by the National Focus Group only for the very initial stages of learning takes hold in the form of rote-learning throughout elementary and high school. Unable to engage students in authentic conversation, teachers resort to teaching the alphabet, spelling and text-based answers. States therefore urgently need to give intensive inputs to teachers to help upgrade their own English proficiency, particularly their spoken English skills. Training them in how to teach English can be effective only when they themselves know English.

2. Provide well-designed teaching-learning materials in audio form that not only give listening and speaking opportunities directly to students, but also indirectly serve to train teachers in imparting these two crucial skills for oracy. It is important that these audio materials are not restricted to giving dry pattern drills and pronunciation practice, but expose students to functional English in real contexts, in a graded and lively manner.

3. Adopt a bilingual pedagogical approach in teaching English, using the development of the school language as a pedagogical resource. Better reading and writing skills in the school language will help students to transfer this competence to the learning of English. Moreover, bilingual story books and other materials with parallel texts in the two languages go a long way in strengthening reading comprehension in both languages.

4. Involve informed resource organisations / persons in textbook development specially in the grading of language levels and relevant content. This will ensure that the attainment levels expected from year to year are realistic. In many states, there is no clear technical understanding of scope, sequence or the appeal of content for young children.

5. Provide a wide range of both instructional and reading materials in every class, instead of a single prescribed textbook. The National Focus Group has suggested several tangible ways to ensure an input-rich classroom environment.

6. Reorient learner evaluation. Up to now, tests and exams evaluate recall of textbook-based content instead of the ability to use the language. Given

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[1]The National Focus Group defines "pseudo-production" as language behaviour that mimics real production, but is not supported by an underlying system that allows the learner to step outside the boundaries of what has been taught.

the well-known backwash effect of evaluation methods on curriculum and pedagogy, we need to measure functional proficiency in spoken English, reading with meaning, and independent writing at different levels.[2]

Unless the above measures are taken seriously, the early introduction of English in our regional medium schools will remain a ritualistic reform. Furthermore, the intention behind it, that of social equity and equal opportunity, will ring hollow.

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[2] *Examples of interventions relating to steps 1-5 above attempted by us at the Centre for Learning Resources, and available for wider use :*

- *"Enhance Your English" , a 144 - hour modular course for teachers' proficiency*
- *"We Learn English - Levels 1, 2 and 3" - interactive radio course of 245 lessons for basic spoken English skills (also available in audio CD form)*
- *"Let's Read And Write English Levels 1,2 and 3" - interactive audio lessons with accompanying readers-cum-activity books for Class 4 and above*
- *"My World - My Words" - bilingual picture word books for basic vocabulary in English and 12 Indian languages*
- *Series of graded bilingual story books for young readers*
- *English games and activities*

Teacher Preparation for Teaching Language in Elementary Schools

Prema Raghunath

Language is an entirely unique human activity that has no real comparison in any other species, though there is enough evidence to show that animals, both land and aquatic, birds and insects 'communicate' with each other and with the rest of their community to survive and procreate. Of course the 'finer' sentiments of love and loyalty are expressed by gaze and licking and so on.

However, using language as a tool for every activity that covers behaviour is, I would think, peculiar to Homosapiens. I would go even so far as to say that we are drenched in language. Our intentions and thoughts, whether made public or not, are couched in linguistics. In this article, it is essential, I shall argue, to equip our children to acquire enough language skills in the first few years of their schooling that will stand the test of time and the vicissitudes of life. This broadly covers the following:

· Giving children enough language inputs to cover their immediate schooling needs (academic)

· Giving them opportunities to extend these skills to outside-the-classroom activities (social)

· Creating enough interest to use these skills in later life

Here we have to understand that in the Indian context, we are considering English (L2) as a replacement for the role played by the mother tongue (L1). The basic conundrum that faces most teachers in Indian classrooms across the length and breadth of this country is how to superimpose L2 on L1 and allow it to take over the functions of L1. Whether it is advisable to do this, were it even possible, is of course a moot point and one that has been the subject of a longitudinal study done for Cambridge University several years ago (Dr Sita Chari and Prema Raghunath). That no satisfactory conclusions were drawn is enough testimony to the very complex nature of the part played by language in the human brain. However, L2 is here to stay. Indeed it has become an Indian language in one sense, though it is not entirely clear what part of the population that has even a working knowledge of English, would use it for social interaction and emotional satisfaction. We are talking in this context of a language that teachers must teach in order to equip learners for the economic and commercial world, rather than a language that gives its speakers a world view.

Language acquisition begins with listening. It is entirely safe to assume that if a child has normal hearing, she will pick up first the sounds, then chunks and finally sentences that constitute her linguistic world. This is the language that one hears spoken, whether the mother tongue or any other.

At three, the decision has been made to introduce L2 into the child's life and the elementary school teacher is the one to translate this dream into reality. In learning English, what does real-life listening involve, especially from the teacher's point of view? This can be divided into two stages:

First, gather samples of situations which might require English. List all the situations you can think of which involve people listening to others in their own mother tongue. This will include where they are responding answering, commenting, reacting etc. but the important thing is they must be able to understand what is being said. Penny Ur recommends that you talk yourself through a routine day and note all the different listening experiences that occur.

The second stage involves finding commonalities between English and the mother tongue. How can this be achieved in the classroom? Here are some suggestions:

Day 1 : The first item is, most definitely, informal talk. Most listening texts should be based on genuine, spontaneous speech or at least as close an imitation of it as possible.

The class must, by now, be able to understand simple words, appropriate grammar in the present and past

tenses and through this, be able to construct simple sentences outside the conventional textbook situation.

For example:

What are your names?

My name is _____. Her name is _____.

Practice with and.

My name is _____ and she is _____.

How do you both come to school?

I come walking and she comes by cycle.

Please point out that AND is used when things are related and BUT when there is a difference or something unexpected takes place.

I went to my friend's house. She wasn't there. I went to my friend's house but she wasn't there. On the other hand, we say I went to my friend's house and she was there.

OR indicates choice / uncertainty.

When do you eat dinner?

I eat at 8 or 8.30.

Please contrast this with:

Sometimes I eat at 8. Sometimes at 8.30

Examples of 4 scenarios for creating sentences using conjunctions:

- Talking about daily routines
- Meeting a friend
- Getting ready for school
- Making a cup of tea

Day 2

Practise the following with a partner:

- Telling a favourite story
- Visiting a relative

It is apparent from this that the closer the situations are to the target audience, the greater will the impact be.

It is very useful to create some of the tasks in the classroom itself so that the children can participate in the activity. Encourage children to develop the ability to extract information from a single hearing. This is where discussion plays a very important part, because apart from allowing children to think in a web pattern, it requires that they use language further for thinking.

This fulfils the first requirement of the task itself, which is to have, in advance, some idea of the kind of text they are going to hear. The listening purpose must also be made clear. Are you, as the teacher, going to ask questions, or are you going to give an extended task i.e, some further task which will use this particular text as a basis. For example, you may be using the sample listening text just to familiarise your children with the language, as in, listening to a song or a story or watching a film. It is entirely possible to gauge the reactions and understanding level from your observation of their body language and facial expressions. For example, your response list might include the following items:

- Obeying instructions, which may mean drawing/ painting a picture of the text you read, or making something (an origami boat).
- Ticking off items, which may mean that you read a list of items required for, say, a picnic and the objects placed on a tray.

For Classes 4 and 5, you may want to include:

- Detecting mistakes, statements which contradict earlier ones
- Guessing and predicting - What do you think happened next/to character/who do you think was the real culprit?

Teaching speaking is an activity which is at once easy and, sometimes, impossibly difficult. How many times does a teacher, when confronted with a class of young learners, find to her despair that the same mistake is being made again and again! An example is learning the difference between the verbs, 'to say' and 'to tell.' Tell can only operate with an object - told me/him/ someone, while say doesn't need one (he said........). However, the number of times one hears 'My mother told she will give you a letter,' is legion!

Here are two questions that elementary school language teachers can ask themselves:

1. How do you judge an activity as having been successful

2. What are the problems you encounter in getting students to talk in English in the classroom?

Here is a classroom activity for oral fluency which teachers could try:

Have two pictures with a number of items, for example, an urban scene and another of a rural scene. Each group looks at the picture for two minutes and then makes as many comments as possible, with a nominated person in the group marking a tick for each comment made. The pictures are exchanged and the class repeats the exercise with the second picture, trying to get more ticks this time.

The second activity is the famous 'Spot the Differences.' Here the students work in pairs, with each member of the pair having a different picture. Each one will then describe his picture, item by item, while the other describes the same item in his. Thus if there is a tree laden with fruit in one picture, and a bare tree in the other, this point is noted. The teacher has to ensure two things - one, that the discussion is being carried out as far as possible in English and two, that she knows the pictures really well.

Other speaking practice items include role play and related techniques, such as, dialogues (though this has gone out of vogue in most classrooms, it is still a very effective method), plays, and simulated situations. The last two are particularly valuable for 7-10 year olds.

The more complicated skills of reading and writing should be introduced with great care and sensitivity. Most Indian classrooms have to reckon with the fact that the classrooms may be the only place where reading opportunities present themselves. The hard questions are: Should students be taught orally for a while and then reading introduced? Or, should reading and writing be introduced from the beginning? Most schools favour the latter, though the problem with this approach is that children are often bewildered by the onslaught of new skills to grasp.

Some more questions to ponder on include:

Should it be the phonetic method or should it be direct attack? Name or sound? What about capital and small letters of the alphabet (no Indian language has them)?

Both the phonetic and direct attack approaches have been tried and found successful. In elementary schools, it is important to use symbols that are easy for children to relate to. In today's context, thanks to TV, many words are ubiquitous and need no translation. Teachers could make a list of English words that are already in the children's vocabulary and teach these first (examples include names of fruit, sports equipment and facilities, names and functions of cars and bikes, eating and drinking items). However, given below are the items that have to be checked for efficiency and its opposite:

1. Language 2. Content 3. Speed 4. Attention 5. Prediction 6. Background information- familiar items make the reading experience far more fruitful 7. Motivation - let's not shun information about favourite celebrities such as cricketers and other sports persons, even film stars are allowed if we monitor information 8. Purpose 9. Strategies - gently progressing to the techniques of skimming, scanning and detailed reading for pleasure or serious study

I have deliberately left out writing since that is a very complex activity, perhaps the subject for another article, though I'd like to mention in passing that in France, mindful of the fact that, on the whole, girls' small muscles develop faster than that of boys' (whose large muscles develop earlier, hence their ability to jump, climb and run), the entry age for writing is four years for girls and five for boys. This brings us to issue of preparedness. Our children have to be prepared and for this our teachers' watchwords have to be preparation and alertness.

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The School Library - a Rich Resource in Language Education

Usha Mukunda

The school library is traditionally seen as responding to, and supportive of, the school curriculum. So apart from having a comprehensive and well-selected collection of material, it is the responsibility of the librarian to alert and inform teachers and students, of new, relevant and useful resources that the library has. However, I would like to add a vital dimension in which the library actually initiates activities and programmes to enrich the curriculum. For the library to perform in this way, there are some pre-requisites:

1. An enlightened and pro-active management

2. A dynamic and user-friendly librarian

3. An involved and open teacher-body

4. A lively and interested student population

All these working as a harmonious team bring about what I call the Open Library. None of these are in watertight compartments. The vibrant presence of even one can bring about change in the other three. The rest is the energy and will to make it work.

Let us examine how the library plays its part in the development and enhancement of language education in schools.

The 'Esquimos' have no word for 'War' :

Language may have begun as a functional tool but it has evolved over time into a complex and sophisticated system for expression of every kind. It is not only a means to convey ideas but also sets us thinking, reflecting and responding. It provides a window to understanding culture, habits and societal norms and is a mirror to evolving trends in a community of peoples. To come alive, language must be heard, spoken, read and written. The strand that weaves all these together is enjoyment, appreciation and a facility in understanding and using it at different levels.

Give every man thy ear and few thy voice :

Apart from having a strong resource collection, which

teachers and students can draw upon, the librarian must meet children of every class at least once a week in a library period. This can be used to initiate many activities in language learning.

Storytelling and reading out are the most popular listening activities. To make this a rich experience, judicious selection of reading material is crucial.

1. Reading out of myths and legends is invaluable for the young child. She comes in contact with language that reflects the history, tradition and natural wealth of a culture.

2. Well-known classical tales of every language can lay the foundation for appreciation and further reading as children get older.

3. Short stories are read out at first; gradually leading to longer books read over a whole term. This brings about an awareness of the different uses of language for each of these genres. The craft of an author lies in using language economically and effectively, as well as in being able to express herself at length, conveying the leisure and subtlety of the language.

4. Stories with different themes give the child a chance to encounter descriptive, narrative or conversational styles in language.

5. Listening to the language of poetry is the best way to introduce it to young children. They are gradually able to see how language can, at times, perform calisthenics and can, at other times, be reflective and very personal.

6. Non-fiction is often forgotten when it comes to reading out to children. But it is a powerful tool where language can be used to inform, discuss, argue, persuade, inspire and even make you laugh!

All these examples of reading out can be extended till the oldest classes. In this way, the learning of the language is getting sharpened and deepened to prepare them for the other requirements of language learning - speaking, reading, and writing.

Speak now or forever hold your tongue! :

Language learning can be great fun when the tongue is unleashed!

1. Treasure hunts happen in the library using language as a cryptic tool, first with the librarian setting the clues and then with the children taking it on.

2. Just-a-minute - a speaking game where you must speak with a minute's preparation, and do it sensibly, grammatically correctly and coherently for one minute on a given topic provides hilarious insights into the misuse of language.

3. Book auctions, where one group of children 'sells' a book for reading to the others, demands fluency and persuasive use of language.

4. Along with these speaking games, the library has introduced the concept of a book talk. This is done by each student at least once a term. It is a presentation about a book read, and covers theme, plot, characterization, language and style as well as a personal response. An excerpt from the book is read out giving the listeners a direct feel of the language. Following this presentation is an equally important aspect - questions from the other students and the librarian who can tease out nuances from the written word.

5. In their senior year, students are required to present a mini-seminar on a topic of their choice. This demands clarity, coherence and some sophistication in the use of language.

6. Students are taken to bookshops and exhibitions to select books for the school. After this, at the school assembly, they say a few words about the book and why they chose it for the library.

7. At times, a class or an individual student selects poems from the library to read out at assembly gatherings.

8. Another popular activity in the library is play reading. A group selects a play, randomly assigns the parts and off they go! If they but knew it, Oscar Wilde, Premchand, William Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw, Girish Karnad and Tom Stoppard among others

have greatly enriched language learning in the school.

Beware….! He reads too much :

The entire gamut of the library collection is available to students and teachers for their voyages in reading. This is the opportunity to unobtrusively guide students through all the various genres. Short stories, novels, classic literature, modern writings, plays and poems, essays and biographies, travel books and popular science books can be read, critiqued and discussed to make the students aware of all the possible expressions of language.

1. The language of reflection is available to them when they read diaries, journals, travel books and autobiographies.

2. They come in contact with the language of ideas when they read books on philosophy, education, scientific or economic theories and historical thoughts.

3. One very important aspect is the reading of translated works. Here readers are exposed to the subtleties and complexities of different languages and how meaning in language is linked to the ethos of a people. When students read stories from other cultures and geographical regions, from historical

sources and from science fiction, that exposure can be the first step in breaking down barriers.

4. Another interesting encounter for younger children is with dictionaries. They discover that this book holds a treasure of information about language. Root and origin, meaning, pronunciation, spelling, usage, homonyms, part of speech and even current status, all combine to tell the fascinating story of words.

5. The reading of newspapers, magazines and journals is very much encouraged in the library. The language encountered in these formats helps students discover different styles of writing.

6. Reading online and learning the language of the internet seems to come easily to children of today. The library can help make them aware that it is one use of language among many, all of which are available there.

7. Labels, announcements, instructions, time-tables, maps and telephone books, which are all part of the library collection, use a language that also needs to be learnt.

Is it so written in the bond? :

You may wonder how the library could be involved in the writing process in language education.

Library projects are the clue! Every year each class takes on a project to do with the library. One group prepares bibliographies, while another researches and writes a history of the library. Yet another prepares a questionnaire for a library user survey. One popular activity has been the writing of little books of biographies of workers in different fields. A cobbler, a bus driver and a policeman were some of the people interviewed and written about. As you can see, very different styles of language are used in each of these exercises and there is unconscious learning about them in the reference and background searching they do prior to the project. One other project was to make a

short video film about the library for which they had to write the script! Other writing assignments include book reviews, making a list of the conventions of the library, making posters about interesting books and contributing pieces to the notice board.

Some last words and the rest is silence :

Some things we have done in the library are to stock examples of books in other languages even if they are not taught or used in the school. This is to show children how different languages can be written and read - right to left, top to bottom, and almost calligraphic to look at!

The library can also convey a strong message to users by bringing the second language books to the forefront of the library, even if it means flouting the classification scheme. We have done this in our library with good results.

"Whoever you are, the world (of language) offers itself to your imagination. Calls to you like the wild geese." Mary Oliver.

References:
- Quotes from poems by Mary Oliver and from plays by William Shakespeare.
- Examples are from the library at Centre for Learning, Bangalore

Usha Mukunda has had a sustained engagement with school libraries for 25 years now. She set up an Open Library at The Valley School, KFI and then at Centre for Learning, Bangalore. Her focus has been on bringing about confident use of the library as well as a joy in reading for all young people. This she has done through games, activities and projects. After retiring from daily contact with Centre for Learning, she has been reaching out to schools both urban and rural, to help set up open libraries and initiate activities to promote reading. She can be contacted at usha.mukunda@gmail.com

What do Teacher's think of Language Teaching?

Rajni Dwivedi & Shobha Shankar Nagda
Translation by: Mahima Singh

Discussions with teachers often reveal that most children in Class 5 are unable to read, narrate stories, recite poems or express their views either verbally or in writing.

What then goes on in a language class that all efforts to develop the linguistic abilities of children seem to fail? Discussions with teachers and classroom observation sessions have revealed multiple dimensions of their attitude towards language teaching. In the following pages, an attempt has been made to study some of those viewpoints.

What Does Language Mean?

Usually teachers understand the question, "What does language mean?", in terms of a lay-man. The answer typically is, "Language is a medium through which ideas are exchanged;' it is the 'instrument of communication."

The questions that many teachers most often fail to appreciate or even recognize are : Can we think without language? Can we imagine without it? Can we recognize different things and categorize them without language? Can we analyze without language? What are the different ways in which language is used? What really is the relationship between us and language?

Even if we look at language from the 'communication' point of view, children should be able to freely express themselves, understand others, ask questions, construct arguments, etc. Unfortunately, this is not what happens in most classrooms. Most often, children are to listen to the teacher and follow instructions without thinking and memorize answers to questions after a lesson in the textbook in order to 'reproduce' the same in the examination.

Language Teaching - Learning Objectives and Processes

The goals related to the teaching-learning of any subject are directly linked to our understanding of the subject. This understanding not only helps determine what one has to teach but also enables us to ascertain the very method of teaching it. Because the way teachers understand the question, "What does language mean?" is restricted, it also predetermines the objectives of language teaching.

According to many teachers, the important objectives of teaching language are to:

- know the pronunciation of sounds
- know the pronunciation of words
- produce sounds correctly
- pronounce words correctly
- develop the ability to read the alphabet
- develop the ability to read words
- develop the ability to neatly write the alphabet and words in appropriate shape and order
- develop the ability to use punctuations appropriately
- develop the ability to read sentences
- develop the ability to use grammar accurately
- impart moral values

The expectations and processes of textbook writing are also often based on the above objectives. Consequently, the language classroom is based almost entirely on reading of letters, combining them to read words and then sentences. There is no scope for comprehension, or an opportunity to converse and express views, be it through speaking or writing.

We have spoken on teachers' opinions of the goals of language teaching. There are other viewpoints that teachers have which predetermine their language teaching. These include:

1. Language and all other subject are learnt piece-by-piece and step-by-step.

Instead of looking at language in a holistic perspective, teachers often take a piece-by-piece view of it. This view is extended to the manner of transacting language. The general understanding is that language is learnt piece -by-piece, where the pieces may either be listening, speaking, reading or writing, or sounds, letters, *matras*, words or sentences but rarely anything more. If we revisit the question of objectives of language teaching in some depth, one can see the following steps:

· first the children are taught the pronunciation of sounds

· then they are taught how to speak clearly

· and finally, the children are taught how to read the alphabet and then write it

According to teachers, language teaching implies developing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in that order.

Teachers feel that without listening to the words uttered by the teacher, children cannot produce new words or sentences. The ability to read and write is also viewed in similar terms. Reading entails recognition of the alphabet and producing the corresponding sounds and, therefore, in order to read, children need to memorize the alphabet chart and recite poems and prose almost verbatim. To develop writing skills, a similar mechanical routine is adopted where children are repeatedly asked to copy the alphabet and words. In the name of language teaching, children spend the first year doing just the one activity of copying and repetition of the alphabet and some words.

Since these four skills are thought of as distinct abilities, teaching-learning activities become repetitive and laborious. If reading and writing were to be linked with children's conversations and experiences, the entire process would perhaps be more meaningful and more effective.

Let us see one example which elucidates how language is taught piece-by-piece in the classroom. The teacher enters the class and disciplines students by scolding them. He then writes some (Hindi) letters on the board to explain how words are constructed with them and then sentences with words.

घ, र, च, ल, अ, ब, न, भ घर, चल, घर चल

अ, म, न, घर, चल, अमन घर चल

च र ण घर, चल, चरण घर चल

After this, the teacher makes the children read the letters, the words formed with the letters and then the sentences formed with the words. He does this exercise throughout the period calling one child at a time to read off the board. The entire session is based on letter and word recognition and in the process the very meaning of the sentence (an artificial unnatural one, no doubt) that has been constructed is lost.

This is crucially linked to the choice of subject matter - to read, the subject matter picked must be such that it goes forward step by step. Consequently, if the subject matter gets confined to letters , words without matras (e.g. कमल, अमर etc. and कमला is not allowed) or sentences (घर चलए नल पर चल सरपट कर) and the like.

Children are therefore forced to engage with content that they can neither relate with their own experiences nor find any meaning, use or interest in them.

2. Language is Learnt through Copying

Teachers believe that children learn a language when they are taught isolated pieces of that language in a standard and pure form without interference of any other language. This means that it is with the repeated enunciation of sounds and words before them that children are able to imitate those words, thus picking up the language. This belief is so strong that such imitation is the pattern of language teaching that is adopted.

In the process of learning language, most children initially babble for a while. Do we teach them how to babble? It is not that adults talk in a babble to children from where a child can pick up such a manner of speech. Children, on their own, make several new sentences. Do we speak the same sentences or speak

only one sentence before them so that they may hear it many times and copy it?

My friend's daughter (aged three years) and her aunt are in conversation:

Aunt: Say I'm good
Child: I am good

Aunt: I am a girl
Child: I am a girl

Aunt: I am bad
Child: You are bad!

Now think, how did the girl know what changes had to be made to the sentence to avoid calling herself 'bad?' How did she learn to say this? By copying? By someone telling her or…. is something else happening here which is difficult for us to understand in the framework of imitation?

3. Language can only be Learnt from Textbooks

It is believed that the proper way of learning language is through a textbook, that children must be taught the various structures and that too in the specified order (Lesson 1, Lesson 2, etc.). Children should not be normally allowed to read a lesson that they like in the textbook. Teaching is considered complete after the lesson is explained and the difficult words in it "taught." Children have to learn the answers to the questions given at the end of the chapter.

Despite the availability of a large corpus of literature, especially literature apt for children of that age, none of that is introduced to or made available to the children. I once asked children in a classroom if they would like to listen to a story or a poem. They did not reply. Then I told them a story. In the same class the next day, children themselves asked me to recite a poem. After I finished reciting the poem, the children requested me to repeat the same story that I had told them the previous day. This indicated that children do have an urge to listen to stories and poems but because we do not use literature in a meaningful way their interest is lost. The task of making them memorize the key points of the various poems, prose pieces, stories etc. is boring, particularly when the key points are also in accordance with what has been told to them. The

purpose of literature as an exploration and enrichment of oneself and one's world view is completely missed.

None of the language-related contexts available in the form of advertisements in magazines, newspapers or on hoardings in the street is used or even thought of as a possibility.

Textbooks do indeed help, but they only have limited scope and children need   to be introduced to other resources. Teachers will have to think about what else, besides textbooks, is necessary to develop the ability of children to use language.

4. Belief in a Child's Capabilities

Many teachers believe that a child's learning begins only when he/she begins going to   school. Many teachers also believe that children from well-off families in big towns or cities know much more and are intrinsically more capable and intelligent compared to children from rural and/or poor homes. These children can rapidly learn how to read and write but those from villages or poor children whose parents are illiterate do not know anything and cannot learn easily. Such children can only learn from school if they pay attention and make a great effort.

Every child learns the rules of the language spoken by his/her family and those around him, be it rules at the level of sounds, words or conversation. The child not only knows how to produce appropriate words and sentences but he/she also knows what needs to be done to a sentence or the intonation required to make it into a question. He/she can also differentiate between the manner of speaking he/she should adopt while addressing his/her father and when talking to guests who come to the house. In fact, children even know how to talk to someone in case they want something from them. Who teaches children these things?

But, ignoring these abilities, children are only asked to learn the alphabet and words. So a child, who knows all the rules of conversation, comes to class and has to avoid speaking altogether!

It may be fruitful to keep the following few points in mind while teaching a language class:

- The reading-writing resource material should be meaningful and of a level that is comfortable for children

- The resources provided must be in a familiar language

- The teacher should engage in meaningful conversation with his/her students, should listen to the children carefully and with patience and give them adequate opportunity to listen to what others have to say. They should be encouraged to extract the laws of grammar for themselves and extend their vocabulary at their own pace

- It does not make much practical sense to divide a language into the alphabet, pronunciation, grammar, copying, etc., nor can the above be learnt in a particular order. The only way to learn a language is to try and use it as much as possible by speaking, making logical arguments, imagining, being creative, reading and writing. Given the opportunities to do all of the above, language learning is not that tricky!

Rajni Dwivedi and Shobha Shankar have been working with Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre for the last 6 years and 12 years respectively. They have been associated with teacher training and textbook development efforts in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Rajasthan. Rajni has helped in developing the D.Ed. course in Chhattisgarh and Shobha has extensive experience of working with children in literacy camps and non formal education centres. They can be contacted at rajni@vidyabhawan.org and shobha@vidyabhawan.org

Something to try in a Language Class!

LEVEL I: USE AS MANY OF THE TILES BELOW TO FORM A WORD

| A | G | K | I | E | B | F | U | N |

LEVEL II: ADJOIN AS MANY AS YOU CAN OF THE TILES BELOW, TO THE ONES ABOVE, TO FORM A WORD

| AE | IO | NS | GH | LF | RN | OU | PH |

LEVEL III: NOW LET'S PLAY WITH WORDS TO FORM A SENTENCE!

| ARRANGED | DISTURBED | THEY | HAD |

| TODAY | US | MARRIAGE |

Source: http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com/
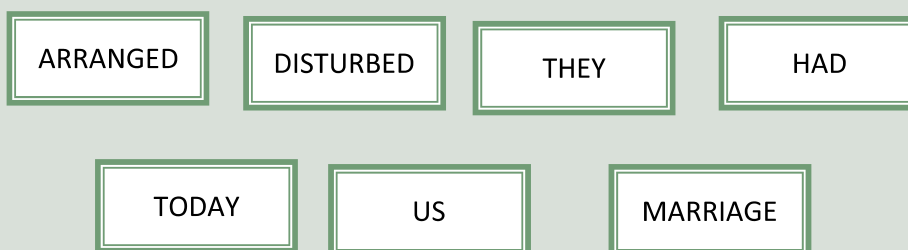
VOICES OF STUDENTS

Three Languages, Three Paradigms

Ashvin Srivatsa

I have some degree of familiarity with three languages: English, Tamil, and Japanese. English is my native tongue – I've learned it since I was born, and it has been the medium of instruction in all of my schooling. Tamil is the language spoken by my family at home – though I've never received formal instruction in Tamil, I have been exposed to it on my yearly vacations in India. Unlike Tamil and English, my only exposure to Japanese is in the classroom. Each of these languages has influenced my intellectual development in a different way, and I shall herein attempt to describe my experience with each of these languages.

English is nothing new to me – as a resident of the US, I have been exposed to this language since birth. I would consider myself a proficient speaker, reader, and writer of the English language. Naturally, multiple factors have contributed to this. No single educational approach would have imbued me with the competence that I now possess. My experience with English began when I was but a wee lad – my parents read to me frequently when I was young. This provided me with the solid basis from which I could later proceed to expand my knowledge of English.

Prior to the beginning of my formal schooling at age five, I was exposed to all sorts of English-language stimuli, ranging from books and billboards to television and conversations and even to vehicular license plates. It is my firm belief that interacting with English from such a wide variety of sources was absolutely fundamental to my development. By absorbing all the information I could from my surroundings, I became well-prepared for the formal phase of English instruction that began upon my entrance to the primary school system.

Ever since entering kindergarten, I have been formally taught English. Though there has been a gradual shift in focus over the years, with ever-greater emphasis being placed on the analysis of English literature rather than the mechanical aspects of the English language, the analytical and mechanical components of the language are inseparable – a firm basis in the mechanics of English is a prerequisite for conducting sophisticated analysis, while performing analysis will invariably leave one with a greater appreciation for the mechanics of the language. The synergistic effect of these two aspects of learning seems to have been of great value to my acquisition of English.

The final and most crucial component of my journey to acquire English has been my insatiable desire to read. Ever since learning how to read as a youth, I have always felt the urge to study the written word. During some parts of my life, I had eyes only for almanacs and encyclopedias; at other times, I preferred whimsical tales of fantastic adventure. No matter what I read, I was furthering my knowledge of English, acquiring new vocabulary one day and perusing a unique sort of diction the next.

It is this holistic way of learning English – one that incorporated instruction in the classroom, parental aid, and self-directed inquiry – that provided me with the proficiency in the English language that I today possess. My experience with English has been one that is an example of fully-realized potential – an example of the great knowledge one can achieve given the appropriate strategy. Indeed, the inclusive and effective way I learned (and continue to learn) English has served as a model for the way I now choose to approach my own education.

But for all that I might say about my understanding of English, I can say none of the same about Tamil – I can neither read nor write it and my comprehension of spoken Tamil is rudimentary at best. Though my parents have always used some Tamil in speaking with me, this has been the extent of my exposure to the language. Whereas I was continuously exposed to English and able to assimilate new knowledge on a

regular basis, the same cannot be said for Tamil. I never had access to Tamil publications, scarcely had the opportunity to interact with other Tamil speakers, and had no practical reason to learn Tamil. Even when visiting my relatives in India, I could survive without ever speaking a word of Tamil.

In the absence of any need to speak Tamil, I felt no motivation to put in the effort necessary to become a skilled Tamil-user, despite the occasional overtures by my parents indicating their desire that I try to speak Tamil more often. Today, I certainly recognize the value of learning a language as an intellectual pursuit if for no other reason, but as a youth, such advanced reasoning was absent. Faced with both a lack of resources and a lack of motivation, my Tamil never progressed to a sophisticated level, though there is certainly no impassable barrier stopping me from learning the language. To me, Tamil stands as an example of what could have been, but was not – potential left unrealized due to mere logistical factors.

The way I have approached the Japanese language is in some ways a middle-ground between my experiences with Tamil and English, and in some ways completely unique. To the best of my knowledge, I am the first person in my family to have learned anything more than a rudimentary sort of Japanese. For this reason, I had absolutely no experience with the language until a class in Japanese was offered by my school from the seventh grade onwards. I entered that class with no idea of what to expect, no foreknowledge of what Japanese would be like and what I would learn from that class. Having studied it for four-and-a-half years now, I can say that in addition to teaching me Japanese, this class broadened my horizons in a way I never expected. In addition to presenting me with a look into Japanese society, a singular culture like none else, it influenced the way I learned in general: I found myself able to apply the pedagogical strategies I acquired to my other classes, indubitably enhancing the way I learned anything.

My school's Japanese language curriculum is unlike the curriculum for many of the other foreign languages taught at my school, in that it prescribes teaching not only of the mechanical aspects of the Japanese language, but also of the ways in which the Japanese language is relevant to both historical Japanese society and contemporary Japanese culture.

From the very beginning, the new phrases we learned were placed in a context that made them significantly more memorable and relevant to my life. Within the first few weeks of class, we learned how to ask and answer questions such as "Where is the bread?" This information was swiftly followed up with a video of an interaction between a grocery store customer and clerk with the customer inquiring as to the location of a particular comestible and the clerk answering the customer's query, entirely in Japanese. There is no doubt in my mind that this demonstration of the relevancy of the grammatical structure we had just learned was immensely helpful in cementing that structure in my mind.

This process has continued over the years, despite the increasing abstraction of the lingual elements studied – for example, Japanese is a highly honorific language and usage of the proper vocabulary in the proper situations is crucial to being able to function in Japan. Rather than treating honorific terminology as something entirely abstract, we were presented with social situations in which certain honorifics were appropriate, sometimes in the form of video and sometimes in the form of a skit.

Throughout my study of the Japanese language, reinforcement of the practical ties between the language and its societal implications was crucial to making the things I learned more memorable. Beyond the immediate consequences of understanding Japanese as it would pertain to being able to operate in Japanese society, learning Japanese taught me to think in a new way – to develop analogies between the English language with which I am intimately familiar and the Japanese language which was once entirely foreign to me; to approach the complexities of Japanese society by examining how each aspect of Japanese society relates to its language. Japanese has

also taught me to think about writing in a completely new way, for its writing system is syllabic and pictographic, rather than the alphabetic and alphabet-like systems so much more familiar to many. Though learning a new language may not yield this *particular* benefit, there are sure to be other hidden rewards from studying any language at all.

In looking back at the languages I have learned, it seems that each language can be characterized in a unique way - English, for example, was the language that was inextricable from and inherent to my way of life. I have learned English both in the classroom and in a freeform manner, such as when I read for my own pleasure.

I have only learned Japanese in the structured environment of the classroom, on the other hand, and have never been exposed to a wide variety of stimuli beyond that which is presented in the classroom. Though this has left me with a firm understanding of the Japanese I have so far learned, it has limited my ability to innovate in Japanese -this will remain so until I receive significant exposure to Japanese outside the classroom. Of course, this is not to say that my Japanese is bound to remain forever inadequate -in some cases, this sort of firm basis is all that is necessary.

Tamil, in this sense, is completely the opposite of Japanese. Though I have never received formal instruction in the language, I have been exposed to it since I was born and have received a good deal of exposure to the language in the form of conversation with my family. This has left me with little but the ability to think effectively about learning Tamil. Indeed, it is this that I make my goal - using the skills I have gained from my study of Japanese, I hope to learn Tamil in a somewhat structured environment. Because I have experience with Tamil as a sort of native language, it is my hope that someday, my knowledge of Tamil may rival my knowledge of English. For, after all, if knowing three languages is alone enough to help one learn, would not knowing three languages *well* help even more?

Ashvin Srivatsa is a lifelong learner and a gifted student who is passionate about Mathematics, the Sciences, Japanese and Music. To accelerate his pace of learning, Ashvin has taken a suite of advanced placement courses (college level courses) both from his school as well as from Stanford University's Educational Programs for Gifted Youth and North Western University's Center for Talent Development. In fall 2009, Ashvin is entering his senior year at Sycamore High School in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is an avid reader who likes to read just for learning, loves a hearty laugh, and travels to India every year to visit his family. He can be contacted at ashvin.21@gmail.com

Learning Gujarati from Friends; Not learning Marathi at School

Ranjani Raghavan

I am a Tamilian brought up in Mumbai. I could speak Hindi, English and Tamil by the age of three. I also started speaking Gujarati because I had Gujarati friends and I learnt a completely new language in the most natural way! But I still can't hold a conversation for more than five minutes in Marathi- a language I learnt for six years at school.

Teaching languages usually starts off with the alphabet- for Marathi it wasn't necessary as it has the same script as Hindi. So we move on to the textbook immediately. The lessons are translated to English. Questions based on the lessons are given and answers are "mugged up" by the students. The same questions appear in the exams; the student writes these answers and passes the exams.

This goes on till Class 10. During the process, the student starts understanding the basic language but is still not able to frame grammatically correct sentences. When it comes to essays and letters, students find it difficult to put their ideas and thoughts in Marathi. We simply have not been prepared for this ability. Less than five to ten per cent of the students in a class do well in creative writing.

The burden of learning language within the tyranny of syllabus is unbelievable. There are around 25 lessons and poems (really!) and more than 100 answers to "mug up" for a 100-mark paper. Add to this, the fact that the lessons and the stories are uninteresting. However, a student can, even without 'learning,' still get just around 65 marks by rote learning the answers. There is no 'language learning' as such. There is merely a sense of relief after Class 10 as the subject is not compulsory anymore!

The only way this problem can be solved is by altering the method of teaching. The teachers must inculcate a liking for the language. You can't just know a language by force. There should be more emphasis on speaking and listening skills in the beginning, gradually moving on to reading and writing. Lesson-based exam should be done away with. There must be more of comprehensions, compositions and tests based on audio lessons. This will ensure that students will at least have a better grasp of the language and be more fluent in it when they finish school. Isn't there a lesson for the education system from the way I learnt Gujarati from my friends outside school?

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TOOLS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Language Development through Story-telling

Geeta Ramanujam

Every person is a storyteller even when she begins to narrate an experience, an anecdote or a news item. The storyteller is also the audience when she listens to the television, radio or a family member. All communication in the world evolves and revolves around stories. There are stories everywhere from bulletin boards, to bus-stands, railway stations, theater houses, homes, schools, colleges, pavements, roads, advertisements, families, schools, places of work and even in space. When we share our experiences and memories with family members and friends, they are full of stories.

So, naturally the need to communicate to each other becomes evident.

To communicate, language plays a vital role. The language of storytelling involves the skills of listening, recalling, and re-telling, which lay the foundation of the oral tradition. The four basic pillars of language development - Listening and Speaking, Reading and Writing - are contained in the treasure box of stories.

Stories instill a sense of wonder evoking imagination in the child from a very young age. A great treasure trove of folk tales in each culture is buried in our own backyards. It is our duty as a community to unfold this treasure and plough it back to the children so they can listen and feel the characters of the story and listen to the sounds of the teller.

Evolution of Sounds and Language Development

What are sounds? Atomic science and Einstein's theory have projected the conclusion that, at the level of the atom, all matter is the same. Objects appear different to the eye because energy produces vibration of different frequencies at various points.

Vibration creates sound. The earliest vibrations were felt by the saints - Rishis who became aware of it and called it *Sruti* or that which is heard. The oral chanting and tradition of the Vedas have been passed from one generation to another without any written documents for the same. They have neither authorship nor copyright and yet the tradition continues even today through the ancient method of learning by the ear (called *Stotra*) in the Guru-Shishya tradition.

Why were they not written down? Some say that some sounds do not lend themselves to be accurately reproduced phonetically. They fall between two syllables and there are many such sounds in the Vedas. Our emotional response, and even the cosmic force which regulates the orderliness of nature, change with the differences in intonation.

How the modulation of voice could have adverse effects is told as a short story in the *Taittareeya Samhita* of the Vedas. The celestial craftsmen called Tvashta learnt a *Mantra Japa* by which he could create a son capable of destroying Indra. While chanting the *Mantra*, he erred in the intonation and accent of the sounds of words. This resulted in the creation of a son exactly contrary to his intention. Instead of asking for a son who would destroy Indra, he asked for a son who would be destroyed by Indra. The story goes on to say that eventually it turned out to be so.

Language is words spoken well and communicated with the right effect. Words which determine the intention of a feeling, emotion or an object can be effectively communicated only when it is transmitted in the right tone, emotion and accent.

Just as a person well versed in music can immediately identify a wrong note, a person well versed in language can identify a mistake in the spoken tongue.

At the Tokyo children's library in Japan, the chief librarian uses storytelling to help children speak Japanese slowly, with pauses contrary to how it is being spoken today.

If you listen to our radio and television channels, all regional languages seem to sound alike with an

accented English mix. We are evolving a totally new gibberish which is neither the English spoken as it ought to be nor the modern slang, but a new language which makes no sense.

There are more than 1,652 mother tongues recorded with the names of speech varieties that the speakers said they spoke. Linguists have classified these speech varieties or dialects under 105 languages in India alone.

Language for Teaching

Teachers need to be effective communicators and language forms the basis of all communication. Teachers need to balance the emotional and the intellectual quotient in children and this can only be possible when the teacher communicates well in the classroom.

Although we divide the school day into subject periods, the skills of language are used throughout the day. The receiving skills are listening and reading, while the sharing skills are speaking and writing. Speech has no purpose unless associated with listening. Listening needs to have pause and in the word "listen" is the word "silent." There are nearly 40 different types of listening and one needs to understand what it is to observe and listen with body, mind and soul.

To be in communion means to share a mutual understanding or feeling, to exchange ideas for which storytelling lays the foundation. The words in a story like river, monkey or chocolates bring home different images to each of us.

Teaching is not just telling. Storytelling involves communication like showing, showing how, showing why, evoking a sense of wonder and decorating words with the highs and lows that can trigger the imagination and create a thought process in the child.

Once this is established at the primary level, the child can lead an entire lifetime of talking and reading with ease and will express herself clearly, confidently and comfortably.

The "tales of the tongue" can have a deep impact on the child's ability to respond to circumstances and subjects around her.

How Do We Begin ?

To be a storyteller, you must first be a good "story listener." Listen to people telling stories. Note their language, intonation and stress on vowels, sentence formation, pause and flow. Observe the images, speech and mannerisms of the people around you.

The best way to become a successful storyteller is to keep telling stories. As you gain confidence and interest, you will begin to collect more tales, tape some and recall them at ease.

Take time to listen to your own stories. Become the character you are within. Try to exaggerate it. Create a character which is not you. Try to identify yourself with a character in a story. All this is possible when you are not viewing storytelling as mathematics, science, geography or history. It is not a subject to be learnt and learnt by heart. It is not going to reveal its secrets so easily to you. "Pause, Wait and Watch." This process will automatically affect a shift in your thinking skills. Be attentive to your friends and to the children and assure them that you are listening with your whole heart to them, by nodding your head or responding with hmm, I see, etc. When you have learnt to be a good story listener you can perhaps begin to think of laying the foundation of being a good storyteller.

What is the Purpose of Storytelling in a Classroom?

Storytelling enlivens a classroom and makes concepts much easier to understand. What normally would take five classes to understand can be understood in just one or two classes when explained or told through a

story. Most importantly, as children listen to you they pick up words, language, accent and inadvertently your pronunciation and tone.

When children listen whole-heartedly to a story about the measurement of the pyramids or experience an anecdote in history through a story, their whole being is alert.

Every word and sound you speak makes an impact on the child. Storytelling helps to lay the foundation of all learning.

What are the Tools Required to tell Stories?

The best tool is our own selves. Our own internal faith and strength creates the right atmosphere for telling stories. We need to believe in stories ourselves in order to create that faith in children.

Once upon a time two men argued about a chameleon. While one said it was blue the other argued that it was brown. So they went to a friend who had lived in that part of the jungle for many years.

He said that both of them were wrong and added that "the chameleon is black and I have it in my box." When he opened the box the chameleon appeared white. So, neither of them was right and yet all of them were right. So too in storytelling, some stories may be true and some false and yet they are all stories.

'The universe is made of stories not atoms', said a great philosopher.

So, once we believe in it, the story is transmitted automatically with the feelings we add to it, just as we add the ingredients for cooking and it becomes a lovely dish.

Our basic storytelling tools are :
- Body Language
- Expressions
- Voice
- Mannerisms
- Word Play
- Fluency in Language
- Vocabulary
- General Knowledge
- Presence of mind

It is very important for us then to read a story several times before we master its telling.

"Once upon a time there was a crow" is more easily read than told. For when you begin to tell a story, it should be told simply and clearly with the right intonation and sounds

In order to master this, one needs to :
- Choose the story to suit the audience. The best stories are those you are familiar with and have tried with your family and colleagues first before you venture to use them in the classroom.
- Learn to narrate it effectively.
- Practice it several times.
- See that the beginning and the ending is good.
- Ensure that it has clearly drawn out characters.
- Time your story.
- Read the story.
- Reread it aloud several times.
- Tell the story.
- Retell the story aloud.
- Prepare the expression, action, sounds.
- Personalize the story.
- Give it a last polish.

You are now ready to tell your story......

'The Universe is made up of stories , not atoms.....'

Geeta Ramanujam is a storyteller, academician and consultant for several educational programs in India and around the world. She is a recepient of the Ashoka fellowship. She has trained over 49,000 teachers so far and has been a successful entrepreuner in Integrating Storytelling with Education as also to give a new dimension of Storytelling as an art form. She has been instrumental in developing an Academy for Storytelling - the first of its kind in India - which offers certificate courses in Storytelling. Storytelling is a spiritual and religious journey for Geeta and what she enjoys the most when leaving a workshop is that it has touched the feelings of the participants one way or the other. She can be contacted at geetastory@gmail.com

Use of Puppetry in Teaching Language

Prema Daniel

Language is the most important tool in a child's learning experience. Children are introduced to languages other than their mother tongue at a very early age. Most schools choose English as the medium of instruction because parents (and the public) want children to be exposed to English as early as possible, as it is seen as a stepping stone to success.

Teachers often label children as dolts and feel their I.Q. is low if they don't know English. In their anxiety to teach English, teachers feel that shouting commands, making a child write something five or six times, and constantly giving instructions without interaction with the children, will somehow make them learn the language.

An important method of learning any language is the Language Experience Approach.

The components of this method are :

1. Motor control

2. Visual discrimination

3. Auditory discrimination

These three components develop the main language skills that are: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Puppets can be used effectively in this approach of teaching language.

Why Puppets?

Anything a teacher can do, a puppet can do too! Puppets can dance, talk, sing, jump, read, write and teach too! A classroom comes alive with puppets.

The children in turn:

- Communicate with others, practice good listening skills, use language as a social tool, appreciate and enjoy good literature, use grammatically correct language, are fluent and natural in their expression and speak distinctly without shouting.

- Learn written language if labels and signs are used along with the puppet.

- Find the combined visual, aural and kinesthetic way of learning hard to resist.

The way children respond to puppets is fascinating: they are willing to suspend belief and react to the puppet as if it were real. Many teachers have a puppet that 'speaks only English' and use it effectively to encourage their children to speak in English. Puppets promote communication, as children attempt to discover their names, ages, likes and dislikes.

Children sometimes use puppets as their mouthpieces and lose their reticence, participating in a way that they would not have if they were asked to act out the part themselves. Puppets also enable children to take on new and different roles. Puppets add variety, and sometimes a touch of magic to the class. You may find that children who are not always cooperative, or who do not show a great deal of interest in class, respond very positively to puppets.

Puppets can be used for general warming up, chatting, giving instructions or introducing language. They can be used in songs, chants, conversations, improvisations, and plays.

Puppets can be used even in a confined space. Elaborate characters - even ghosts, monsters, dinosaurs - normally difficult to represent on the stage, can be made into interesting puppets. They can be used with stories you tell the children and ones they invent themselves.

Using puppets calls for some skill in acting like using different voices for different characters. Puppeteers need to learn how to manipulate the puppets, open their mouths synchronous with what the puppets are saying; sometimes the puppet has to be still, or turn and move appropriately, as well as enter and exit with care. However, children only need to control the

puppets enough to make their play interesting and understandable to an audience of their peers.

Making Puppets

Children have to follow instructions while making puppets. Puppets made by the teacher / children have two advantages over ready-made ones: First there is 'the fun' of making them and second, 'the challenge' of developing their characters. It is often easier for children to make 'animal' rather than 'people' puppets.

The process of making a puppet is a rewarding craft activity in itself and the end product - the puppet - plays a key role in subsequent activities.

Using Puppets Effectively in the Classroom

- Use puppets to help introduce or reinforce a concept or activity. Just hold the puppet still, as you interact with a group of children. Look towards the puppet as you speak. When the puppet replies move its mouth or body as it speaks to the children. Again, remember to hold it still when you or another puppet speaks.

- Some puppets are only for the teacher to use in directed lessons. These are usually large, special puppets and can become the class mascot. They can emerge to brighten your day or disappear if they are frightened by too much noise in the room.

- Making puppets can be messy in the classroom. This experience may get the children excited. Work with small groups in an independent or as a teacher-directed activity.

- Be flexible and allow the children to be innovative in the puppets they make.

A Conversation Class Using Puppets

1. Make the puppet take a lesson. Let the children ask the puppets questions in English. The puppet can ask questions too. You can write the questions on the board.

2. Let each child make a simple puppet, with the material provided in about 30 minutes.

While the children are making the puppets there is an opportunity to use language. That's nice. Cut carefully. This can be the head. Are these his legs?

3. As the children finish their puppets they can show them to each other and talk.

4. When all the puppets are ready, ask the children to sit in a circle. Let them talk through the puppets to the child next in the circle. Help them when they are stuck for words.

5. Each pair of children then joins another pair and a conversation takes place between four puppets.

8. All the children now walk about the room talking to each other's puppets.

9. Each child should now draw a picture and write about their puppets.

10. Having established the character of their puppets, they can now make up a play. Guide them with a story line.

Bird Finger Puppets

Bird finger puppets can be used to teach the following poem :

"Two little blackbirds sitting on a hill.
One named Jack and one named Jill
Fly away Jack, fly away Jill
Come back Jack, Come back Jill."
[Traditional folk song]

You will need two bird finger puppets, one for each hand. Say the poem with the action of hiding and bringing back the puppets.

This poem can be modified to teach opposites.

Change the names of the birds and the last word of the first line, for example :

...cloud. One named Quiet and one named Loud.
...bell. Sick-Well,
...kite. Heavy-Light,
...park, Light-Dark,
...gate, Love -Hate
...bend, Start-End.

Beak

Wings
Cut 2

Body
Cut 2

Place on fold

Face
Cut 2

Elephant's
Trunk
Cut 2

Elephant's Ears
Cut 4

Rabbit's
Ears
Cut 4

Cat's Ears
Cut 4

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The New Flavour of Language Textbooks - NCERT initiative

Kamlesh Chandra Joshi

Till some time back, language textbooks had a very set structure that emphasised on making children responsible citizens and inculcating respect for the country. Language was considered merely as means to communicate and not as a medium which helps children explore a variety of information, experiences and insights. Language was being taught in a pre-determined sequence that aimed at making children aware of the alphabet, words and sentences. The syllabus of the textbooks under this framework was thus restricted to a set pattern and the child made to remember facts in a very mechanical manner. This provided little scope for a child to think and write. The child's ability to learn language in a natural way was discouraged.

It is in this prevailing scenario that the language textbooks recently published by the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) seem like a breath of fresh air. This progressive approach can be felt only when one actually sees, reads and uses the books in the classroom with children.

These primary-level language textbooks are published by NCERT under the title 'Rim Jhim.' These books have been designed with a view to provide for a child's imagination, thoughts and descriptive ability. Classwork is also designed keeping this in mind. All chapters provide a lot of scope for the teacher to create or establish a situation where children can express their thoughts freely.

When we read these lines of a poem on the cover page of the Class 1 textbook, we go back to the days of our childhood ; we recall our village, our neighbourhood, playing under the trees, Indian summer, winters and the rainy season:

"Hara samunder gehra paani
Bol meri machli kitna paani
Kamar kamar tak gehra paani

Bol meri machli kitna paani"

Text books of the older era had lessons that were mostly translations of western stories like "Sleeping Beauty," "The Blind Prince," etc. To find this earthy Indian poem in a government text book of the 21st century is a joyful feeling - these lines that connect with the common man make the textbooks live and vibrant!

Reading Material Around Us

It needs to be emphasised here that for the lakhs of children in our country who are getting their first exposure to printed or published material, these kind of books give immense pleasure, by the mere fact that the things around them find a mention in the textbooks and the children actually can "feel" them. The pictures in the books provide children the opportunity to share their experience, converse, think, find, imagine, estimate and to find logic. However, it is important that teachers understand the reason for including these pictures in the textbook. They need to delve into questions like: What should we to talk to the children about regarding these pictures? Why should we encourage discussion around them? Only then will the objective of including lively pictures in the textbook be realized.

These pictures depict the homes of the children and the world around them like their school, the railway station, the kitchen, the swing, the fields, the bus journey etc. The child is able to relate to these in thought as well as expression. The conversation amongst the children helps them to establish relationships with the surroundings and express themselves better.

A Place for Folk Art and Folk Stories

Indian culture and the rich variety of our folk stories have been specially used in the textbooks. Illustrations have beautifully depicted the folk art of various states like Madhubani of Bihar, Warli Art of

Maharashtra and the Patt paintings of Orissa. These illustrations help emphasise that school syllabi can include local culture in the textbooks and enrich them. The illustrations can also help develop an appreciation for aesthetics among children. This is indeed a new step in the re-designing of text books.

Opportunities for Expression

Consider this innovation: On Page 52 in 'Rim Jhim-3,' the oft repeated story of the crow and the fox is narrated. But on the very next page, based on the same pictures and characters, the children are given the task to create a new story. Thus, children are given a chance to think differently and come up with a story of their own. Teachers should not however expect that all children will make a new story. These exercises are only to suggest that children be given adequate opportunity to express themselves and to inspire them to do so.

These textbooks give a lot of opportunity for playing, brain-storming, craft work, etc. But care should be taken that teachers get all this done by children in the class, and they are not made to do the same as homework.

Some Stories

All the topics in the textbooks are skilfully arranged in a manner to help learn reading. Children can just experience the fun of reading, without the fear of having to answer any questions from the teacher.

Whereas some chapters are meant to encourage the inquisitive nature of children, some are illustrated in the comic format.

Traditional books are designed such that they teach children some letters of the alphabet and the child learns to read word by word. There is neither any meaningful reference nor pleasure for the child. With the new NCERT books, the effort is to ensure that as children read, they understand and think, make connections and analyse situations.

In the story 'The Boastful Bee,' there is a question 'What might have happened when the bee got caught in the spider's web? Complete the story.' Another question:

"Write a new title for the story." This is a different kind of challenge for children.

The point to be noted here is that the stories are not just meant to be read and the answers to the questions to be remembered. They are there so that the children understand the process of story formation/creation and try to write something new on their own. Most of the exercises encourage children to gather information from their surroundings so that they understand the functional use of language and are sensitive towards their environment.

The textbook becomes a linkage between our culture, our tradition, our surroundings, our imagination and our experiences to which we are attached - we make our new viewpoints, script them, learn from them and move forward.

Private schools and private publishers may perhaps learn from these text books that it is not essential to introduce a separate text book for art and craft. They only increase the burden of the school bags of the children and on the parents who spend money on them unnecessarily. All these aspects can be beautifully included in just one textbook. These textbooks facilitate reflection on our part as well - what we should keep in mind while teaching children; what are the aims of education; how knowledge is meaningfully constructed by children etc.

Those teachers who prefer following a set and predetermined structure will probably be disappointed with these books, as they are not designed only to teach the alphabet and these books do not emphasise on the correctness of grammar. The practice of grammar is in a manner that the children can learn by using words and sentences themselves with reference to a context .

We now have textbooks that view the teaching of language in a very broad perspective. These textbooks emphasise how a child's previous knowledge, local surroundings, diversity of the country, multi-linguism and Indian culture can be translated into textbooks. It is essential to orient and counsel teachers regarding

the approach of the text books so that they appreciate the spirit of these text books and work actively with the children in the class. Teachers will also need to rise above the obsession with tests and exams, to be able to give sufficient space to the children to think and express themselves. These text books are a step forward towards the achievement of milestones articulated in the National Curriculum Framework 2005. As the Chinese proverb says, "A long journey begins with one step."

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Over 100 ways to say SAID!

Dr.Manmohan Singh said the nuclear deal would be signed soon.

Dr.Manmohan Singh confirmed that the nuclear deal would be signed soon.

Dr.Manmohan Singh reporters assured that the nuclear deal would be signed soon.

Dr.Manmohan Singh asserted that the nuclear deal would be signed soon.

Dr.Manmohan Singh announced that the nuclear deal would be signed soon.

Source: http://www.msgarrettonline.com/100ways.html

ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGE

Reading Literacy: From International Perspective to Classroom Practice

Juliette Mendelovits

"We are good at churning out people who can learn and memorise but not those who are creative or capable of original thought." *Sam Pitroda, Head of the National Knowledge Commission*

Dr. Pitroda's comment (cited in Dhillon, 2009) implies that there is something fundamentally lacking in India's approach to education. While acknowledging the necessary strengths afforded to a society by its capacity to learn and memorise, his remark suggests that going beyond these capacities, to think critically, to reflect and create are essential for full and continuing economic and social development in the 21st century.

How can classroom teachers contribute to developing their students' capacity to go beyond "learning and memorising?" This article looks at the lessons that can be gleaned from a large scale international assessment of reading literacy, part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD PISA).[1] Although India has not, to date, participated in PISA, this study's approach to reading may nevertheless serve as a useful model for guiding the teaching of reading in Indian classrooms.

What information from PISA is useful for teachers? The assessment framework on which the PISA reading test is based has been developed and refined over the course of the project by a group of international reading experts, guided by feedback from a multitude of academicians and educators from the participating countries. The assessment can thus be regarded as representing the best current thinking world-wide about what reading is and what young people need to know and be able to do as readers by the end of compulsory schooling. Proficient readers, by PISA's

definition, are equipped with the competence and confidence to find information for themselves, to interpret it and to make critical judgements about its quality, reliability and usefulness for various purposes. PISA thus defines reading as "understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society." (OECD, 1999, 2006, in press).

When it comes to operationalising this definition in the form of an assessment instrument, PISA identifies a range of situations, text formats and types and processes for coverage, and then dedicates a pre-determined number of the assessment questions to each of these variables to ensure that all the important elements of reading are appropriately represented, and that subsequently the results can be interpreted in terms of the extent to which students have demonstrated proficiency in relation to each variable category.

I'd like to look at one of the PISA variables reading processes in some detail.

PISA posits five processes or "aspects" of reading: retrieving information, forming a broad understanding, developing an interpretation, reflecting on the content of a text and reflecting on the form of a text. Every task in PISA reading is designed to address one of these five aspects :

· Retrieving information questions focuses the reader on locating discrete pieces of information within the text.

· Forming a broad understanding and developing an interpretation tasks focus the reader on relationships within a text. Tasks that focus on the whole text require readers to form a broad

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[1] *Information about PISA can be found at http://www.pisa.oecd.org*

understanding; tasks that focus on relationships between parts of the text require developing an interpretation.

- Reflecting on content tasks is concerned with the ideational substance of a text.

- Reflecting on form tasks is concerned with the structure or formal features of a text.

These five aspects of reading have been collapsed into three aspects for reporting purposes: access and
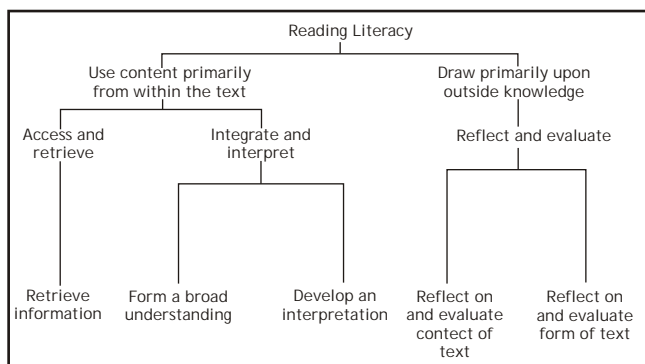
retrieve, integrate and interpret, and reflect and evaluate. The diagram above summarises the focus of the aspects and the relationship between them.

As the diagram shows, within the aspect variable, while both access and retrieve and integrate and interpret items draw on content from within the text, reflect and evaluate items draw primarily on outside knowledge, and ask readers to relate this to the text they are reading. Although all three aspects need to be exercised by the proficient reader, the reflect and evaluate aspect is of particular interest in light of the comment quoted at the beginning of this article as it most clearly pushes the reader beyond learning and memorising to the original thinking that Sam Pitroda finds lacking in the graduates of current Indian education. It requires the reader to do more than repeat information from the text and more even than to re-structure, synthesise or perceive relationships within a text. Rather, it asks readers to generate a response by consulting their experience or

knowledge and drawing on those elements in responding to the text.

The following are a few examples of tasks from PISA.[2] They have been selected primarily to illustrate different kinds of reflect and evaluate questions, but they also show the range of text types and question formats found in PISA, which could serve as models for teachers in developing tasks relating to the reading texts they are teaching.

The first task is based on two letters about graffiti, presenting opposing views - one (Helga's) representing graffiti as a public nuisance, and the other (Sophia's) arguing that it is a kind of art.

"Which of the two letter writers do you agree with? Explain your answer by using your own words to refer to what is said in one or both of the letters."

This task asks the reader to express a personal opinion on the topic, in relation to the presented texts. Here are a few student responses that gained full credit:

- I agree with Helga. Graffiti is illegal and that makes it vandalism.

- Helga because I am against graffiti.

- Sophia. I think it's hypocritical to fine graffiti artists and then make millions by copying their designs.

- I sort of agree with both of them. It should be illegal to paint over walls in public places but these people should be given the opportunity to do their work somewhere else.

- Sophia's because she cares about art.

These examples illustrate that many types of answers may gain full credit; regardless of which letter-writer the student chooses to agree with. What is important is that the response provides a plausible interpretation of the letter-writer's position, and expresses an opinion consistent with that interpretation.

The second example is based on "The Gift," a complete short story about a woman and a panther who are

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separately caught in a flood. The story traces the way the woman's reaction to the panther changes from fear and hostility to sympathy for a fellow-sufferer. One of several questions asks,

"Do you think that the last sentence of "The Gift" is an appropriate ending? Explain your answer, demonstrating your understanding of how the last sentence relates to the story's meaning."

Here students are invited to make an evaluation of part of a text based on thematic completeness, by relating the last sentence to central relationships, issues or metaphors in the story. Students could gain full credit for their answer either by suggesting that the ending was appropriate or inappropriate: the scoring is based on the extent to which the response is justified and grounded in a plausible reading of the text.

The third example is associated with a piece of stimulus that consists of a tree diagram showing the structure and distribution of a national labour force (employed, unemployed, and subcategories):

"The information about the labour force structure is presented as a tree diagram, but it could have been presented in a number of other ways, such as a written description, a pie chart, a graph or a table.

The tree diagram was probably chosen because it is especially useful for showing

A. changes over time
B. the size of the country's total population
C. categories within each group
D. the size of each group"

This multiple-choice task requires an evaluation of the form of the text. The task is to consider the suitability of the tree diagram for particular purposes in comparison with the suitability of other forms of presentation. The reader is required to demonstrate explicit understanding of the text's structure.

Finally, a fourth task requires reflection on a table containing information about the types of programs offered by an international aid agency, PLAN International. The material was taken from a public report distributed by the agency. The table shows the countries in one region of PLAN International's operation, the type of aid programs it offers and the amount of work accomplished in each country within each category of aid. Of the recipient countries shown in the table, it is apparent that Ethiopia received the smallest amount of aid. The question is as follows:

"In 1996, Ethiopia was one of the poorest countries in the world.

Taking this fact and the information in the table into account, what do you think might explain the level of PLAN International's activities in Ethiopia compared with its activities in other countries?"

For this task, students must hypothesise about the content of the text, drawing on specialised knowledge, and must deal with a concept contrary to expectations. They also need to identify patterns among the many pieces of information presented in a complex display. This was among the most difficult of the tasks included in PISA 2000.

The table below summarises the range of texts, the aspect and a more detailed description of the kind of reading each question intends to assess.

Example	Text type	Aspect	Question intent
Graffiti	Argumentative (prose)	Reflecting on and evaluating the content of a text	Comparing one's personal opinion with opinions expressed in a text
The Gift	Narrative (prose)	Reflecting on and evaluating the form of a text	Commenting critically on the appropriateness of part of the text in relation to the whole
Labour	Expository (tree diagram)	Reflecting on and evaluating the form of a text	Evaluating the structure of the material in relation to its purpose
PLAN International	Descriptive (table)	Reflecting on and evaluating the form of a text	Hypothesising about an element of a text that is contrary to expectations

How could classroom teachers use this kind of information? The following are a few suggestions, both for classroom teaching and for professional development sessions for teachers:

- As a collaborative or independent professional development exercise, write descriptions of the

skills required to answer other examples of PISA released material that require reflection and evaluation.

- Draw on these examples as models for classroom discussion of texts that are part of the local syllabus.

- Adapt the PISA questions to texts that are being taught with a given class, and use them as assessment tasks to ascertain areas of strength and weakness in students' capacity to reflect on and evaluate what they read.

- After using some of these kinds of tasks with a class, share the students' responses with a colleague and reach consensus about how they should be marked, and what skills and abilities (or deficits) they reveal.

- Conduct a professional development session in which teachers share tasks of this kind that they have developed, and colleagues classify the tasks according to the type of reflection and evaluation required.

Although PISA assesses 15-year-olds only, it implies an approach to reading, and to learning in general, that encompasses every level of education, from the earliest years to adult life. Reading is a foundational skill that is a key part of any educational program. The skills and approaches taught through reading can be transferred to subject areas across the curriculum. (OECD, 2009)

Reading can be approached in a way that emphasises more passive and receptive understanding, or in a way that extends and challenges thinking. Because PISA reading literacy takes the latter approach, examining its assessment framework and tasks can provide teachers with insights that may be particularly helpful in helping Indian students to become more capable of creativity and original thought.

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In the last issue (Issue XII) of the Learning Curve, on Science Education, through oversight, we missed out four footnotes in the article "Developing Teachers" by Kamal Mahendroo. We owe an apology to Kamal and our readers for the same.

CASE IN STUDY

The Prince in the Classroom

Rukmini Banerji

It is afternoon in a government primary school in Bakshi ka Talab block not far from Lucknow. The Class 2 classroom is packed with children. In this school, like in many other schools in the area, the lower grades have many many children. At least half of them look like they are really too young to be in Class 2. We are busy with the language text book. The chapter is long. We start with the first paragraph. Except for one or two children, no one can read even a few lines fluently.

The name of our chapter is Siddharth.

"That is a hard name. Can you all say it?"

The class begins to say "Siddharth" loudly over and over again. The name rolls off their tongues in many different ways. Even after some time, some children are having trouble with the "d" and "ddh" sounds coming one after the

उत्तर प्रदेश कक्षा 2 पाठ्य पुस्तक
पाठः– सिद्धार्थ और हंस, पेज नं.71

सवेरे का समय था। चिड़ियाँ पेड़ों पर चहचहा रही थी। रंग–बिरंगे फूल खिले थे। राजकुमार सिद्धार्थ बाग में टहल रहे थे। अचानक एक हंस ऊपर से गिरा। वे लपक कर उसके पास गये। हंस को तीर लगा था। सिद्धार्थ ने तीर को धीरे–धीरे निकाला। घाव को पानी से धोया। हंस अपने बचाने वाले को एकटक देख रहा था।

other. The air is full of energetic repeated thumping, sounding out of the name of the prince. Children seem to enjoy the sound of the word in their mouth.

"Rajkumar Sidhharth baag mein tahal rahe the."[1] What does "tahal rahe the" mean?[2] I ask. There is a lot of discussion. Was "tahalna" just the same as walking or was it something else? Can everyone do "tahalna?" One boy had the final say. According to him showing what "tahalna" is, was much simpler than talking about it. The class clears space for him. The boy sticks his stomach out and throws his head back. Then he walks forward in a leisurely fashion moving his arms very slowly. "Ah ha" says a girl from the back of the class, "Tahalna" is when you are a fat person walking down the street."

I begin to read the story and the children listen carefully. For most children in the class, the chapter is too long and too hard. For them to learn to read, they need simpler and shorter text to scaffold and support their journey. They need lots of colourful pictures in small story books. They need print to come alive around them. They need to be read aloud to. They need to talk and think about what is being read. The desire and the ability to read grow in an environment where reading, writing, talking, discussion is happening around them.

My children in rural Lucknow present a challenge. This is a challenge not only for me and my class but also for scores of similar schools across the country.

For many children, like those in Bakshi ka Talab, and their families, school is a new thing. School is a formal place: there are rules about the use of time and for how interactions between people happen. These rules and behaviours are different from that at home or in the community. There is a formal "school" language and style of expression which is different from how s/he speaks and interacts at home and outside school. Textbooks guide what happens in the classroom. All tests and examinations are based on what is in the books that are "taught" in class. This separation of "school" from "home" and of "learning" from ordinary "life" creates the impression for children and for parents that it is the "book knowledge" imparted in school that is the knowledge to be absorbed. This impression has far reaching implications as children get

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[1] *Prince Siddharth was strolling in the garden.*

[2] *"Tahalna" means strolling.*

older and move to higher classes. This perception has to be broken early. In many fundamentally important ways, books and discussions, letting children talk in their own way and in their own idiom, enabling them to link what happens in the classroom to what happens outside are very important activities. All these help children understand that school and home are not far apart.

Our textbooks or even story books tend to be in the mainstream language or the standard language of the state. But many children, often those from socially backward communities have a different language background (in terms of dialects, vocabulary and syntax). Such children need bridges. Not only is coming to school a new thing for them and their families - but often they have to learn a whole new language as well in order to properly inhabit the new world into which they have arrived. Traveling from the known to the unknown is a journey that has to be navigated with care. The teacher in Classes 1 and 2 has this special responsibility - the responsibility of supporting the child's language development as s/he moves from the world of the home to the world of the school and to the world of mainstream standard language.

Our primary school system is built on several assumptions.

Assumption 1: Children start school at age 6.

Assumption 2: Children attend school regularly.

Assumption 3: Each year they learn what is expected of them. Each subsequent year, the teacher starts with the first chapter of the textbook of that particular class. It is assumed that children make linear progress in learning. Each year the content and material for that particular grade is covered. Each year for each child, there is substantial accumulated "value" added in terms of learning.

Each of these assumptions is not applicable for much of India, especially for children in government schools. Many children enter school earlier than six and many others enter school much later.[3] Attendance patterns vary across the country, but it may be fair to say that at least in several north Indian states, attendance in primary grades is sporadic and continuity across grades cannot be taken for granted. Mothers of half of India's primary school-going children have not been to school themselves; thus learning support in the family is far from guaranteed. Often no one knows when and to what extent a child has fallen behind academically or even whether s/he has picked up the basics in early grades. Through the academic year, teachers are propelled by the 'course' or by having to complete textbook material. That is what they are expected to do during the course of the year.[4]

But, what about children who do not make adequate progress? Our school system does not have any in-built remedial structures that recognizes, identifies or generates plans to help children who may fall behind. The pace of textbooks picks up substantially after Class 1 leaving many children far behind from Class 2 onwards.

For the past decade, Pratham has worked with government school systems and village communities in many states. We feel that concerted action is needed for accelerating reading in primary grades to give children a fighting chance to catch up and really have a shot at universal elementary education. Learning to read is the first and most essential step for education. Without being able to read fluently a child cannot progress further in any school or educational program. Similarly, without a solid foundation in basic arithmetic it is not possible for children to move ahead in school. Large scale focused efforts to strengthen and accelerate their learning need to be made, both

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[3]See ASER 2008 report for age-grade tables for states www.asercentre.org

[4]The current version of the Right to Education Bill underscores this point by stating that entire curriculum must be completed within a specified period of time.

outside school and inside school, so that India's children can make satisfactory and sustained progress through the elementary stage of education.

The goal of Pratham's current Read India campaign is that all Indian children will read fluently and be confidently able to do basic arithmetic by 2010. Through collaborations with governments and village communities, this campaign is currently active in more 300 rural districts. The aim is to catalyze existing resources and energize structures to strengthen children's learning. We hope that most children will go well beyond this level.

The key elements of the Read India campaign are simple: First, daily time is needed to focus on ensuring basic learning. Such time also needs to be created during holidays. Example: a "reading period" each day at school, and in summer months, a time each day for reading in the community. Second, children need a constant supply of appropriate reading and learning materials. Third, adults need to work with children; these adults are usually teachers and village volunteers. These adults get training and on-the-ground support as they work with children. Fourth, children's progress towards goals has to be tracked so that course corrections can be made.

After the intensive phase of a campaign, it is important to plan a follow up for the next four-six months so that the increased reading and arithmetic levels of children as well as their interest can be sustained.

The actual intervention is straightforward. We call it "CAMaL" : Combined Activities for Maximized Learning.

Story telling is a fun way to engage young children. Story telling helps children become familiar with characters, with plots and events, and with how these are held together in a narrative. Developing a sense of narrative flow is an important element for children even before they have learned to read. This helps children follow stories in texts and in books.

Reading aloud : Reading to children is one of the best ways for making "reading" come alive. "Modeling" reading is important so that children can experience,

first hand, what "good" reading is all about. Reading aloud with clear pronunciation, putting a finger under each word that is read, helps children to connect sound of the word with what the word looks like while also connecting to the overall context of the story.

It is best if the child and the teacher have copies of the same book and go through it together. It is very natural for children to want to be like the teacher and do what she does. So, it is not uncommon to see children doing "pretend" reading. This is an important first step towards actual reading.

Discussions and chats: Facilitating discussions and conversations by children about stories that have been told or heard helps to link the text/story with real life and with their first hand experience. "Talk" is not easy. Many teachers talk "at" children rather than enabling them to talk "to" each other. The scaffolding of talking activities needs planning and practice. Opportunities for oral expression need to be designed so that all children can participate. This strengthens comprehension and understanding.

Drawing and scribbling: From an early age, encouraging children to express themselves by putting pencil to paper helps to create pre-writing skills. At first, children will create shapes and figures that may not be easily recognizable. But a simple step of asking a child "what is this" helps him or her to think and to articulate. The adult can simply write down whatever the child says next to the drawing. Over a period of time, drawings become more recognizable and more linked to the story that has been heard or read. The important thing is that each child's expression should be his or her own and not copied and that each drawing is accompanied by some discussion between the child and the adult about what this is.

Decoding : Games with letters and words are an easy way to build basic decoding skills and help children connect sounds to symbols. There are many games that can be played orally with letter cards and alphabet charts. Decoding or learning to automatically decipher sound-symbol units is an extremely important

component of learning to read and of gaining the confidence and the capability to deal with known and unknown texts.

Libraries and reading corners - access to books: For sustaining an interest in books, it is critical to ensure easy access to a wide variety of well illustrated, age appropriate books and reading materials that children can easily and freely look at any time.

The challenge of early grade language development is how to design effective classroom activities for a whole year that integrate these fundamental elements.

Frequent and diverse opportunities for talking and for expressing themselves on paper are essential preparatory steps for writing and reading. For overall language development, it is effective to combine activities "do-say-read-write." Combination of activities such as reading aloud with finger on each word, discussing the text that is read, finding common words, writing them down, drawing pictures based on the story all together lead to a strong foundation for talking, reading and writing.

Children learn individually. They also learn well in groups. Sometimes they need to be left alone and given the opportunity and the materials to try things out on their own. At other times they need structure. All of these will go a long way in transforming today's young children into becoming confident, capable and curious speakers, readers, writers and learners of tomorrow.

Can rapid change happen on scale? In the last few years, we see substantial change in basic reading levels in several large states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra.[5] These significant and substantial changes are a result of several factors: focused and clear learning goals,

resolute leadership within the government, alignment of teacher training and field support to achieve these goals and large scale participation at village level to support the reading campaign. If some states can bring about big changes in basic reading levels in a short period of time, then we know it is possible even with the resources that we currently have.

In our class, we have moved to the next paragraph in the Siddharth story. I read the paragraph aloud first. Then I read it again putting my finger under each word as I read. The class can see what I am doing. There are some difficult words here too. We sound them out. We talk about what I have just read. "Devdatta has come into our story. He says to Siddharth that the swan is his because he shot the arrow and made the swan fall to the ground". Just like Siddharth and Devdatta in the story, the children in my class argue about whose swan it is. I listen to them. Then I read the paragraph out loud again. Children listen and follow the sentences in their textbook. Their fingers move across the page word by word as I read. "Mere jaise kaun padhega?" I ask. One young man comes up to the front of the class, holds his textbook up and read. Half of it is reading and half of it is pretending to read. But the effort is laudable. One by one, children come up and attempt to read. We finish for the day. Everyone packs their bags and gets ready to leave. As I watch the children leaving the school compound, several children are pretending to carry bows and arrows and aiming for invisible swans in the sky. A few others are strolling, just like we read, like Prince Siddharth in his garden.

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[5] See ASER reports from 2005 to 2008. All reports are available on www.asercentre.org

Redefining Reading and Writing: Experiences from Language Resource Generation Workshops

L. Devaki and Manasi Mishra

A group of 17 government school teachers entered our beautifully done up training hall. They were from three states Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Puducherry - and it showed clearly. They walked in groups, sat in groups, ate in groups, and even talked in groups! We realized that our first assignment was to break the language barrier, in order to initiate our work on language teaching.

To our utter surprise, the barrier literally melted away in the course of five days. And they were excited by the enriching experience of understanding the objective of language teaching and generating resources.

On the last day one participant walked up to us and said….. " In my 17 years of teaching experience… ….. Never did I realize that it is not creativity that I lack (in developing resources)…. It is understanding"

Thus the story begins here!

The Language Resource Generation Workshop was organized from December 6 - 10, 2008, by Azim Premji Foundation, in Bangalore. The participants of the workshop were a mix of government school teachers, content writers and lecturers from various District Institutes of Education and Training .

Why did we organize this workshop? Language has two roles in education - as a medium and as a subject. A study of current language teaching practices shows that:

a) Content teaching is going on in the name of language teaching. At best there are a few exercises on grammar and word-meaning.

b) Teachers have a narrow definition of reading and writing as consisting of reading or writing of letters /words.

c) There is hardly any recognition of different functions of language in the educational context.

Hence in today's scenario, language teaching is hampered by:

- Poverty of variety in resources - the resources used for teaching languages are generally stories or descriptive essays. The other functions of language are mostly focused on in the higher classes.

- Vocabulary teaching is confined to vocabulary in text and there is no specific methodology for vocabulary development.

- Resources are linear and flat with very little scope for making predictions, drawing inferences, different ways of organizing information etc.

- As children grow up to learn Mathematics, Science, etc., they begin to use different functions of language and use different ways of thinking through language. Currently, children enter the higher classes with almost no adequate preparation for learning these subjects.

Against this backdrop, we felt that in our language workshops with teachers we not only needed them to understand the theoretical perspectives of language but also introduce them to what "variety in resources" meant. And it could best be done if they developed such resources themselves.

Hence, after days of mulling over the workshop design, its objective as well as outcomes, we settled on:

- Helping participants create language - specific resources that could be used in giving language teaching inputs to teachers.

- Experiencing the process of resource generation.

The most effective way to "create an experience," we believed, was by:

- Exposing the group to a variety of resources.
- Building on the experience of and diversity within the group.

Little did we know that we were in for a unique experience ourselves!

A significant proportion of time was spent in understanding and planning for the workshop. And we developed a detailed and exhaustive bank of resources/ideas ourselves. We developed resources across three identified genres:

Vocabulary Building	Reading	Writing
· Sight Words · Vivid Verbs · Descriptive Words · Rhyming Words · Spelling Patterns	· Attracting children to reading · Listening · The Alphabet · Vowels · Comprehension · Identifying main idea, supporting ideas · Identifying topic sentence of a paragraph · "How to" reading · Comprehension following instruction · Posters and Advertisements · Reports - Facts Vs Opinions · Graphs & Tables	· Sentence Writing · Paragraph Writing · Essay Writing · Descriptive Writing · Facts Vs Opinion · "How to" Writing · Persuasive Writing · Creative Writing · Picture Prompts Story Telling · Sequencing Story Telling · Cause and Effect Story Telling · Adding details to a story · Altering Beginning, Middle, End · Comparing two different fairy tales · Altering Character, Setting, Conflict Resolution · Story Telling: Assessment

The work focused on Classes 3, 4 and 5 using technology and non-technology-based resources. We filled a whole box with samples of these resources. We collected a variety of books for the participants to consult.

In keeping with our objective, the method of transaction of the workshop was designed such that it:

1. Encouraged sub-group sharing and brainstorming of ideas.

2. Facilitated an environment that encourages creative thinking.

3. Gave space and time for thinking/planning and doing.

4. Gave space for inter-regional exchange and interface.

5. Focused on a presentation as well as documentation format for every resource developed to ensure that it was thought through and could be easily understood and adopted by an independent reader. This also gave scope for grading the activity with clearly spelt-out objectives for each class.

The day of the workshop arrived!

We met our group and embarked on a journey that reflected the lack lustre language teaching scenario of today. It was clear to us that the group came with expectations. They expected to be told and shown different things that they could take back. And this is where they were surprised.

We began the day with a short background to language teaching, which they heard patiently and then asked them "Do you have any questions?" and they answered, "No," uniformly.

We asked them, "Do you understand what is being said?" and they answered, "Perfectly." So we said, "Then let's start!"

We began with what they were most familiar with - "Vocabulary Building," or "Word Building." We displayed an activity: "Touch an object blindfolded and describe its attributes."

In their groups they blindfolded each other. And from every group, we saw them identifying the object. Some said, "It's a tiffin box....no just a box." Some said, "Mine's easy; it's a ruler."

We said, "Now tell us the attributes." They said, "Oh, It's long/short…. hard/soft…… big/small… rough/smooth …" We asked for other words and they were stuck.

We then asked them to describe an experience like "How did it feel when you put your feet in warm water?"

or "How is the experience of eating this toffee?" or "How did it feel when your face was in front of a high speed fan?"

They did not have the words to describe their experience. We asked them why they weren't able to do it and they were taken aback by their own inadequacy. We asked them if they ever made children enrich their vocabulary. And they all said that they did. They reported asking children to find word meanings from the books, fill in blanks, and identify names of objects. We also introduced the use of "sight words" in language teaching as a tool for vocabulary building. We then gave them time to create resources keeping this in mind.

That day we saw each one speak to members from other states.

They had a presentation by each group. The resources still focused largely on "naming." And the ones that explored further were of the nature where new words were introduced completely independent of their context - very similar to memorizing new words and their meaning.

We pointed this out to them in the context of language teaching. Some kept asking us what the difference was. Children should know new words and they know through this game. Some said, "But we don't understand." Some asked us what the difference between the two was. Some asked us what the need for all of this was.

We understood that they had realized that there was an inadequacy and that in itself was a step forward.

This process continued. We demonstrated a series of activities on reading and writing. The group began to see that the process of developing and using resources was not an independent activity. It was entrenched in the lesson and the larger language objective. They were struck by the need to probe further into their practice.

The following is a glimpse of some of the resources developed:

Resources without using technology

Chhattisgarh - Class 5

1. Give the children a topic/theme/event e.g. Summer holidays

2. Ask them to prepare a scrap book on the theme.

- They need to have pictures of objects/people/ events etc. relevant to the theme.
- Make a list of words that depict emotions/ expressions they will feel.
- Attempt to describe a day during the holidays.
- Learn at least ten new words that are relevant to the theme. And explain the relationship between the words.

Puducherry - Classes 3 & 4

- Make masks of different animals for children.
- Now encourage them to have discussion on a situation in the jungle e.g. drought.
- Record what they say on the board.
- Now help children make a 4 line story on the same

Orissa - Classes 3 & 4

- Give children a sentence with a context clue e.g.
It was a .... evening.
Children were .... in the park.
Their dresses were ....
They need to fill the blanks.

Teachers' Concerns

- How do we introduce new words to children, if we do not tell them the words directly?
- We have never developed activities with very focused objectives
- The difficulty is to move children from their first language to the second

Approach to Reading and Writing in the Computer-Aided Learning Program

The Computer-Aided Learning (CAL) Program is a research study with the objective to explore

whether computer-aided learning (including digital learning resources) can meaningfully impact learning and classroom processes when deployed by enabled and empowered teachers. Teachers are enabled both pedagogically and technologically in this program. The enablement is through a series of interactions that support perspective building among teachers on the teaching of reading and writing, mathematics and environmental studies. Since reading and writing abilities lie at the base for both mathematics and environmental studies, the program started with perspective building on reading and writing.

Perspective building deals with reflections on current practices of teaching reading and writing, attempting to identify problematic areas and reasons for the same and trying to address these areas by redefining reading and writing as a process.

Current practices of "teaching reading" show the following:

- It is assumed that teaching of the alphabet/words in itself will help students read. Consequently, students are often given inputs of letters/words for reading.

- Reading of letters, words and sentences in itself is taken as an indicator of reading ability. There is no explicit emphasis on comprehension. This results in many students being able to read, but without understanding.

- There is very little awareness of the kinds of errors made by students in reading. Consequently, 'remedial' instruction takes the form of more reading.

Reading however is a complex process consisting of three interconnected components, namely:

a. Mechanics of reading which involves the knowledge of sounds (phonological awareness), sound letter correspondence (decoding) and word analysis (the connection between individual sounds and the letters used to represent them.) This includes not only awareness of the phonics aspect but also sight word recognition, knowledge of parts of words (roots, suffixes and prefixes) and fluency.

b. Comprehension which consists of constructing meaning. It involves not only getting the meaning of individual words but also combining ideas in the whole text with what we have in our own memory. Comprehension itself consists of vocabulary, background knowledge and the knowledge of the structure of the text.

c. Strategic knowledge of reading which comprises being aware of the purpose of reading and using strategies that meet the purpose of reading.

The CAL program attempts to help teachers redefine reading by impacting their practices of teaching reading and assessment of reading. In this process of teaching reading, the emphasis is on using a small (about four-to-six line) whole meaningful text and the teacher modelling both reading and thinking. In this process, the teacher connects to the background knowledge of students, invites predictions and inferences, engages students in describing pictures, predicting the story on the basis of the title, reading the story and shared reading. After reading, students are engaged in comprehension activities like re-telling the story, drawing the narrative structure of the story, engaging in sight-word games, building word walls, etc.

A similar approach was taken to writing also. Writing was defined as a process of organization of ideas, making outlines, drafts, revising them etc.

An activity to learn the alphabet through names was introduced. In this, teachers help students to write their names (in large fonts, each letter in a different color). These are pasted on walls. Students first have to identify their names. They then have to identify others whose names start with the same

letter as their names (e.g. Gita will look for names that start with 'gi'). These are then listed. Attention is then paid to the last letter, the second letter and so on. After a week or so, names of parents/siblings of students are similarly put up and the same exercise is undertaken.

1. Reading and Writing are not just skills of decoding and encoding.

2. Reading is not oral reproduction of whatever is written.

3. Writing is not reproduction of text that is already written.

So what are Reading and Writing?

1. They are both active processes in which the reader/writer is engaged in constructing meaning of the text that is being read or text that is being written.

2. Children read and write only when they see the relevance of what they are reading and writing.

3. Children are unable to read and write not because they are not interested but because they do not find the act of reading and writing interesting.

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BOOK REVIEW

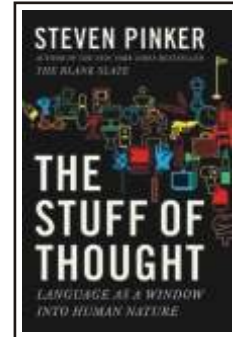## Who's Afraid of Human Nature?
Steven Pinker and the Grammar of Mind

The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature
by Steven Pinker,
Penguin Books (2008), xii+499 pages

A Review by Indu Prasad

There is a theory of space and time in the way we use words. There is a theory of matter and a theory of causality too… These conceptions vary in their details from language to language, but their overall logic is the same… Though these ideas are woven into language, their roots are deeper than language itself. They lay out the ground rules for how we understand our surroundings, how we assign credit and blame to our fellows, and how we negotiate our relationships with them. A close look at our speech our conversations, our jokes, our curses, our legal disputes, the names we give our babies can therefore give us insight into who we are.

Steven Pinker, The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature, p. vii

The Stuff of Thought, says Pinker, is a book about what linguists call semantics and pragmatics. His own perspective on language and semantics, however, is not that of a linguist's. As a cognitive scientist, Pinker's focus is primarily on the link that binds word and meaning to the human mind. Pinker's subject is the conceptual "infrastructure" that he is convinced is innate to the human mind, the innate cognitive structures that make language itself possible and can, in turn, be unravelled through a study of language.

In The Language Instinct (1994), Pinker himself says that his subject is not language itself, but the relationship between language and mind. The Stuff of Thought, he writes, is the third of a trilogy. His first book on the subject, The Language Instinct, he describes as "an overview of the language faculty." And

since, Pinker says, a language is a way of connecting sound and meaning, the other two books turn towards each of those spheres. Words and Rules (1999) is about the units of language, how they are stored in memory, and how they are assembled into the vast number of combinations that give language its expressive power. The Stuff of Thought, he says, is about the other side of the linkage - semantics and pragmatics.

At the same time, says Pinker, The Stuff of Thought rounds out another trilogy: three books on human nature. How the Mind Works (1997), tries to "reverse-engineer" the psyche in the light of cognitive science and evolutionary psychology. The Blank Slate (2002), explores the concept of human nature and its moral, emotional and political colourings. And The Stuff of Thought broaches this topic in still another way: what we can learn about our make-up from the way people put their thoughts and feelings into words.

There is a joke towards the beginning of an earlier book by Steven Pinker which goes somewhat like this: A young man, who is trying to make a decision about what he wants to do with his life, goes up to his mother and says, "Mother, I think I want to become a Doctor of Philosophy." At which the excited mother says, "Wonderful! But what kind of disease is philosophy?"

This joke appears towards the beginning of Pinker's The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature, which is perhaps Pinker's most sustained attempt thus far to deliver a knock-out punch to opposing philosophies. No one who has read through any of Pinker's books, though, would ever think of accusing

Pinker of suffering from the disease of philosophy. The guiding principle that spurs him on is "science." Pinker, who used to teach in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at MIT and is now Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, is less of a philosopher seeking to explore and more of a "scientist" trying to prove.

In the world according to Pinker, the main villain is the "Blank Slate" (Empiricism) which, he says, "is often accompanied by two other doctrines which have attained a sacred status in modern intellectual life" the Noble Savage (Romanticism a la Rousseau human beings are born good but are made bad by social circumstances) and the Ghost in the Machine (Cartesian dualism - the mind and the body are two separate entities). This trinity, according to Pinker, has had devastating repercussions in our understanding of ourselves and, therefore, has had a harmful impact on education, social policy and politics.

For Pinker, the way out is a "scientific" understanding of human nature. "Human nature," says Pinker, "is a scientific topic, and as new facts come in, our conception of it will change." So, in book after book, Pinker sets out to dismantle what he considers to be the wrong turns taken by Western philosophy and to erect in its place a correct, scientific, understanding of human nature.

Pinker's basic problematique, to use what was once a modish term amongst the opponents of innateness, is one he shares with Noam Chomsky, linguist and trenchant critic of American imperialism. In Language and Responsibility, Chomsky says:

...It is natural for advocates of social change to adopt the extreme position that "human nature" is a myth, nothing but a product of history. But that position is incorrect. Human nature exists, immutable except for biological changes in the species.

And, as Chomsky put it in his criticism of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, there is no "proof" that human nature is "the totality of historically determined social relations." Such claims, according to Chomsky and Pinker are "false."

The study of language, therefore, according to both Pinker and Chomsky, is not merely a study of logical rules, but is essentially a study of epistemological necessity. "Linguistics," says Chomsky, "is one part of cognitive psychology..." and "the linguist, the experimental psychologist, and the neurophysiologist are engaged in a common enterprise" which is to unravel the cognitive structure of the mind and discover "the biologically determined a priori system" that informs it. Through the study of the relationship between language and mind, according to this view, we begin to understand what Pinker calls "the infrastructure of our experience."

It is in this sense that language for Chomsky is a "mirror of the mind" and for Pinker "a window into human nature." What is at stake is an understanding of the "grammar" of our innate cognitive procedures as reflected in linguistic rules and categories which would lead to a chain of correct understanding: a scientific and hence correct understanding of cognition will lead to a correct understanding of how our mind works, a correct understanding of how our mind works will lead to a correct understanding of human nature, a correct understanding of human nature will lead to a correct understanding of what human beings are and what they need, a correct understanding of human needs will lead to a correct understanding of the correct measures that need to be taken to address our problems...

These, then, are the main ideas that inform Pinker's work in general and The Stuff of Thought in particular. In close to five hundred pages divided into nine chapters, The Stuff of Thought tries to work out the implications of these ideas. The last chapter of the book Escaping the Cave sums up Pinker's attempt to see how the "inventory" of human nature is reflected in language. Pinker writes:

(All) this underscores the place of education in a scientifically literate democracy... The goal of education is to make up for the shortcomings in our instinctive ways of thinking about the physical

and social world. And education is likely to succeed not by trying to implant abstract statements in empty minds but by taking the mental models that are our standard equipment, applying them to new subjects in selective analogies, and assembling them into new and more sophisticated combinations.

According to Pinker, education will succeed only when we acknowledge and understand the innate standard mental models that we as human beings have inherited as a species. The empiricist understanding of the nature of the human mind is wrong and leads to an account of learning that is inherently manipulative since the mind is inherently blank, it can be shaped in whatever fashion the powerful desire. The empiricist understanding of mind leads to an authoritarian abuse of power ("sinister social engineering" is what Pinker calls it), and a curtailment of freedom. What is finally at stake in our understanding of language is nothing less than an understanding of just what exactly a just, equitable and humane society might mean.

One final word, although a discussion of this would be beyond the scope of this review: what is it about empiricism that has troubled so many Western thinkers? Why, in mainstream Western thought, is there, from its very inception in ancient Greece, this eternal recurrence of the antagonism between Rationalism and Empiricism? And, why does Science have such a privileged place in the hierarchy of Knowledge? In this sense, Pinker works completely from within the grammar of mainstream Western thought; he offers no resolutions, but he does exhibit all the symptoms.

"Teaching is an Art, Not a Science"

Teacher Man: A Memoir
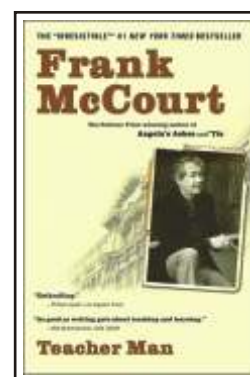*by Frank McCourt*
Scribner, USA (November 2005); 272 pages

A Review by Sitalakshmi Natarajan

Frank McCourt, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of Angela's Ashes, illustrates the truth of this famous adage in this 'down to earth' and 'unsophisticated' autobio graphical account of the repertoire of his growth as a teacher, story teller, writer, and in the process, as a human being, in 'Teacher Man.'

This book is a mightily entertaining mixed yarn of his experiments and experiences as a teacher, and his own difficult life, full of insecurities and failures, his midlife crisis etc. In this book review, however, the focus will be on the teacher and his interesting pedagogical approaches to teaching.

The first four lines of the first chapter encapsulate the invariably unsure feelings that every seasoned and conscientious teacher would have gone through at some point in the beginning of his/her teaching career:

"Here they come.

And I am not ready.

How could I be?

I'm a new teacher and learning on the job."

It is this unassuming, disarmingly honest and 'matter of fact' tone in the autobiography, of his thirty year old journey as an educator-cum-learner that makes for a compelling and insightful reading of the story.

"Whatever the subject, what the teacher really teaches is himself."

McCourt as an educator with an infectious humility and undeniably wry humour epitomises this basic human virtue which seems to be a far cry from different professions. Sadly, this rat race and unhealthy competition has become a part and parcel of the field of education too. However, McCourt's approach to teaching is extremely refreshing and reassuring for teachers, especially if one is a person with a certain intuitive understanding of his or her students. It will be even easier if one is driven by the desire to bring out the best in them by touching upon the quality of curiosity and excellence, which may more often than not remain deeply hidden and lie dormant due to many impinging and detrimental external factors on their lives.

The different schools he had worked in, in America, were a 'conglomeration' of so much "teen unhappiness" "...they form gangs and fight other gangs, not rumbles like the ones you see in movies with star crossed romances and dramatic music in the background, but mean fights where they grunt and curse one another...and stain the grass with their blood, which is red no matter where it comes from."

His own formal training had taught him to use "the red pen for the bad things" because it "is the teacher's most powerful weapon." His authorities and department heads had instructed him to arouse fear and awe among students, to be impossible to satisfy..... which he couldn't.

The essential qualities of a teacher which McCourt lives and writes about, without making them sound as 'the' perfect pedagogical instrument in this mixed yarn of his struggles and growth as an educator, are as follows:

- Be interested in your subject
- Know your subject
- The best way to learn anything is to discover it by yourself
- Teach them "know how"
- Let them learn guessing
- Let them learn proving
- Don't tell them everything
- Don't force it down their throats

"A great discovery solves a great problem but there is a grain of discovery in the solution of any problem." (George Polya, a world famous mathematician)

This is exactly what McCourt, the unsure, unconventional, insecure English teacher, does through his spontaneous and apparently shocking (though highly successful) experiments to inculcate a deep sense of curiosity first, and later, a love for reading and writing among his students.

Some of the writing tasks that he set for his kids in the creative writing classes included exploring and working with nursery rhymes and recipe books.

The extremely inspiring and hilarious assignment that he invents with 'forged excuse notes' of students for not completing their assignments is worth reading. He uses these notes as a literary weapon against his students' resistance to 'any kind of writing assignment in class or home.' The quality of work that emerges finally was termed 'brilliant' by the Staten Island Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Martin Wolfson, while the students enjoy it thoroughly.

"Instead of teaching, I told stories. Anything to keep them quiet and in their seats." By allowing the students a big peek into his personal life, his childhood, his youth, his weaknesses, etc. (through stories), he made himself vulnerable and, in the process, was accepted as one among them.

A good teacher is in the deeper sense of the word, 'a multi-tasking, caring and tolerant human being.' This element comes through beautifully in McCourt's memoir which is a tapestry of "mundane events and incidents that shine against the backdrop of that pathetic, abused child."

"They thought I was teaching. I thought I was teaching. I was learning. And you called yourself a teacher? I didn't call myself anything. I was more than a teacher. And less. In the high school classroom you are a drill sergeant, a rabbi, a shoulder to cry on, a disciplinarian, a singer, a low-level scholar, a clerk, ... a psychologist, the last straw."

How many of us 'teachers' are actually ready to don such a suit of multi-tasking for all the children in our classes who come from different cultures with different learning abilities, different difficulties and strengths, with different ambitions and dreams of parents for their off spring……. , and make a difference in their lives?

Challenging! Difficult! Overwhelming! But Definitely Not Impossible!

It would be time well-spent while talking about Teacher Man to gather some ideas about the constructivist approach to teaching which seems very relevant in today's scenario of education and is in many ways closely connected to McCourt's approach.

In the past, constructivist ideas were not widely valued due to the perception that children's play was seen as aimless and of little importance. Jean Piaget, the great pioneer of the constructivist theory of knowledge, did not agree with these traditional views, however. He saw play as an important and necessary part of the student's cognitive development and provided scientific evidence for his views. Today, constructivist theories are influential throughout much of the so-called informal learning sector.

Social constructivism views each learner as a unique individual with unique needs and backgrounds. According to the social constructivist approach, instructors have to adapt to the role of facilitators and not teachers (Bauersfeld, 1995). A teacher tells, a facilitator asks; a teacher lectures from the front, a facilitator supports from the back; a teacher gives answers according to a set curriculum, a facilitator provides guidelines and creates the environment for the learner to arrive at his or her own conclusions; a teacher mostly gives a monologue, a facilitator is in continuous dialogue with the learners (Rhodes and Bellamy, 1999).

Though intuitively McCourt does what he thinks is right in different situations in his English classes, what he actually follows is the theory of Constructivism, the implications of which are as follows:

- Allow room for student responses to drive lessons
- Encourage the spirit of questioning by posing open-ended questions
- Encourage discussion among students
- Be one of many resources that the student learns from
- Facilitate experiences that challenge students' preconceptions
- Insist on clear expression from students
- Reawaken students to the livingness of the subject
- Propose problems proportionate to the knowledge of the student

The interesting experimentation that he carries on within his English classes as well as the manner in which he handles difficult kids, with an instinctive understanding of their needs and desires, their joys and sorrows is an eye-opener.

A fitting tribute to this book and the author would be a quote by McCourt[1] himself, on what he thinks is the purpose of schools. "I think a school should work like hell to help young people with their "potential"- whatever that is. It should be a liberating rather than a narrowing place where curiosity is encouraged and fostered."

Is this what we as teachers and parents wish for our children? Or is it too much to ask for?

References :

- *Information from the Internet on Constructivism*

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[1] *Frank McCourt died of cancer at age 78, on July 19, 2009.*

Reading the Everyday Class Life of a Language Teacher[1]

The Class (Entre les murs)
Directed by Laurent Cantet
2008

A Review by Alex M. George

Entering the Classroom

When I first watched The Class *[Entre les Murs]*, a particular scene towards the end of the film compelled me to watch it again, to find the original book and, finally, to write an appreciation. Henriette, a student walks up to the teacher, Marin, and tells him "I didn't learn anything …. I don't understand what we do …in school." Even though she is aware that there is another year before she decides to go to vocational school, she knows, probably like the teacher himself, that making sense of what the classroom does to you and all that happens in school is nearly impossible. In the cinema hall, I tried to recall this student's face but could not. I thought the director probably introduced her for the first time, as if to tell us that just like the teacher you [the viewer] never noted her presence. But, in later viewings, I realised she was there in the film but remains silent, nearly invisible, and the only syllable that she speaks is prompted by another student.

This film discusses a theme that currently dominates discussions on western classrooms multi-culturalism. Over the last few decades, nations in Europe have come to accept the presence of children from different national and racial backgrounds. Thus, curriculum and classroom practices are trying to move away from 'Eurocentrism.' The classroom in this film is located in suburban Paris and children belong to Arab, African, West Indian and Chinese nationalities. It tells the story of one academic year in the life of a teacher who is aware and sensitive to their backgrounds.

This is definitely not the first time that the story of a suburban school, often attended by students from underprivileged communities, becomes a theme for films. Hollywood films, like 'Freedom Writers' and 'Dangerous Minds,' based on biographies of teachers, do portray instances of success where inner city children become engaged in education. There have also been fictionalised accounts in books of teacher practices like The Blackboard Jungle or Decline and Fall. I am not sure how the theme of lives of teachers / classrooms has appeared in French or other languages.[2] But there was something in The Class that I could not help noticing: it problematises the multicultural scenario and the efforts of an empathetic teacher.

In the Indian context, our classrooms turn a blind eye to the existence of plural identities. Probably one aspect that differentiates the Indian classroom is the 'underplaying' of identities. Often teachers are expected to assume value-neutral positions. There are

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[1] *This reading of the film is biased, from the experiences of someone who works in education. It does not make any effort or claim to understand what a film critic would look for in a Cannes award winner. Similarly, neither does this reading claim nor asserts practices of language teaching, and its dynamics. Thanks to Pooja for getting hold of the film again.*

[2] *I just brush aside films like Taare Zameen Par under the carpet, where actors become larger than life and not the themes and narratives and dialogue like "…SSA ke anthargat…" gives you a feeling of the 'newsreel' days!*

situations in which schools have become spaces where we segregate identities - religion, caste or class. Unfortunately, Indian film directors go to school only to 'locate' a teenage love story and not to narrate social lives of classrooms.

The Narrative - Between the Walls

To the English-speaking world, the film came with a misleading title, a literal translation of the French *"Entre les Murs"* is 'Between the Walls.' While the world outside school ceases to exist in the first few seconds when François enters the school, the rest of the film weaves through the organic school for a year: the parents, the administration, the playground, the staffroom, stairways, corridors, offices, and, of course, the class. This gives us a feeling that 'Between the Walls,' a translation of the original French name, would have been more descriptive of the film. However, thinking differently, if one looks at every one of these other spaces, the actors and the events in relation to everything that happens between the student and teacher, one would feel the Anglais name was after all accurate! Through the narratives in the classroom, one does learn about world outside the school how the teacher wishes to mobilise support for their 'brilliant but illegal' Wei, a Chinese immigrant; how students talk about the sexual identity of the teacher; how students are bothered about their 'national' identities while discussing the African Cup, etc. Overall, there are a series of events, but not necessarily one major event like in the storylines of many films.

What we learn from this film, which is semi autobiographical, is probably the limits of or challenges to the idea and practice of multiculturalism - as how the walls of the classroom seem to "restrict" the actual practice of multi-cultural classrooms. In this context, the film is about various ways of negotiating power relations in the classroom. Unlike in most of our Indian classrooms, where the teacher is dominant, Marin's classrooms show a scenario where both the teacher and student constantly negotiate this space. The rest of this write-up looks at this aspect and how it becomes visible through the ways in which language is used, which is beyond the fact that Marin teaches language in a multiracial scenario.

Language: Ways of Domination or Negotiation

In this film, the classroom is clearly a space for series of challenges - on every word spoken, on every expression used, on every name picked up. The teacher as well as the students probably never wait for a solution but move on without necessarily reaching some plane of negotiation.

At one point, we find Marin using an abusive comment made by a student - "the cheeseburger stinks" as an antonym for the word 'succulent' which was being discussed. On another occasion, we find students pointing out his bias for "whitey names" like "Bill" as a teacher as against Ahmed, Aissata or Rashid etc. Marin finds himself on the back foot on the issue and relents.

The multicultural classroom poses a challenge to the nature of language in the form of the "imperfect subjunctive." Esmeralda asks what this is. In the process of discussing this, the question of it being useful gets raised. While the teacher insists that students master grammatical structures and recognise the worth of every 'register' of language 'familiar, current, formal, oral and written' students seem to harp repeatedly on the ideas that these usages belong to 'bourgeois' and not 'normal' communities. In a certain sense, the teacher tries to be inclusive about the varieties, forms, and nature of language, just like his attempt to treat diversity in the class.

On another occasion Marin tries to moderate a debate in the classroom and cannot stop himself from asking, "Is that the way you speak to the teacher?" On an earlier occasion, he demands and manages to get an apology from Khoumba, who then immediately turns back to say her apology was false. Marin, on many occasions, challenges the norm, but in demanding respect and in ensuring that he receives it he acts like most teachers. The societal norm of the manner in which a child should speak to the adult is emphasised. Marin himself makes the mistake of breaking the norm - in a fit of fury, he calls a girl a shank - another norm of

society is broken, a teacher using abusive language. Marin's dilemma is the awareness that there is no way the school system can punish him as a teacher but the students are under the control of the adult.

It is here that rules and regulations of both language and society overlap and become a central theme to this reading. On every occasion, one sees Marin having a different view be it in the case of punishment or reward. He reminds us of the fluidity of defining rules either to praise a student or to punish her. How an organised rule-bound system fails to appreciate a student's performance based on her scores because her classroom behaviour is not seen as positive. Or how a student is punished without necessarily knowing the scenario in which she "misbehaves." Looking through this lens in the use of rules and regulations in language teaching or usage of language too - the boundaries seem to blur. The multicultural classrooms negotiate rules of standard language.

The Teacher: Negotiating for Learning

The teacher being capable of knowing every student in the classroom seems to be a false claim. As pointed out at the beginning about Henriette, who admits that she never learnt anything, there was Esmeralda, who tells the teacher that she read Plato's, 'The Republic.' Marin himself considered this book above the level of a reading for this group of students in their history classes. Thus, on the one side, the teacher fails to understand the student and, on the other, students fail to recognise the worth of the teacher because the film tells us the teacher's empathy was not sufficient to win them over and lead them to the so-called 'liberating education' ideal. Each challenge posed by the child in the classroom questions the dignity that the teacher expects. On one occasion another teacher blurts out 'we are not animals', and on another in a fit of fury the

teacher feels 'they are animals.' Hence, in spite of the teachers in the school being empathetic it is a series of challenges to recognise the worth of the other.

But, on yet another occasion, and probably often, the viewer is in complete admiration of the teacher. Souleymane, whose story is partly central to the film, refuses to do the assignment 'Self Portrait' just the way the teacher demands. In order to complete this task, he uses photographs rather than the written text. In a very traditional language classroom, this would have been abhorred. However, Marin engages with Souleymane, appreciates and guides him to provide captions and displays them. It is important here that students themselves make a difference between the student and teacher's roles. Initially, the students consider self-portraits as "expected" by the teacher cannot exist because the teacher cannot be seriously interested in 'knowing' about their feelings and their 'real' personal lives and will use it as tool for discussion.

The Class is still a film about the teacher, than about the class, because we become more familiar with François Marin than the students in the classroom like Souleymane or Esmeralda or Khoumba. Or one keeps hearing about the views of the teachers about the students: often as a challenge to their own notions as what students need to be like. There were moments of great success for the teacher but then he too succumbs to the challenge, though much after a struggle.

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RESOURCE KIT FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Some Government Organisations Working in the Field of Promotion and Development of Languages

S.no.	Name of the Organisation	Website
1	Central Hindi Directorate, New Delhi	hindinideshalaya.nic.in
2	Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore	www.ciil.org
3	Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology, New Delhi	www.cstt.nic.in
4	English and Foreign Language University, Hyderabad	www.ciefl.ac.in
5	Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra	www.hindisansthan.org
6	Maharishi Sandipani Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan, Ujjain	-
7	National Council for Promotion of Sindhi Language, Vadodara	www.ncpsl.org
8	National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language, New Delhi	www.urducouncil.nic.in
9	National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi	www.ncert.nic.in
10	National Translation Mission	www.ntm.org.in
11	Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi	www.sanskrit.nic.in

Some Non-Government Organisations Working in the Area of Language Education

S.no.	Name of the Organisation	Website
1	Akshara Foundation, Bangalore	www.aksharafoundation.org
2	British Council, India	www.britishcouncil.org
3	Centre for Learning, Bangalore	http://cfl.in
4	Centre for Learning Resources, Pune	www.clrindia.net
5	Digantar Shiksha Evam Khelkud Samiti, Jaipur	www.digantar.org
6	Dr. Reddy's Foundation, Hyderabad	www.drreddysfoundation.org
7	Eklavya, Bhopal	http://eklavya.in
8	Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, Phaltan, Maharashtra	www.indiaprogressiveeducation.com
9	Pratham, Mumbai	www.pratham.org
10	Rishi Valley Institute of Teacher Education, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh	http://www.rishivalley.org/rvite/rvite_overview.htm
11	The Promise Foundation, Bangalore	www.thepromisefoundation.org
12	The Teacher Foundation, Bangalore	www.teacherfoundation.org
13	Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre, V.B. Teachers College, Udaipur	http://vidyabhavansociety-seminar.org/

List of Some Popular Children's Books' Publishers

S.no.	Name of the Publisher	Website
1	A&A Book Trust / Arvind Kumar Publishers	www.arvindkumarpublishers.com
2	Alka Publications	www.alkapublications.com
3	Anveshi (through DC Books) - Tales from the margins a series of eight books	http://www.anveshi.org/content/view/172/99/
4	Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS)	www.bgvs.org
5	BPI India Pvt. Ltd.	www.bpiindia.com
6	Cambridge University Press	www.cambridge.org/asia/
7	Center for Learning Resources	www.clrindia.net/materials/childrenbooks.html
8	Chandamama India	www.chandamama.com
9	Children's Book Trust	www.childrensbooktrust.com
10	Eklavya	http://eklavya.in
11	Eureka Books (EurekaChild An AID India Education Initiative)	www.eurekachild.org/eurekabooks
12	Hamlyn: Octopus Publishing Group	www.octopusbooks.co.uk/hamlyn/
13	Harper Collins Children's Books	www.harpercollinschildrens.com
14	India Book House	www.ibhworld.com
15	Janchetna	http://janchetnaaa.blogspot.com/
16	Jyotsna Prakashan	-
17	Karadi Tales Company	www.karaditales.com
18	Katha, New Delhi	www.katha.org
19	Macmillan Publishers	http://international.macmillan.com
20	National Book Trust	www.nbtindia.org.in
21	National Council of Educational Research and Training	www.ncert.nic.in
22	Navakarnataka Publications	http://navakarnataka.com
23	Navneet Prakashan Kendra, Ahmedabad, Gujarat	-
24	Oxford University Press	www.oxfordonline.com
25	Parragon Books	www.parragon.com
26	PCM Children's Magazine	www.pcmmagazine.com
27	Pratham Books	www.prathambooks.org
28	Puffin Books, Penguin Group	www.puffin.co.uk
29	Pustak Mahal	www.pustakmahal.com
30	Rajkamal Prakashan Samuha	www.rajkamalprakashan.com
31	Ratna Sagar Publishers	www.ratnasagar.com
32	Room to Read	www.roomtoread.org
33	Sahmat	www.sahmat.org
34	Scholastic India Publishing	www.scholasticindia.com/publishing.asp

S.no.	Name of the Publisher	Website
35	Shree Book Centre, Mumbai	-
36	Tara Books	www.tarabooks.com
37	TERI Press	http://bookstore.teriin.org/childrencorner.php
38	The Learning Tree Store	http://www.tltree.com
39	Thomas Nelson	www.tommynelson.com
40	Tormont Publication Inc.	-
41	Tulika Books	www.tulikabooks.com
42	Two-can Publishing/Cooper Square Publishing	www.two-canpublishing.com/ www.coopersquarepublishing.com
43	Vasan Publications	www.mastermindbooks.com

Some Weblinks for Language Learning

1. http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/magickey/adventures/dragon_game.shtml is a game that helps learn about a question and a question mark.

2. http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/magickey/adventures/creamcake_game.shtml is a game that helps learn rhyming words, their pronunciation and use in sentences.

3. http://www.proteacher.com/cgi-bin/outsidesite.cgi?id=4731&external=http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/actbank/sorganiz.htm&original=http://www.proteacher.com/070037.shtml&title=Graphic%20Organizers contains well-delineated writing standards, level wise.

4. http://www.lessonplanspage.com/LAK1.htm contains a whole host of ideas for language activities

5. http://www.col-ed.org/cur/lang.html has a plethora of links to lesson plans for language learning, and none of them conventional ones.

6. http://www.op97.org/ftcyber/jack/puzzles/puzzles.html has easy, medium and hard jigsaw puzzles that are based on fairy tales.

7. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IVNi-FpEuY has a video of the Panchatantra story about the doves in a hunter's net (collective strength) in Hindi.

8. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ODqhC-GhIc&NR=1 has a video of the Panchatantra story "The ungrateful Mouse" in Hindi.

9. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANjO_VjjIDw&feature=related has a video of a story on why the sea water is salty.

10. http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0510a.html contains links to different versions of the story of CINDERELLA, from around the world.

11. http://www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/ contains Folk and Fairy Tales from around the World.

12. http://www.rubybridges.org/story.htm contains the inspiring story of Ruby Bridges and her teacher

13. http://www.thepromisefoundation.org/TPFLtRB.pdf is report of a Study on Learning to Read in Bengali, useful for language researchers in Indian languages.

14. http://www.thepromisefoundation.org/TPFRdK.pdf is report of a Study on Reading Difficulties in Kannada, useful for language researchers in Indian languages.

Some Websites for Language Resources

1. http://www.bookadventure.com/ki/bs/ki_bs_helpfind.asp allows the user to enter the preference (level, type of book, etc.) and then generates an entire booklist, complete with title, author name, ISBN number, etc.

2. http://school.discoveryeducation.com/ provides innovative teaching materials for teachers, useful and enjoyable resources for students and smart advice for parents about how to help their kids enjoy learning and excel in school. The site is constantly reviewed for educational relevance by practicing classroom teachers in elementary school, middle school, and high school.

3. http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com/ allows the user to create and print customized word search, criss-cross, math puzzles, and more using his/her own word lists.

4. http://www.henry.k12.ga.us/cur/Kinder.htm has a host of ideas for the classroom, to improve language, science, math, art, and many other skills.

5. http://gem.win.co.nz/mario/wsearch/wsearch.php allows you to generate your own word maze/word search puzzle.

6. http://georgemcgurn.com/articles/readingforpleasure.html has a good article on reading for pleasure.

7. http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/pages/374.shtml for a lovely idea on getting children excited about reading.

8. http://www.readingrockets.org/article/c55/ for another idea

9. Also, see: http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw/campaignpartners/ideasbank/reading/

10. http://www.vrml.k12.la.us/krause/Reading.htm has slide shows for reading for kids.

11. http://kielikompassi.ulc.jyu.fi/kookit0405/seashore/mrshrimpandsammy.htm has a film to teach pronunciation.

12. http://www.msgarrettonline.com/descripwords.html for descriptive words

13. http://esl.about.com/od/vocabularylessonplans/a/characteradj.htm for an excellent activity that develops and broadens knowledge of character adjective vocabulary.

14. http://www.scholastic.com/ispy/play/ for a set of award winning puzzles and games that allow children to discover word associations, word play and themes that help them build important learning skills including reading.

15. http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/in_the_bag/index.html for an interactive game that builds vocabulary.

Some Weblinks to E-Books and Online Libraries

1. http://worldlibrary.net/WidgerLibrary.htm has several e-books that can be downloaded.

2. http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/ift/index.htm has links to Indian fairy tales.

3. http://primary.naace.co.uk/activities/BigBooks/index.htm has audio-e-books for kids.

4. http://www.vrml.k12.la.us/krause/Reading.htm for slide shows that excite a child to read.

5. http://www.arvindguptatoys.com/ contains an enormous list of books on enlivening language learning, rated by Arvind Gupta. Many of them can be downloaded for free.

NOTE: The above Resource Kit is not, by any means, an exhaustive one. It has been put together with the help of several individuals who work in the field of Education, all of whom we would like to sincerely thank, for their time and effort.

The Many Colours of the Pen that Writes

Neeraja Raghavan

If you regard poetry as being only for 'those people', try watching the film Il Postino (The Postman). A fictional tale woven around Pablo Neruda[1], it is a heart-warming story of a postman who goes to deliver letters every day to the poet - and slowly finds the poet within himself awakening. By the end of that film, the realization that poetry is nothing but a contact with one's deepest self slowly begins to dawn in the mind of even the most diehard sceptic. [That film, in fact, prompted me to write my first serious poem: and I was amongst those who thought poetry was 'not for me'.]

In a similar sense, many of us may feel that writing skills are needed only by those whose day-to-day work demands a lot of writing: journalists, reporters, editors, researchers, academicians, writers, and others of that ilk. However, just a little bit of reflection will reveal that almost everyone (whether a doctor, businessman, engineer, nurse, teacher, advertiser, administrator or salesperson) is called upon to communicate something or the other in their workplace, and often times, the communication is expected to be in writing. Learning to do this effectively will go a long way in improving that facet of one's work.

Not everyone may be called upon to write a four-page essay, but recording, documenting, summarising, reporting, and occasionally, even a little bit of creative writing are tasks that many of us need to perform. The nurse who has to document the patient's progress (for the benefit of the doctor on duty) is better equipped to do it if (s)he has an idea of how to go about recording observations clearly and systematically. The engineer who makes a visit to the site of construction would need to report about the suitability of the site (for the project under consideration) as accurately and concisely as possible. The administrator often calls upon those (s)he administers to quickly summarise the happenings in a meeting so as to help effect speedy decision-making. Parents need, on occasion, to whip

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In his Deliciae Physico-Mathematicae (1636), German inventor Daniel Schwenter described a pen made from two quills. One quill served as a reservoir for ink inside the other quill. The ink was sealed inside the quill with cork. Ink was squeezed through a small hole to the writing point. Progress in developing a reliable pen was slow, however, into the mid-19th century. That slow pace of progress was due to a very imperfect understanding of the role that air pressure played in the operation of the pens and because most inks were highly corrosive and full of sedimentary inclusions. The Romanian inventor Petrache Poenaru received a French patent for the invention of the first fountain pen with a replaceable ink cartridge on May 25, 1827. The design of the pen allowed for smooth writing without unwanted dripping or scratching. Starting in the 1850s there was a steadily accelerating stream of fountain pen patents and pens in production. It was only after three key inventions were in place, however, that the fountain pen became a widely popular writing instrument. Those inventions were the iridium-tipped gold nib, hard rubber, and free-flowing ink.

Taken from the link:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fountain_pen

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[1] *Pablo Neruda (July 12, 1904 September 23, 1973) was the pen name and, later, legal name of the Chilean writer and politician Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto. Neruda assumed his pen name as a teenager, partly because it was in vogue, partly to hide his poetry from his father, a rigid man who wanted his son to have a "practical" occupation. With his works translated into many languages, Pablo Neruda is considered one of the greatest and most influential poets of the 20th century. In 1971 Neruda won the Nobel Prize for Literature.*

up a creative tale that will put their child to sleep or, as educators, need to bring home an important lesson that probably can be best conveyed only through a story. The salesperson needs to be able to summarise the attributes of the product being sold, in an appealing manner, so as to engage the potential customer within a short time frame.

Expressing oneself well in any language is therefore an undeniable asset, and often a basic requirement, for almost anyone. If one is able to write reasonably well in the language, so much the better! While forms of writing abound, I will confine myself to just four types of writing that are demanded of many of us in the workplace, and sometimes even outside it. These are: summarising, précis writing, journal writing and creative writing.

If one were to summarise the text in the box on the previous page, one would be called upon to restate the main ideas, omitting all supporting examples and evidence. The length of the summary could vary, but a sample (of a four-sentence one) is given below:

Unless one understands how a thing functions, one cannot improve its design. The humble pen exemplifies this statement, as it was not until its mechanism of function was understood (in the mid-19th century) that its design really took off. A 17th century inventor made a pen from two quills, the ink squeezed slowly through a small hole to the writing point almost as slow as the progress of the design of this writing instrument! Only when the role of air pressure in the operation of pens was understood, did a stream of patents and inventions flow smoothly out...nudged along the way by three key inventions: the gold nib, hard rubber and free-flowing ink.

If you found the summary more readable than the original text above, without a significant loss of matter, then the summary was a good one.

What's the difference between a summary and a précis, one may well ask? The classic text on précis writing, Précis Writing for Beginners, by Pocock is as relevant today as in 1917, when it was first printed. A précis is a type of summarizing that insists on an exact reproduction of the logic, organization, and emphasis of the original texts. An effective précis retains the logic, development, and argument of the original in much shorter form. Given below is one attempt at making a précis of the same passage:

How has the humble pen metamorphosed over the years? A 17th century German inventor has left behind a description of a pen made from two quills, one inside the other. One quill served as an ink reservoir for the other. However, since most inks were highly corrosive and full of sedimentary inclusions, the design of the pen did not progress smoothly. Although its design has changed significantly over the centuries, it was not until the mid-19th century, when people finally understood the role of air pressure in the operation of pens, that a plethora of patents and inventions of various types of pens burst forth. The fountain pen became a popular writing instrument only after the gold nib, hard rubber and free-flowing ink were invented.

As you can see, there is greater adherence to the flow of argument in the précis than in the summary. I have often looked back on my school years and thanked my précis writing classes (and teachers!) for any writing skills that I may now possess. We would be told to shorten a three page text into one page, then into half a page and finally into a paragraph. The quality of attention that such a reading demanded (with the ability to sift out the non-essential from the essential), the continuous revisiting of content and words used, and the rephrasing (in brief) that we were thus called upon to do has stood me in very good stead in later years. When you have to urgently convey some important news, a good précis writer will do the trick! [Don't we all need one such person around, at home as well as the work place?] Writing reams is often far easier than being brief and succinct. Who was it who once said: I didn't have time to write you a short letter, so I wrote a long one...? Some say it was Blaise Pascal; others go as far back as Cicero.

If there is one other kind of writing that helped hone my writing skills it is letter writing, sadly an anachronism today, the age of electronic mail. However, even today, the option of journal writing is still open. Writing a journal is said to be one of the best ways of polishing writing skills. Demanding that one 'simply records' what has taken place in one's day is deceptively simple. For, it is seldom that words flow out of one's pen: or up from one's keyboard! Therefore, it is useful to trigger such writing by giving writing prompts, e.g. what did you have for breakfast today?

My day begins with my usual breakfast of a boiled egg. Peeling off the shell is strangely satisfying, as the removal of pieces is accompanied by the emergence of a whole. I have never quite gotten accustomed to the smell of a boiled egg: despite having it for breakfast for so many years. It always hits me with a start. Biting into the soft grey, white and yellow mush is not so pleasant, as it invariably demands a second brushing of teeth so as to not go around all day with a grey and yellow mouth! And what with one's bus due to depart at 0725 hours: it's seldom that I truly relish my breakfast.

This brings me to the fourth kind of writing: perhaps the hardest. What is creative writing? While I find that difficult to define, I do think that creative people "see" things differently. One of the things we are taught very early in our schooling is to compare and contrast things. Spotting differences is a skill we acquire very quickly. However, it is often the underlying sameness in much that is around us, that creative people discern: and the not-so-creative tend to miss, obsessed as they are with (obvious) differences.

So if we were to try this exercise in creative writing, again with the same two subjects: the pen and the egg, let's see what would happen...

Take a look at this picture of an egg, and just jot down words that the picture evokes out of you. Here's what I got:

Egg: oval, brown, round, smooth, new life, creation, waiting, continuation, shadow, gentle, rocking, brown on white.

Now do the same with this picture of the ink and pen:

Ink and Pen: words that will flow out of the pen, waiting, new words, creation, communication, ink waiting to be used, words waiting to pour out, pen ready to scribe.

What's connecting these two things? Do you feel they are too utterly different? Just wait till we try to tie them together, using the phrases and words jotted above:

WAITING
Life will spill out of the egg
Words will flow out of the pen
Both are suspended in gentle anticipation
Who will emerge from the egg?
What will speak from the pen?
Waiting, waiting, the egg rocks slightly
The ink tremors in the bottle
Locked inside the brown and oval shell
Is a life waiting to be born.
Hidden inside the grooves of the nib
Are words that will fill the pages of a book
The Creator speaks through Creation
Some use words.
Others, creatures.

If you think it's tough: just try! You may well be surprised by the results! Enjoy your bout of writing: summarising or précis, journal or creative!

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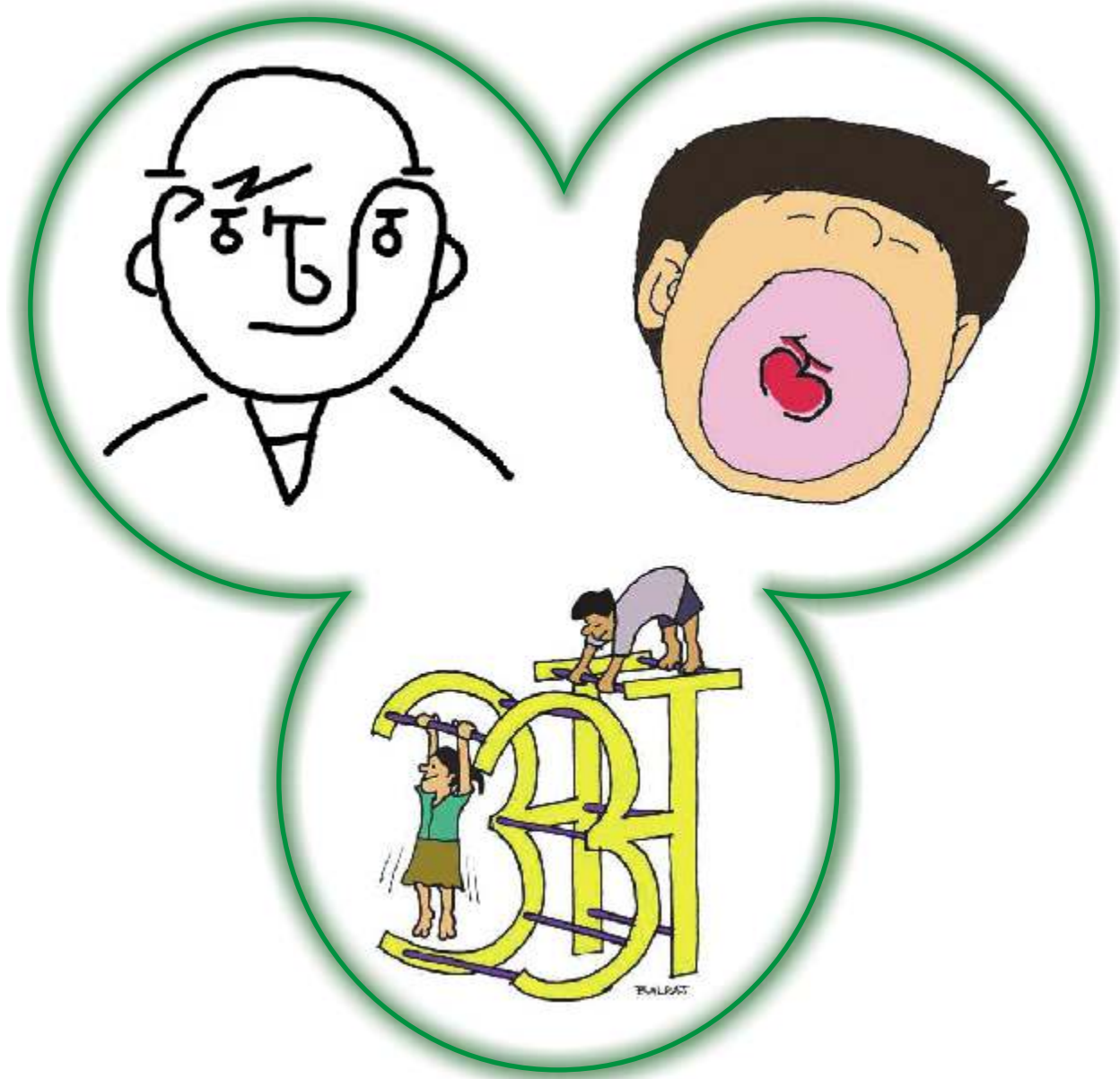
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