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Editorial Team

Design
Cover photo – Purusottam Singh Thakur
Photos – Azim Premji Foundation Archives, Authors

Layout (Hindi) – Ganesh Graphics
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh
Layout (English) – MAP Systems
Bengaluru, Karnataka

English Translation
Eklavya Foundation, Bhopal
Coordinator: Sonam Kumari

Printing
Lakshmi Mudranalaya
Bengaluru, Karnataka

Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar is Azim Premji University's quarterly publication on school education. The publication seeks to provide practice-based content for pre-primary, primary and upper-primary government school teachers across the country. It is a platform for them to share perspectives, experiences, reflections and classroom processes that reflect effective pedagogy aligned with NEP 2020, NCF-SE and NCF-FS. First published in Hindi, it is also translated into English and Kannada.

Editorial

The fundamental requirement of school education is that all students acquire basic linguistic and mathematical skills. However, due to various practical challenges on the ground, many students are unable to attain efficiency in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). Ensuring that each child acquires FLN is one of the most pressing challenges for teachers today. Given this challenge, the Government of India has launched *NIPUN* (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) *Bharat Mission* in collaboration with the state governments to achieve the target of FLN by 2026-27.

This challenge existed even before the pandemic, but COVID-19 deepened it significantly. Though the worst of the pandemic is now behind us, and teachers have worked tirelessly to recover lost ground, the journey to foundational learning for all is still far from complete.

The challenge of FLN is particularly acute in government schools, where children often lack a home environment that supports learning and are burdened with the responsibility of earning along with their parents. Teachers face several additional obstacles – irregular attendance, delayed enrolments, students admitted directly to classes III, IV, or V without prior schooling, indifference of parents, etc. This means that whatever opportunities students have are available only in schools. This increases the responsibility of teachers. However, the responsibility does not lie with teachers alone. It lies with the entire educational system, from school-level leadership to district and state-level academic support structures. It lies in the deeper understanding of FLN shared through discussion in meetings and workshops with academic colleagues and supporters at all levels of the system.

Meeting this collective responsibility requires two key enablers: a clear and shared understanding of FLN for a collaborative and supportive academic environment at all levels, and secondly, a positive, supportive academic environment for individuals committed to the mission at all levels through responsible and intensive monitoring.

It is evident in the concept of FLN that foundational skills are not just about grasping language or learning a few mathematical operations; rather, it is about helping children make sense of their world, develop the ability to reason and reflect, and prepare to face real-life challenges. It is about enabling children to think mathematically and engage meaningfully with their learning. When language and mathematical skills are developed early in students, they take an interest in different subjects, and their eagerness to learn new subjects increases in higher classes.

It is our responsibility to ensure that every student achieves the desired levels of FLN. For this, it is important to understand FLN not only as a process but also as a core idea. This understanding forms the essence of this issue. You will find articles that centre around the concept of FLN, classroom experiences, and the challenges faced

by teachers in making foundational learning a reality. Also, these articles explore the true meaning of FLN along with the strategies that can be adopted to work on this with children. One of the articles specifically highlights the value of learning through interaction and association with materials, like a mathematics kit, rather than relying solely on mechanical methods.

Other articles explore themes like meaningful dialogues and their usefulness in the teaching process, how creative writing can deepen children's engagement with learning, and how thoughtful lesson planning supports better outcomes. There is also the inspiring story of a school that saw both enrolment and learning levels rise after adopting specific practices tailored to its context. As always, this issue includes a piece on Early Childhood Education (ECE), sharing the experience of an *anganwadi* centre and how these create enabling environments for young children.

In our regular column, 'In the Spotlight', a teacher from Madhya Pradesh tells us about the processes they have used to enhance learning. The much-loved 'Pages from Teachers' Diaries' section carries classroom experiences from teachers across Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka. You will also find reviews of two intriguing books in the 'In the Company of Books' column, and the activities section has a range of activities that are skill-based and interesting. Your valuable letters are included in the 'We've Got Mail' section of the magazine.

With the publication of this issue, *Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar* has completed 24 amazing issues, and we are excited to share that the 25th one will be a special edition! In this issue, your favourite column, 'Pages from Teachers' Diaries' will feature reflections of 25 teachers. They will talk about their classroom experiences and school journeys, along with some significant articles on primary school education.

In addition to this, we will be coming up with a special December edition focused on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), in line with the National Education Policy 2020, which places strong emphasis on quality education for children aged 3 to 6 years.

Both the upcoming issues will be special issues! For both these issues, we look forward to your contributions – articles, reflections, diary entries, and activities drawn from your own experiences. Your letters, questions, and articles from across the country continue to inspire and energise us and assure us that we are connected. Let us keep reading, writing, and sharing your experiences.

With warm wishes,

Pratibha Katiyar
Editor-in-Chief

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Shivani Rajwade Vetter: Sonam Kumari

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COLUMNS

Understanding Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

Gulshan Yadav

According to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Foundational Stage 2022, the objective of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) is to make young learners proficient in reading, writing and mathematical skills from the early years. The skills mastered at this stage not only better equip them for the educational journey ahead but also prepare them as adept learning individuals.

Figure 1. The ability to read and write early allows learners to access diverse reading material.

The early years (ages 3-8 years) are a period for rapid learning in children, making it crucial to focus on their FLN. The development in the skills of reading and writing along with an understanding of early mathematics, prepares them for the understanding of complex concepts that follow. Acquisition of the ability to read at an early stage allows the learner to easily access textbooks, stories and other teaching materials and utilise them for their learning. This prompts the learner to progress successfully. On the other hand, learners who lag in acquiring the skills of reading, writing and mathematics at the foundational level are limited in their academic progress, leading to a gradual decline in their engagement with learning in subsequent classes. With time, this early performance will reflect in the students' improvement or decline in learning, widening the gap between high-performing and low-performing students.

What comprises FLN?

We understand that FLN stands for 'Foundational Literacy and Numeracy', but it becomes equally important to understand what constitutes FLN to decide how to work with students on language and mathematics. Just as foundational literacy does not mean the ability to read basic sentences by breaking them up (into words or syllables) without comprehension, similarly, number sense is not confined to just the recognition of two- or three-digit numbers. FLN comprises many aspects. By understanding those aspects, we can work towards the

overarching goals of education set by NEP 2020, such as critical thinking and reasoning skills.

The objective of education is not solely to pass examinations; it is the 'holistic development' of learners and developing '21st-century skills, problem-solving and life-skills' in them.

A limited understanding of the foundational numeracy domain confines us merely to digits and operations, whereas it actually includes other concepts, such as number patterns, the relationship between numbers and operations, geometry and more.

Let's talk about 'spatial understanding', that is, the understanding of space, as one of the sub-concepts of geometry. Early learners also have the ability to understand where objects are placed, which ones are near and which are far, and that nearby objects appear larger while the distant ones appear smaller and so on. Spatial understanding includes other sub-concepts: 1. Shape recognition; 2. Understanding of direction and space: such as nearby, distant, left, right, up, down, behind, etc.; 3. Measurement: distance, weight, etc.

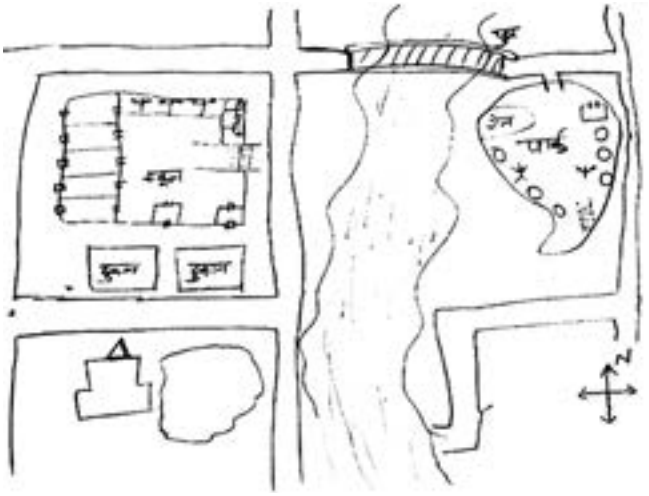

Figure 2. Students used this visual map to find the shortest route from park to school.

Let's look at the impact of foundational competencies in the later classes with the help of an example. In class III, the teacher assigned an activity to the learners in which a visual map indicated the locations of the school, park and students' homes using specific symbols. The students were required to determine how many meters eastward they would need to go from the school to reach the park.

Based on FLN instruction, students' prior learning at this point would include: the ability to read given instructions; interpret the symbols shown on the map (and thereby identify the school and park); determine that the park is to the east of the school; and estimate the approximate distance that needs to be covered to reach the park, and so on.

"The objective of education is not solely to pass examinations; it is the 'holistic development' of learners and developing '21st-century skills, problem-solving and life-skills' in them."

While working on this task with their peers, the learners were expected to collaboratively think of multiple aspects at a time:

- Look at the entire map carefully and associate the symbols with their respective locations.
- Understand the locations with reference to up-down, left-right, nearby-far and directions.
- Understand that walking towards which direction will lead them to the park and that if they go in the wrong direction, they will not reach the park.
- Determine in which direction the park is located and how much the distance is from the school.
- What obstacles are there along the way (such as a river) and then decide in which direction to turn or whether to use a bridge to cross the river.
- If there are no obstacles visible, then they can create a new path or build a bridge over the river other than the one shown on the map.

While making all these decisions, they were expected to be able to logically explain to their peers why a particular decision was made to understand the chosen path and the reasons behind it.

Incomplete understanding of FLN

- **Number sense not number names:** Often, foundational numeracy is assumed to be only about teaching children 'number names' and addition-subtraction. Learning number names is a minor component of understanding numeracy. It is 'number sense' that includes the ability to understand relationships between numbers, recognise patterns, and comprehend concepts, such as why one number is smaller or larger than another, etc. While learners memorise and learn to write number names, they are unable to articulate the relationship between, say, 5 and 7, as well as their practical use in everyday life. It is also important to note that when foundational numeracy is confined within fixed boundaries, essential skills and concepts, such as measurement, basic patterns (including problem-solving) and shapes often get overlooked.
- **Reading is not merely the pronunciation of words:** Similarly, reading is understood only as the correct pronunciation of words. Whereas the objective of

foundational language competency is to foster the ability to read with comprehension and analysis in the learners.

- **Overlooking the multilingual perspective:** There is little effort to include the learners' home language in the teaching process. From the perspective of foundational language competency, this is important because it is the medium of the learners' fundamental thought process. In the context of Chhattisgarh, the native languages of most of the learners studying in the northern and southern parts of the state are *Gondi*, *Halbi*, *Kamari*, *Surgujia*, *Kurukh,* etc.
- **Overlooking activities:** Often, understanding of foundational language gets limited to the reading and writing of words. Storytelling, poem recitation, role play, and many other such interesting activities that can be conducted in the classroom are often sidelined in the classroom processes. Foundational language learning means developing an interest in learning the language through engaging activities.
- **Compartmentalising language and mathematics:** Most often, language and mathematics are approached as two different subjects. The understanding of how both these subjects are related and can complement each other is not established. The result of this is that students struggle to express mathematical problems in words or to convert word problems into mathematical expressions.

Home language, context and foundational understanding

National Education Policy 2020 strongly emphasises embracing the home language as the medium of education. The experience presented here is of the students belonging to the 'Kamari' tribe living in the urban area of Dhamtari district in Chhattisgarh. The home language of the learners is 'Kamari', a language different from Chhattisgarhi, which is the regional language used in teaching and learning and interactions in schools. Due to this linguistic difference, students are hesitant to communicate in Chhattisgarhi or Hindi and even to participate in class or attend school. The teachers appointed in the school are themselves unable to speak Kamari, widening the gap in communication between them and the learners.

There are teachers who provide opportunities to learners from classes I to III to interact and express their thoughts in Kamari. They explain and understand these interactions in Chhattisgarhi or Hindi with support from students of classes IV and V. These classrooms have an environment of inclusivity and support.

> The freedom to use the home language did not just elevate learners' confidence but also encouraged learning and support amongst peers – an impactful strategy for teachers. It helped in addressing the hesitance among students to speak and participate and motivated them to also take an interest in learning other languages. While not all students could reach class-level proficiency within one or two years, a significant shift was observed as previously reluctant learners began to view education as a positive experience. It was observed that many of these learners have learned to read and write. This practice demonstrates the impact of respectfully including the home language of learners in schools to bridge the gap between the home and the school.

Such efforts are being made by the teachers in different regions. For instance, experiences of providing education in languages, such as *Gondi* and *Halbi* in the different regions of Bastar in Chhattisgarh, and *Surgujiya* and *Kurukh* in northern Chhattisgarh further affirm this understanding. The state government and various educational organisations have developed textbooks to impart primary education in local languages, such as *Gondi* and *Halbi*.

Similarly, it is important to include examples, activities and references from the learners' context, like the kind of houses, plants, etc., they are surrounded by. This relatability ensures better engagement. Students can be asked to collect different types of leaves and classify them based on criteria, such as long and short leaves, green and less green leaves, or leaves of different colours. They can also count the number of leaves in each group.

No child left behind

The examples discussed so far illustrate that by working on foundational language and numeracy skills at the early stages, we can ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed, particularly those from marginalised communities.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Simran Sadh Vetter: Sonam Kumari

Gulshan Yadav is a member of the Azim Premji Foundation in Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh. He has been working in the field of education for the past 15 years. His first engagement with primary education began in 2013 when he joined the Azim Premji Foundation Fellowship Program as a Fellow. For the past 11 years, he has been involved in mathematics education, teacher training, and the development of teaching-learning materials.

Contact: gulshan.yadav@azimpremjifoundation.org

Integration of Environmental Experiences with Literacy and Numeracy

Mohammad Umar

Children come to school having learnt many things from their surroundings. Their learning naturally involves interconnecting and integrating various subjects. Teaching and learning in the early grades become more purposeful when this integration and interconnectedness of subjects is kept in mind. Possibilities for foundational literacy and numeracy can be found in all teaching materials; what is needed is a shift in perspective.

Figure 1. Integration of subjects creates joyful learning.

Currently, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) in primary education is a priority for central and several state governments. Therefore, education departments and organisations are doing considerable work on this. Many people in government and non-profit organisations understand the issues of FLN from the perspective of integration and holism, but this thinking has not yet reached the classrooms. This article includes the experiences of integration and holism gained through teaching-learning engagements with teachers and children. It also attempts to consider the following questions:

- What challenges do children face in FLN?
- What are the possibilities and approaches for working on the integration of language, mathematics, and environmental experiences?
- Which principles of education could be more beneficial for working on FLN?

Integration and interrelationship of subjects

I read a sentence aloud in Hindi to some teachers, 'These days inflation has increased; wheat flour used to be 40 rupees per kilo, but now it is 45 rupees per kilo.' Then I asked, 'What skills and competencies do we need to understand this statement?'

One teacher replied, 'Reading and writing in Hindi, and being able to construct meaning while reading. For example, we should know the meaning of words like inflation, flour, increase, 40 rupees, 45 rupees, etc., and then understand the meaning of the sentence as a whole.'

The teacher was right. In daily life, we use maths and language together in various contexts. Even with young children, while telling stories, assigning tasks, or discussing their experiences with games, we use both maths and language. For example:

- *Two* monkeys lived on *a* tree.
- There was *a* very big mango tree in the garden.
- Bring *three* glasses from the kitchen.
- These *two* rotis are for you.

Children also integrate language and maths with their experiences while talking among themselves. For example:

- I scored *15* runs today.
- Dad gave me *10* rupees. I ate ice cream at the fair.
- I am *taller* than you.
- I can run *faster* than you.

Here, we see the intertwining of not only language and maths but also everyday experiences from the environment. Clearly, without a foundational understanding of language, maths cannot be understood. Yet in schools, language and mathematics are taught separately. From the beginning, children's textbooks, notebooks, classes, exams, teaching aids, and teachers are different for these subjects. This separation becomes a major challenge in children's learning of language and maths at a beginner's level.

> **Without a foundational understanding of language, maths cannot be understood. Yet in schools, language and mathematics are taught separately.**

A good curriculum, syllabus, and policy documents – all recommend creating and continuously highlighting interconnections between subjects. Still, very little attention is paid to the organic interrelations present between the subjects. Even in training programmes, these subjects are separated. The language expert focuses primarily on language issues, and the mathematics expert on maths. Modules created for teacher training are also divided between foundational language and mathematics. So, among the teachers too, these subjects remain compartmentalised. In such a situation, we need to consider when, where, and how integrated, holistic and interconnected work can actually be done with the children.

Integration and interrelationship: Some experiences

I shared some of my experiences with teachers while showing a few pictures. These experiences of discussions on the pictures came from my interactions with very young children, classroom teaching across grades, and discussions during teacher training. Most questions and activities were taken from primary textbooks, workbooks, posters of poems/stories, or books from the library bag.

Observation, conversation & understanding of spatial and form comprehension

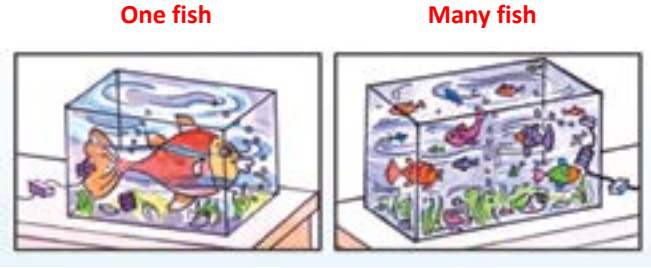

Figure 2. Conversations reveal children's knowledge.

A father was having a conversation with his 3-year-old son, who had not yet started school, showing him the picture of a fish in an aquarium. Looking at the fish confined in the aquarium, the child said, 'This fish will die!'

'Why?' the father asked.

'She will not be able to turn around,' the child replied.

Why would a 3-year-old child talk about the fish dying? Upon analysis, we found that the child had developed an early understanding of 'space and objects occupying space' based on observations and experiences of his surroundings. He knew that for a fish to stay alive, it must move freely in the aquarium. Looking at the picture, the child understood that there was no possibility for the fish to move around. In this situation, the child's remark that 'The fish will not be able to turn around' gives us a glimpse of his deep mathematical understanding. The child, in his own words, is not only expressing an 'understanding of space and shape' but is also applying it. Adults use similar mathematical skills, for example, when they check whether all their household items will fit in a new house or not.

Drawing, understanding of proportion and its application

In class I, children were given a worksheet to solve. The children did not know how to read yet, so the teacher read it aloud: 'A rabbit and an elephant are drinking *sherbet*. Draw and colour the glasses of *sherbet* in their hands.'

All the children drew pictures. Some could draw straight lines, some could not. Many children coloured outside the lines of the glass. But surprisingly, all the children had drawn a big glass for the elephant and a small glass for the rabbit.

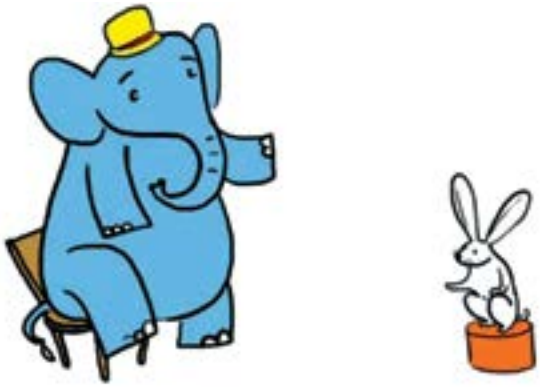

Figure 3. Using reasoning skills to understand size and proportion.

The teacher asked, 'Why is the elephant's glass bigger?'

'The elephant will drink more *sherbet* because he is very big,' a child replied.

We can see that experiences of everyday life and observations of surroundings had taught the children to see the 'proportional relations between things.'

We also asked class VII and VIII children similar questions about the understanding and application of proportion. For example, Kamala contributed Rs 2000, and Fatima contributed Rs 4000. Together, they started a cottage enterprise with a total of Rs 6000. After a month, they made a profit of 3000 rupees. Tell us how this profit will be divided between them. The class I children in drawing a bigger glass for the elephant and a smaller one for the rabbit are demonstrating the same sense and skill of proportionality at a foundational level.

Matching, one-to-one correspondence, and logical thinking

A father showed his 3-year-old daughter a picture of rabbits and carrots and said, 'These rabbits are eating carrots.' The daughter looked at the picture for a while. Then, placing her finger on one rabbit, she said, 'This one won't get a carrot!'

'Why?' the father asked.

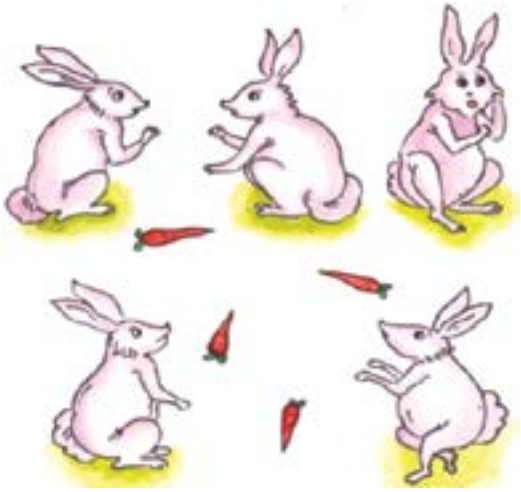

Figure 4. Logical thinking helps in one-to-one correspondence.

The child, matching each carrot with a nearby rabbit with her finger, said, 'This carrot will go to this rabbit, this carrot to this one, this to this, and this to this but this rabbit is looking away, it won't get anything.'

From a mathematics teacher's perspective, this child does not yet know how to count. She did not count the rabbits or the carrots. But by using the principle of 'one-to-one correspondence,' she could tell that there was one carrot available for all rabbits, except one. This understanding will be very useful later for her in understanding other mathematical concepts, along with learning to count and quantify.

Listening comprehension, artistic expression and factors

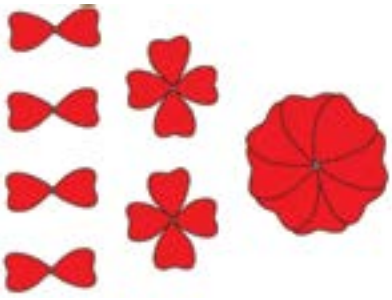

Figure 5. Articles from the surroundings can be used in teaching.

The teacher explained a question to class III children, who did not yet know how to read Hindi properly: 'A flower has eight petals. Rashmi first made flowers by joining two petals each, then she made flowers by joining four petals each, then she made a flower by joining eight petals.'

The teacher asked, 'If you are given 12 petals, how many flowers can be made?'

One girl replied, 'Joining two petals each will make six flowers, joining three petals each will make four flowers, and joining four petals each will make three flowers.'

The children had not yet learned multiplication tables or factorisation of numbers, but they are making flowers by joining 2, 3 and 4 petals to get 6, 4 and 3 flowers, respectively. In this way, the children are actually, indirectly, creating 'factors of 12.' Later, with this kind of activity and the teacher's help, they will also find 'common factors' for any two or more numbers.

Concept of before and after, making estimations, and social concerns

Image 6 is from a class I textbook. The purpose of the lesson is to work on the 'concept of before-and-after.' I showed this picture, and I asked the teachers, 'Who is the boy in school clothes, and what is he doing here?'

I received many answers from the teachers, such as:

- The boy has come to fetch water before going to school.
- He has come to help his mother.
- He will work the handle of the hand pump, and his mother will fill the water.
- He will help his mother lift the pot.
- There may be many utensils. Mother and son will carry them together.

'Why is there such a crowd at the tap?' I asked.

A female teacher answered: In Sirohi, water comes once every three days for half an hour. There is only one tap in the village. The upper caste people fill water there; they do not let anyone else use it.

Close observation, recognising similarity (or patterns), and independent expression

In the same picture, looking at a boy, the children had said that he came with his mother. I asked, 'Who is his mother? The woman behind or the one in front?'

Many children said, 'The woman behind! Because she has placed her hand on the boy's back.'

All the children agreed. Their argument was that a mother is more likely to put her hand on her child's back.

Meanwhile, one boy changed his answer. He said, 'No, the woman in front is his mother.'

'Why so?'

'Look at his face, look at both their faces!' the boy said.

Figure 6. Leading students towards observation and reasoning through pictures.

I looked at the faces of the boy and the woman in the picture, and I was amazed. Both faces were similar. What a minute 'observation' this was! None of us had noticed this, but that child had 'matched' the faces. At home, children hear that they look like their father or resemble their mother. This child had recognised the 'similarity' by matching the faces. This conversation created a great opportunity to work on children's abilities and skills in observation, independent expression and finding and presenting arguments to support their answers.

Is it not worth pondering over why we work with these same children in higher classes on 'matching, common properties, mathematical discovery, similarity and symmetry, logical thinking, communication' etc., while teaching mathematics, language and other subjects in an unconnected artificial manner? We teach them these concepts and skills as if they have no experience after coming into the world. Our vocabulary, contexts, and examples seem unfamiliar to them and, therefore, create challenges in their learning.

Generalisation and social-human values

I told the teachers, 'I had asked the children another question: Who is at the back in the picture?'

Looking at the picture, the children gave several answers:

- He is a grandfather.
- He can't see.
- His turn will come last.

To understand why the children were calling him old, I asked for reasons.

A girl said, 'He wears glasses and walks hunched over.'

A boy added, 'He does not have hair either.'

Children make 'generalisations' by observing people in their surroundings. They themselves decide whom to call *brother*, whom to call *uncle*, and whom it

would be appropriate to call *grandfather*. These children, too, had made a 'generalisation' based on age, dress, and demeanour. In their arguments, they were presenting this very generalisation.

'What would you do if you were in this boy's place?' I asked.

The children's answers were:

- We would help our mother. We would have worked the handle of the hand pump.
- We would help mother lift the pot.
- We would also carry a bucket of water.

One boy said, 'When my turn came, I would fill my pot, then also fill grandfather's pot.'

'Why?'

'Because he is very old.'

This is exactly what a teacher wants in their class – that young children in class I are aware of their environment and sensitive to people around them. This is real education. Many more learning outcomes are being achieved than the specified mathematical objectives of this lesson. Mathematics, language, environment and surroundings, discussion of values, sense of responsibility—all this understanding and sensitivity are being integrated. With such a teaching-learning process, much more can be achieved than the objectives set for the class.

"This is exactly what a teacher wants in their class – that young children are aware of their environment and sensitive to people around them. This is real education."

All teachers listened very attentively to this conversation. Many teachers started taking photos of the pictures. Perhaps they wanted to try out the possibilities created by the observation, analysis, and dialogue on these pictures in their classrooms. I told them that such possibilities exist in every lesson, subject, and picture. And if they do not, then, as teachers, we should create as many opportunities as possible. For this, we need to develop a perspective to identify available possibilities within the classroom.

During the final consolidation, one teacher said, 'Sir, you have made a delicious *khichdi* that is a wholesome integration of language and mathematics.' 'Yes,' I replied, 'but it also includes environmental and contextual experiences. We will have to work with young children in our primary classes by spreading the fragrance of such a delicious *khichdi*, only then will we truly be able to achieve better results for the objectives of basic language and mathematics.' Hearing this, everyone started smiling.

Translated from Hindi. *Translator: Sandeep Dubey* *Vetter: Anjali Noronha*

Mohammad Umar teaches courses on teacher professional development and curriculum development, and material creation in mathematics as faculty at Azim Premji University. Prior to this, he was a Resource Person for maths with the Azim Premji Foundation, Rajasthan. He has been involved in science and mathematics teaching, writing, and teacher training for two and a half decades. He has earlier worked with *Eklavya*.

Contact: mohammed.umar@azimpremjifoundation.org

Foundational Numeracy with my Mathematics Kit

Sarojani Rawat

It is the objective of a mathematics teacher to simplify mathematical processes, give children experiences with these and, thereby, keep every child connected with the processes in the classroom. If every child gets the opportunity to go through the process of learning mathematical concepts, they will be able to work comfortably with abstract ideas. This article explores such efforts of a teacher.

In our efforts to achieve the goal of foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) by 2026-27, I worked with children from my school using teaching-learning materials (TLM) focused on foundational numeracy. I have seen positive results through this approach.

> **Children are eager to learn, and they learn things by doing, touching and observing. They understand tangible concepts better.**

Students in the class and their characteristics

I teach maths in class III, which has 28 students. The students are at different learning levels and, therefore, I have grouped them based on their cognitive abilities and requirements. We know that every child is unique, and their learning pace and behaviour are also different. I try to make efforts towards providing concrete mathematical experiences to children of this age, because at the primary level, children are highly inquisitive and curious. They are eager to learn, and they learn things by doing, touching and observing. Children understand tangible concepts better.

Figure 1. Each student has a different pace and process of learning.

For instance, when it comes to counting, they prefer actual physical counting to mere verbal recitation; they enjoy it. When it comes to measurement, they want to measure things around them, compare them, and discuss with their peers to verify their findings. They want their experiences to be included and look for opportunities to do this.

Children at the primary level learn independently. It is said that rules cannot bind children. Therefore, the importance of hands-on experience, like doing and touching things, increases. From my perspective, this natural behaviour of children is a strong cornerstone of primary mathematics.

Limitations of the mathematics kit

Institutions associated with education have provided our school with teaching materials, which include a 'Mathematics Kit'. This kit includes materials related to counting, time, spatial knowledge, patterns, and mathematical games. Considering the learning behaviours of children at the primary level that I mentioned earlier, I always felt that work should be done with children using tangible objects. I already had the idea of using a mathematics kit in mind, and then we received one. However, since there was only one kit available at our school, not all children were able to benefit from it.

In the classroom, the kit became merely a tool for demonstration. The question was, 'How do I provide the opportunity of using one kit to the 28 students in the class at the same time?' The more active children of the class were the ones to use the kit more frequently. Children who were relatively reserved or hesitant were reluctant to use it. The instructions that came with the kit said that it should not be lost or damaged. This became another reason for students to use it with extra care; therefore, they were unable to make good use of it or benefit from it. Moreover, the kit did not contain materials covering all types of concepts. For instance, if the class was to be taught the concept of measurement, area, perimeter, fraction, etc., the kit lacked relevant material.

Idea of our own kit

Looking at these shortcomings of the kit, I thought of creating a maths kit that every student could use without any hesitation, which would contain materials relevant to most of the maths concepts taught at the primary level, and which the students themselves would make using the resources available to them. This would provide them with an opportunity to create a TLM themselves. As a result, they would have an emotional connection with it. This connection would help them be responsible for the kit and develop values of handling and preserving it.

I believe that the materials in the kit should also be based on the games and activities found in the textbook so that there is a connection between the two, and the kit would become an extension of the textbook.

There were also certain other aspects that I have listed below:

1. Students would be able to use the supplementary material independently.
2. They would be able to experience numerous mathematical concepts physically.
3. Participation of each child in using the material would be ensured.
4. Students would care for the kit responsibly.
5. If any TLM is broken or lost, it can be recreated.
6. The more concepts the kit covers, the more it will help children understand those concepts clearly.
7. Children would enjoy learning mathematics.
8. Children would learn to create things by creatively using waste materials.
9. Children would be able to associate the resources available at their homes and school with mathematics.
10. This process would also provide students with the opportunity to engage in discussions.

Figure 2. Students discuss materials to use for their kits.

Figure 3. When play becomes learning, learning becomes play.

Building mathematics kits

These points helped me in understanding the need for a mathematics kit and determining its contents. I put forth the idea of a maths kit to the students in a planned manner and put together a list of the supplementary teaching materials that should be available in the kit. The list was as follows:

1. A big box to store the contents
2. Number cards from 1 to 100
3. *Ginmala/ganitmala* (number garland)
4. Place value cards
5. Base ten blocks for units, tens, and hundreds
6. Objects and cards for patterns
7. Two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes
8. A clock
9. Play money
10. Collection of mathematical games
11. Collection of mathematical stories and poems
12. TLM related to fractions
13. Masks for poems, stories, and role play
14. Material for measurement

All the students started building their mathematical kits – each one their own.

The process of building the kit started with the box. Children brought big cardboard boxes from their homes. I provided coloured paper, charts, fevicol, scissors, etc. They created beautiful boxes and decorated them with mathematical symbols. They named the boxes 'My Mathematical Kit'. During the process, the students helped one another. Some of them cut out pictures from old books and pasted them onto the boxes and decorated them with sketches and coloured paper. It was delightful to see children so engaged in the maths class. They were excited and curious about the contents that would go into the box!

First, I asked the children to collect bottle caps. They made *ginmala* of 50 and 100 bottle caps. These strings had alternating sets of five red bottle caps, five blue bottle caps, and so on for easier counting. Some students made number strings using beads. They even made hanging cards for the number strings. Plastic paper was wrapped around the hanging cards so that numbers could be written on them and erased later. In this manner, the children made number cards from 1 to 100, place value cards, and blocks for units, tens, and hundreds for place value using chart paper cut-outs.

Figure 4. A child cuts out a mask for their maths kit.

They drew circles on cardboard and cut them out to make clocks. The clock hands were made of cardboard and stitched at the centre with a button, so that the hands could be rotated, giving children a hands-on experience similar to a real clock. Food wrappers (biscuits, toffees, etc.) showing the manufacturing date, expiry date, and weight of the material were collected and included in the kit. Old 25 and 50 paisa coins were also placed in the

box. Play money was made with cards. Three-dimensional shapes were made using small boxes, and marking the face, edge, and vertex. For two-dimensional shapes, paper cuttings were used. Masks were made using thick chart paper. Board games were made with numbers written on A4 sheets, and the rules for playing were written on them. Coloured paper was also used for making patterns. Even empty bottles of different measures, such as 10 ml, 100 ml, 250 ml, 500 ml, etc., were included in the kit. Cardboard cuttings demonstrating fractions, such as 1/2, 1/4 and 3/4, were added to the contents of the box. We also collected some mathematical songs, wrote them down on pieces of paper, and kept them in the Mathematics Kit.

> **In a big group, such activities provide every child with an opportunity to learn. I have also observed that children like maths when taught in such a manner and even consider it their favourite subject.**

Mathematics kits in the classroom

Whenever I work on numbers with children, I ask them to form numbers using cards. If the number is formed incorrectly, I instruct them to refer to place value cards. By doing this, children are able to make as well as understand numbers. Besides this, I ask them to present different numbers using number cards. They do it as a game, for example, who will find the number first. Various other activities are also undertaken with the help of number cards in the class. These include arranging cards in descending or ascending order; removing certain cards and finding the missing numbers; laying out cards from 0 to 9 on the table to form numbers such as 4, 20, or 042 (based on my question); or using the base ten strips to form a given number.

Using the *ginmala*, I work with the children on counting, counting in tens, even and odd numbers, skip counting in twos, and the processes of addition and subtraction, etc. For instance, solving 20 + 5 or 7 + 5 by moving along the *ginmala*, or similarly doing subtraction. Activities such as skip counting by 2s and 3s gradually helped children move towards understanding multiplication tables. Using the shape and number cards from their mathematics kits, we also created different patterns.

I learned that children had developed a quantitative understanding through these activities. By using the blocks of 10 and 100 for addition and remainder problems, they got help in understanding the principle of carrying over in addition. Play money aided in developing an understanding of numbers and addition and subtraction. When children engaged in actual exchanges, they understood what they were practically doing through addition or subtraction.

Sorting concrete two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes is also a part of this process. For example, showing a triangle, identifying a square, or holding both a square and a rectangle to compare similarities and differences. Similarly, in three-dimensional shapes, holding a cube and identifying its base, apex and edges; counting them; and finding similar shapes in their surroundings. Children use the clock they made themselves to show the current time, or to demonstrate 5:00, 5:15, 5:30, and 5:45 on their clock.

Impact of using a mathematics kit

Through such activities, children learn by observing and asking each other questions. In a big group, such activities provide every child with an opportunity to learn. I have also observed that children like maths when taught in such a manner and even consider it their favourite subject. When given the chance to recite mathematical poems or roleplay by engaging in exchanges, their faces light up, and they participate in activities involving the mathematical kit with great enthusiasm. Going forward, I plan to further enrich this kit. I am also trying to incorporate the games and activities discussed in the mathematics textbook into the kit.

Translated from Hindi. *Translator: Rashmi Saurav* *Vetter: Shabnam Sengupta*

Sarojani Rawat his an Assistant Teacher at the Government Primary School, Kharasrot, Narendranagar, Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand. She has a special interest in teaching mathematics to children. She also organises cultural activities, such as wall magazines, songs and dance, and poetry with the children in her school. She encourages everyone to support girls' education and environmental conservation.

Contact: parmarsarojani@gmail.com

Classroom Conversations are Important for Learning

Arvind Kumar Singh

The importance of conversations with children in the classroom cannot be overstated. But how should a teacher initiate such conversations? Where and how should such spaces be created in the school and class timetable? How should opportunities for dialogue be created in the classroom? What should be the nature of these discussions? The author presents reflections on these questions drawn from personal experience.

When asked direct, story-based questions, some children eagerly raise their hands, some lower their gaze, a few answer from their seats, and those who are quiet remain quiet.

Figure 1. Discussions allow all students' active inclusion in the teaching process.

Recently, I came across a story titled 'Robi' in the children's magazine *Cycle*. When Robi came to class VI, he was hit by an unexpected jolt that came in the form of 'English-medium school.' Until then, Robi had been studying in a Bengali-medium school. Robi did not even know the English alphabet. In his very first week, the English teacher said, 'You are such a big boy, and you still do not know A, B, C, D? Come back tomorrow after memorising the letters.'

The next day, the teacher asked, 'Did you memorise A, B, C, D?'

Robi nodded. 'Yes, Sir.'

'Then recite,' the teacher said.

Robi began, 'A, F, Z, X, B, E, G, S, T…'

The teacher interrupted. 'Wait, wait! That is not how it goes. It is A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I… Say it like that.'

Robi asked, 'But why, Sir? Why only B after A? Why cannot F come after A?'

Irritated, the teacher snapped back, 'Because that is how it is.'

Robi replied gently, 'But everything has a reason behind it. If you explain the reason, I will remember it that way.'

Neither the teacher had an answer for this, nor did Robi memorise the alphabet the way others did.

Why cannot F come after A? Why only B? There is no accurate answer to this question. Children often ask such questions in the classroom. And all too often, they are silenced with a cold response. In doing so, we suppress children's curiosity and their ability to express themselves. We shrink the space where they may explore their thoughts, express their questions, and find their own meanings. As a result, in some time, children cease to express their curiosity in the classroom.

I believe it is essential to have discussions in the classroom so that children are actively included in the teaching process. I have found that when we talk with children in the classroom, they feel free to share what they understand and what they do not. When we organise discussion sessions with children in the early grades, we learn about the challenges they face.

Various ways of holding discussions in class

A dedicated period for stories

In my class, I have carved out a special time in the daily schedule just for stories. We call this period 'Just a story.' The primary purpose of this time is to allow children to listen to a story and provide them with opportunities to discuss it. Every day, during this period, I tell children a short story. I prepare for these sessions with the help of books from the library. If the story is long, we continue it the next day. Either in the middle of the story or once it is over, I ask questions based on the context of the story.

Step 1: Read the story aloud

Let's take the example of the following story. **'**Once upon a time, in a jungle, there lived a very fat rooster. He was green in colour. He loved to lie and often troubled the other animals with his lies…'

Step 2: Quiz

Generally, during classroom teaching, we tell stories to children and then ask story-based questions, such as: Who lived in the jungle? What colour was he? What did he say? This is often where the trouble begins. When asked such direct, story-based questions, some children eagerly raise their hands, some lower their gaze, a few answer from their seats, and those who are quiet remain quiet. I think it is better to select questions rooted in the context, rather than in facts. This ensures that all children get to participate in the discussion. The kind of questions I would ask based on this story are as follows:

- There is a bird that makes the sound *kukdu-ku*. Do you know who it is?
- Does anyone here have a pet chicken at home?
- Which animals or birds do you have in your house?
- What sound does a chicken make?
- And what about cows and goats? What sounds do they make?

The children answer these questions. Sometimes, they also ask questions of their own. Often, new questions emerge from children's questions or answers.

Figure 2. Confidence to share what one has learned.

Step 3: Outcome of the discussion

After this kind of discussion, I ask questions based on the story, such as:

- Who lived in the jungle?
- What was he like?
- How did he trouble the other animals?

Often, most children respond, and they find this process extremely interesting. Children learn by making connections between their everyday experiences and the experiences described in the stories.

Discussion based on lessons

Let me share an example from the chapter 'Our Home' from the class III textbook *Hamara Parivesh*.

This story follows Jaya and Jagat as they go on a walk with their grandmother. As they stroll through the neighbourhood, Jagat thinks that every building they see is a house. The difference between a house and other kinds of buildings is explained to him.

Here is how the classroom discussion unfolded between me and the students:

Teacher: Have you ever seen a hospital?

Children: Yes, we have all seen a hospital.

Teacher: Yes?

At first, no one answered. So, I asked the children to close their eyes and think back to a time when they had visited a hospital. Then I guided them gently with questions:

- Why did you go to the hospital?
- Were you unwell, or had you gone to visit someone?
- You must have seen people inside a hospital. What were the different things they were doing?
- Were there any signs or symbols on the walls?
- What kind of signs or symbols did you see?
- Were the people working there wearing the same colour clothes?
- Did you notice any particular smell in the air?

The children were asked to answer the questions one by one with their eyes shut. The children shared a lot. For example, they had seen the red cross sign; they had seen people wearing white coats. They had noticed stethoscopes, nurses, scissors, bandages, rows of beds, syringes, and even fire extinguishers. They remembered the sharp smell of medicines and phenyl.

Then I asked them, 'Now do you understand what all happens in a hospital?'

"Children learn by making connections between their everyday experiences and the experiences described in the stories."

Similarly, I initiated a discussion about the post office. However, the biggest problem in discussing a post office is that today the practice of writing, sending or receiving letters is almost over. Still, I tried to have a discussion:

Teacher: If you have to share something important with a relative, what do you do?

Children: We call them on the phone.

Teacher: If you did not have a phone, and they lived far away?

Children: Someone from our family can go and inform them.

Teacher: And if no one is available to go or if it is not possible to go, then what would you do?

This time, the room fell silent.

Teacher: Do you ever receive things you have ordered online?

Children: Yes! Some of our relatives get packages delivered to their homes.

I discussed the entire process of ordering things online and getting them delivered to one's home. We also discussed how, before the advent of mobile phones, people used to use telephones, and before telephones, people would send letters.

I arranged for postcards, inland letters, and stamps, etc., from the post office and laid them out in the classroom before the students came in the morning. This helped them understand the process better. I showed them our monthly children's magazine and discussed how the magazine reaches us from a distant place. I showed them the addresses written on books, copies, and other items and discussed addresses and PIN codes.

Figure 3. Children learn how letters were written and posted earlier.

> **Discussions sharpen at least three vital skills of learning – listening, speaking, and thinking.**

Discussions based on a magazine column

Every month, *Chakmak*, the children's magazine published by Eklavya Publication, features a thoughtful question in its *Kyun-Kyun* column. These questions have also become a means for facilitating classroom discussions. Just recently, one of the questions asked was: 'We are told to listen to our elders, often without questioning. Do you think this is necessary? Why? Would you want others to listen to you without questioning? Why?'

The children discussed this question and then also wrote down their responses.

Advantages of classroom discussions

A discussion is a two-way process. Children learn while we interact with them and through their responses, we also learn from them. I got to learn about the village from them. I learnt facts about crops, such as how much water they need, and when they are sown and harvested. I learned about vegetables and new recipes. For instance, I was amazed to hear about a dish made from ridge gourd flowers. Discussions open up new possibilities for children. Some of these are:

- Encouragement to explore a subject further
- Building an engaging classroom environment that helps in boosting the self-confidence of children
- Giving every child the chance to put forth their thoughts and opinions
- Offering opportunities to assess while observing
- Leading to a better understanding of a topic, which helps in consolidating learning
- Giving children who lag behind in learning the opportunity to participate in class

Children get the space and opportunity to think during discussions. In order to relate to the topic, they need to draw from and speak about their memories and experiences. In this way, they sharpen at least three vital skills of listening, speaking, and thinking that are extremely critical for learning. We must try to understand what children think and feel about a lesson or situation. Discussions during teaching-learning also help in gaining information about both the academic and non-academic progress of children who remain quiet in class or do not participate in classroom activities.

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Sejal Arora Vetter: Simran Luthra

Arvind Kumar Singh has been working as an Assistant Teacher at Bangla Poothri Primary School in Bulandshahr District, Uttar Pradesh, for the past eight years. His students have been publishing a wall magazine named *Udaan* for the last two years. Their stories, poems, articles, and drawings are regularly featured in the monthly children's magazine, *Chakmak*.

Contact: arv.kiet2011@gmail.com

Fear Hinders Learning

Kishan Lal Salvi

A good school is where every child is provided with respect, safety, compassion, joy, and an environment that inspires learning. The common notion that 'only punishment and fear make children study well' hinders learning. This essay examines the detrimental effects of corporal punishment and fear on children and suggests experiential approaches to enhance learning that foster a positive school environment.

Society's perspectives on fear

I am a primary school teacher in a small village in Rajsamand, Rajasthan. I have been teaching here for around 16 years. The villagers are not very well off owing to their dependency on agriculture. When I started teaching here, I observed that most parents said they had no problem if their children were given a beating (by the teacher) from time to time to make them study.

It is a common societal notion that if children are to be taught, they have to be beaten. It is a shared notion among teachers and parents that any problem related to children has just one solution – physical punishment. They also believe that the fear of physical punishment will prevent children from doing anything wrong and that this would make them better human beings. Another aspect of this idea is that a teacher loves children so much that they beat them, so they do not get spoilt. But such beliefs are not based on reality.

Figure 1. Being happy and interested are important aspects of learning.

Figure 2. The fear of making mistakes obstructs children's learning.

The impact of fear on children

When I first joined the school, I noticed that children were very reserved. They would hesitate to approach the teacher to understand a new concept or to learn something new. While teaching them, I realised that they were not following what was being taught. There would be no questions from them while I taught the lessons. There would be no answers either when I asked them questions. Most of the time, they would be sitting lost in my class. There was no enthusiasm among the children for new lessons. It felt like they were physically present in class, but not mentally. When I tried to conduct activities in class, their participation was poor. The participation when I tried conducting activities in class was poor. They had to be forced to participate in the activities.

Children, physical punishments, and learning

If we really want children to learn, then we must refrain from corporal punishment. While physical punishment can make them do tasks, it cannot help us teach them anything. If we beat them or instil the fear of physical punishment in them, they will always remain distracted by the fear of getting a beating. They will start living in fear of making mistakes and will not able to learn because of this fear. They always keep a watch out for the moment the teacher may raise their hand to beat them.

> **Every child in the classroom has the freedom to ask questions. Children can ask questions related to their lessons or any other matter.**

We have to understand that children come to school with an identity and dignity. They hail from families where beating is common. And if they are beaten in school, too, it hurts their dignity. This is why children shy away from school.

Mukesh's story

There was a child named Mukesh in class V. He would pick fights with the other children at the drop of a hat. He would not pay attention to his studies either. He used to rebel, which made it very difficult to work with him. Then we spoke to him. We learned that his family controlled him a lot. He used the foul language spoken at home in school as well. We started having discussions with him on various topics. We explained things to him in his language. We included and encouraged him in activities. We chose activities in which he would be able to perform well. For instance, we taught him *verbs* and then asked him to pick words that were verbs from a unit in his textbook. His self-confidence soared once he finished the task.

He was also encouraged to speak and put forth his thoughts during the morning assembly. This child had not participated in any activity during the previous year's summer camp. But slowly and gradually, his participation in activities began to increase. Now he is doing well in studies. The biggest achievement is that Mukesh now spends more time in class because he has been accepted into the class. We show him his portfolio from time to time, so that he can see his progress and feel good about his achievements.

When Mukesh was in class IV, he had trouble reading Hindi and English books. However, now he is doing well in both subjects.

How we made classroom processes fear-free

Remove the cane from the classroom

If we wish to teach children in a humane manner that is true to the spirit of education, we have to remove the cane and other such things from the classroom. Our aim is that children come running to school joyfully and without any fear. They should enjoy school; only then will it feel like school and not like a punishment. Hence, we made our best efforts to eliminate the environment of fear and punishment as much as possible.

Use children's language and encouragement

If we eliminate fear from children, they will be free to share their feelings with us. I would talk to them calmly, and more importantly, I would listen to them carefully and be friendly towards them. To help them get rid of their hesitation, I started talking to them in their language, mingling with them and celebrating their little victories. Now the children have slowly begun getting close to me.

Figure 3. Children learn through meaningful conversations.

Provide opportunities for free expression

While teaching, I realised that the absence of fear promotes self-confidence and increases self-esteem in a child. In order to help children overcome their hesitation, we made a framework with several activities. We made it mandatory for them to participate in the morning assembly. Even the youngest of children were to come forward during the prayer assembly and express their views with full confidence without any fear or hesitation, whether in the form of a story, poem, or any other presentation. The result of this was that now most children speak freely in the morning assembly.

Sometimes children also share their personal stories in the morning assembly. We encourage this. We believe that when children share their personal stories, they are building an intimate relationship with the school.

Activity-based teaching

Most of the teaching-learning in the classroom is activity-based. Owing to this, we are not required to control children much. Plenty of activities have been created to ensure maximum participation of children. For instance, a 'word game' has been made wherein children pick a word card on their own. If the child can read that word properly, he takes a step forward. These word cards are circulated among all the children. The more correct words the children are able to read, the more steps they take forward. Children find these activities interesting, and they also facilitate a stronger engagement between children and the learning process. It ensures that there is minimal chaos in the classroom.

Similarly, activities before the class begins also make the children organised. For instance, which group would be cleaning, which one would be responsible for filling the water, or who would be watering the plants, and so on.

Restriction-free environment

There are no restrictions on children. If they want to go out to drink water or use the toilet, they just get up and go and then come back. Similarly, if a child wants to say something, they can go to the office and share without any restrictions. There is no restriction when it comes to the usage of items kept in the office, either. The rule is that after use, the item should be returned to its place.

Problem-solving approach

Often, children are beaten because they fight with each other. In such a scenario, the child who has beaten another is punished. This creates anger among

them. They think that they got punished because of the other child. If punishment is removed from the equation when children fight, they get over fighting episodes quickly and start working and playing together once again. This is why when we see two children fighting, we first call them together to talk to them, then we talk to them separately. In that moment, a child's biggest need is to be heard, not to get the other child punished.

Freedom to question

Every child in the classroom has the freedom to ask questions. Children can ask questions related to their lessons or any other matter. Our effort is to answer their questions satisfactorily so that their curiosity is satiated. Children's questions always stem from curiosity.

Another aspect of this is that the moment we provide children the freedom to ask questions, we also become accountable. Then, in case a child asks us a personal question, we cannot ignore it. For instance, if I arrive late to school, and children ask me, 'Sir, why did you get late?', it is my responsibility to answer the children with complete honesty. In this process of asking questions, both students and teachers are equally accountable to each other.

This is why when we see two children fighting, we first call them together to talk to them, then we talk to them separately. In that moment, a child's biggest need is to be heard, not to get the other child punished.

My reflections

- Fear and physical punishment do not make children learn; in fact, it slows down their learning further. In some cases, learning and understanding get permanently blocked owing to fear.
- Children slowly and gradually start to lose their self-confidence because of fear, and they hesitate to start or learn anything new.
- There are many ways other than fear to discipline children and to engage them in creative activities.
- If there is a set time and routine for every activity, it makes it easier for children to organise their day and time.
- Childhood fear lingers throughout life. Fear at the subconscious level hinders the development of children's overall personality.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Manjari Vetter: Simran Luthra

Kishan Lal Salvi has been a teacher for 17 years with Government Primary School, Gadriyawaas, Baamniyaan Kala, Rajsamand District, Rajasthan. He is especially passionate about teaching English and Environmental Science to students. He likes to read literary works, especially stories.

Contact: kishankunj2@gmail.com

Transformation of a School

M Valli and K Gandhimathy

The transformation of the Government Primary School in Pudukkuppam is a shining example of how passion, creativity, and community engagement can revive an institution. Once on the brink of closure, the school now thrives as a centre of learning, cultural pride, and academic excellence.

Figure 1. A childhood full of freedom, joy and confidence.

In the heart of Pudukkuppam, a small coastal village in Puducherry, stood a government primary school that faced the grim reality of closure. With only 16 students enrolled, the Directorate of Education decided to merge it with a nearby school, assuming it had little to offer to the community. However, this decision triggered an extraordinary transformation, led by a passionate teacher and a dedicated team which refused to let their school fade into oblivion.

A school, as an institution, requires several resources to function effectively and thrive. These are, good infrastructure, skilled human resources, dedicated teachers, strong leadership, and, most importantly, the goodwill of the community in which it exists. However, government schools often fall victim to false stereotypes of providing subpar education, leading to low enrolment and, eventually, closure or mergers. A similar fate awaited this school. This is the inspiring story of how a struggling institution overcame scepticism, redefined education, and became a beacon of hope for its students and the community.

Bridging the gap between community and school

For years, villagers believed that government schools provided substandard education compared to private institutions. Concerns over safety, outdated teaching methods, and a lack of infrastructure further discouraged

parents from enrolling their children in government schools. Government schools were often seen as a last resort for students who struggled academically or socially. Changing this perception was the first and most crucial step in reviving the school.

Determined to shift perspectives, the school embarked on an ambitious mission to create an engaging, dynamic learning environment. Instead of merely focusing on classroom instruction, the staff introduced a series of community-driven events and activities to bridge the gap between the school and the villagers. These included the Annual Day, Food Festival, Learning Festival, Reading Festival, Science Fair, Thirukkural (sacred verses in Tamil) Competitions, Farmer's Day celebrations, Art Exhibition, Sports Competitions, etc.

These activities not only showcased the school's vibrant atmosphere but also rekindled community interest in government school education. Parents and villagers began to see the school as a centre of excellence rather than a failing institution.

Engaging the community through popular events

The school organised a wide range of activities to engage the community with the school and build a strong rapport between the two. Some of these were:

Food Festival

Aimed at celebrating traditional food and promoting healthy eating habits, the Food Festival became a highly anticipated annual event. Parents showcased homemade dishes, emphasising the importance of nutrition and steering children away from junk food. The festival also featured a barter system where villagers exchanged food items, reinforcing communal bonds.

Learning Festival

This event shattered the misconception that government schools focused solely on rote learning. Activities such as origami and craft, clay figurine making, and storytelling allowed students to showcase their creativity. Parents were astonished by their children's talents, strengthening their trust in the school's teaching methods.

Students' Day celebration

On Students' Day, a class II student won first prize in a state-level reading competition. The achievement was publicised through banners and village-wide announcements, further enhancing the school's reputation. Parents were invited to celebrate their children's successes, fostering a deep sense of involvement and pride.

Independence Day Parade

Students dressed as freedom fighters participated in a grand parade, drawing attention from onlookers who marvelled at the school's resurgence. Dramatic reenactments of historical events left a lasting impact, and the community's acknowledgment of the school generated further interest in its activities.

Thirukkural Competition

Participation in the Thirukkural Appreciation Competition was another defining moment. LKG and UKG students memorised and recited Thirukkurals with astonishing

Figure 2. Students talk about their project.

Figure 3. Students showcase their work.

accuracy, earning them the prestigious 'Thirukkural Achievement' award.

Pongal Festival

The school organised a Pongal festival to mark Farmer's Day, which saw overwhelming parental involvement. The event honoured local farmers, and students performed farmer-themed songs and dances. The school premises were adorned with traditional decorations, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the village.

Annual Day celebration

The annual school anniversary became a grand affair, with parents and villagers actively participating. Parents contributed by purchasing gifts, preparing cultural performances, and decorating the school. The four-hour celebration featured a colourful array of artistic displays, solidifying the school's place at the heart of the community.

Challenges

These events were not without challenges. When we organised the first Science Fair, which is now a successful, annual event, it did not draw much attention. I had encouraged all the children to participate. We even bought some materials to support the process. Parents asked me to help their children create projects, so we worked together during school hours. In my classroom, we displayed all nine planets on the upper wall, using coloured lights and balls to bring the solar system to life. The children proudly showcased their creations, filling the room with excitement and wonder.

On the day of the exhibition, neither the villagers nor the parents showed up. Only the teachers, the Inspecting Officer, and just two of the parents of the 16 children enrolled were present. What would a celebration be like without people witnessing it? It felt disheartening. That day, we decided to go door to door, inviting parents and villagers to come to the school and see the students' work. Slowly, people started to arrive. The Science Fair was even televised, and when parents saw their children featured on the news, they were filled with pride. The next morning, parents gathered before the morning assembly to express their gratitude. A thousand butterflies fluttered in my heart... The show captivated the audience. No such celebration had ever been held at the school before.

Showcasing students' learning

Academic activities and student learning are crucial in fostering trust in government schools. Therefore, our focus has now shifted to showcasing students' learning to the community.

Figure 4. Equal opportunity for all to learn.

Print-rich learning spaces

Recognising the importance of immersive learning, the school transformed its classrooms into print-rich environments. Colourful charts, subject-specific displays, and student-made portfolios lined the walls, making learning an interactive experience. This approach extended beyond the school, inspiring parents to create similar learning spaces at home.

Reading Festival

The Reading Festival introduced unique challenges, which enhanced student engagement and learning. These include mirror reading, news reading, reverse or zigzag reading, storybook reading in Tamil and English and handling cash and weighing produce in a mock marketplace.

The festival received widespread appreciation from educators and village heads. A UKG student's ability to read 1,000 words left the audience in awe.

Focus on Early Childhood Education

Understanding the importance of foundational learning, the school focused on revitalising kindergarten and lower primary classes. Classrooms were transformed into vibrant, print-rich learning spaces that captured the imagination of young students. A variety of interactive teaching strategies were introduced, including storytelling, puppetry, and drama; Interactive Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools and visual aids; engaging activities, like dress-up and excursions; personalised exercise sheets and subject-specific notebooks.

Parents were invited to observe monthly classroom activities, creating transparency and trust. Morning assembly and school events also included young children, further strengthening their connection to the institution.

Milestone achievements

The school's innovative approach soon bore fruit, with students excelling in academics and extracurricular activities. Some notable accomplishments included: UKG students naming 99 flowers from *Sangam Literature* on a radio broadcast; winning the prestigious *Thiruvalluvar Award* for presenting 100 *Thirukkurals*; publishing picture and word books authored by students; three consecutive years as state-level toppers in reading competitions; and two consecutive years as state-level toppers in handwriting competitions.

Community trust and growing enrolment

The numbers tell a compelling story. There were 14 students in the academic year 2017-18 and by 2021-22 this number was 57. This surge in enrolment highlighted the community's renewed faith in the institution. Parents who once hesitated to send their children to the school now actively participate in its activities.

A Testament to perseverance

The transformation of the Government Primary School in Pudukkuppam is a shining example of how passion, creativity, and community engagement can revive an institution. Once on the brink of closure, the school now thrives as a centre of learning, cultural pride, and academic excellence.

This journey serves as an inspiration to educators and policymakers, proving that with determination and innovative thinking, any school can overcome challenges and emerge stronger than ever. The school's story is not just about saving an institution; it is about redefining education, rebuilding trust, and creating a future where every child has the opportunity to shine.

M Valli has been a Primary School Teacher in government schools for the last 17 years. She believes education should be joyful and student-centred; it should nurture curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. The author envisions classrooms as safe spaces where every child's potential is recognised, celebrated, and cultivated through experiential, hands-on approaches that spark both understanding and a love for learning.

Contact: vallimani1922@gmail.com

K Gandhimathy is a Resource Person at the Azim Premji Foundation, Puducherry. She has three decades of experience in the field of education. She collaborates closely with teachers, fostering transformative learning spaces that encourage reflective, research-based teaching practices and a commitment to continuous growth and educational innovation.

Contact: gandhimathy@azimpremjifoundation.org

A Day at an Anganwadi | Notes from my Visit

Rekha Chauhan

This visit helped me understand the vital role that the teacher and the environment play in a child's learning. When a teacher truly understands the children and responsibly engages them in age-appropriate learning activities, not only do the children learn well and become ready for school, but they also begin to feel confident and develop a positive attitude towards learning.

One day, as part of my work, I visited the *Anganwadi* centre in Kalanagar, Bengaluru, where Munilakshmamma is the teacher. That day, there were 16 children present at the centre. It was 9:30 AM. As is their practice, since she did not have a co-teacher, Munilakshmamma had invited a child's mother to assist her.

The children started arriving at the *Anganwadi* one by one. As each child entered, the teacher would call out their name and greet them with a 'Good morning!' Each child responded with a 'Good morning!' and proceeded to the 'Pretend Play Corner'.[1] They selected their play materials and brought them to play on the neatly laid-out mats. This is a wonderful activity because children eagerly come to the *Anganwadi* early to pick their favourite toys to play with. When those who arrive later ask for toys, children share them. After playing, each child carefully places the toys back in their place. This activity helps children to naturally develop skills, such as sharing, choosing and organising objects, assisting others who struggle to do these tasks, and taking responsibility for their belongings.

Start of the day

By 10 AM, almost all the children had arrived, and it was time for prayer. As all the children concentrated on the

Figure 1. Learning to share, assist others, and take responsibility through 'pretend play'.

prayer with their eyes shut, one child started jumping and sitting down repeatedly. As if nothing had happened, the teacher gently walked over to him, held his hand, and stood beside him. She resolved the situation so subtly that neither that child nor the others noticed it.

The attendance was also conducted in a unique way. Name tags with each child's name were placed on a tray. The children sat in a circle on the floor. When the teacher called out a child's name, the child would stand up, pick up their name tag from the tray, and wear it around their neck. Not all children were able to do it on their own, so for those who could not, the teacher guided them by pointing to the name on the tag, helping them focus on it, and repeating, 'This is *your* name tag,' before placing it around their neck. After wearing the name tags, the children's faces lit up with smiles. Then, the teacher held up the remaining name tags and asked, 'Who hasn't come to the *Anganwadi* today?' As the children named their absent friends, the teacher lifted their respective tags to show them. The activity concluded with all the children placing their name tags back on the tray.

Figure 2. Check-up of the teacher when a child 'becomes' a doctor.

"As all the children concentrated on the prayer with their eyes shut, one child started jumping and sitting down repeatedly. As if nothing had happened, the teacher gently walked over to him, held his hand, and stood beside him. She resolved the situation so subtly that neither that child nor the others noticed it."

Stepping out

Next, the teacher introduced the date (year, month, week, and day). She asked how the weather was that day. Was it hot? Was it cold? Or was it raining? She asked the children how they felt. The children replied that it was neither hot nor cold inside. 'Alright then, shall we all go outside and see how it feels?' she said, and took all the children outside.

She asked the children to stand in the sunlight for a minute or two and then touch their heads and say how it felt. The children touched their heads and said, 'It's hot.' She then asked them: 'Is it raining? Is it cold? Is the wind blowing?' The children answered 'No' to everything except the wind – only the wind was blowing. The teacher asked, 'So, how do we know that the wind is blowing?' The children had no answer. So, the teacher pointed to a nearby tree and said, 'Children, look at that tree. Is it moving or standing still?' When the children replied, 'Miss, it's moving,' the teacher gave them several more examples of how we can know that the wind is blowing, like clothes fluttering, dry leaves moving in the direction of the wind, and so on. She then led the children back inside.

It was time for the children to drink milk and eat millet laddus. The mother, who was helping the teacher that day, had prepared the laddus and boiled milk for the children. The children were made to sit in a circle, and with the child's mother's help, the teacher distributed a glass of milk and a laddu to each one. After that, the children drank water, used the toilet, and returned to the classroom, where they sat down in a circle again. The volunteering mother also sat with them. The teacher arranged the teaching materials.

Introducing a concept

The conversation between the teacher and the children began about the day's concept. The concept for that week was 'Places of Worship'. The teacher began the conversation with the children about the concept by bringing a tray filled with pictures of different places of worship. She started by showing one picture at a time.

First, she showed a picture of a church and asked, 'Children, what is this?' Rebecca, who was sitting nearby, immediately said, 'Miss, this is a church.' All the children then repeated, 'Church.' The teacher then asked, 'Where have you seen this?' The children answered in turns - 'I've seen it on the road,' 'I've seen it in my village,' and so on. Rebecca said, 'I go and pray there every Sunday with my parents.'

After that, the teacher picked up a picture of a temple. Most of the children said, 'Miss, we've seen this,' and began sharing one by one where they had seen temples - on the road, near their homes, etc. They also spoke about the rituals performed there. Next, the teacher showed a picture of a mosque. As soon as she saw it, Arbiya excitedly said in a loud voice, 'That's a mosque!' There was a gentle smile on her face. When the teacher asked, 'What do people do there?' Arbiya replied, 'They perform the *namaz* there!' Later, the teacher showed all three pictures to the children and said, 'Children, these are called places of worship. Do you know what that means?' She explained, 'It means we offer prayers in our own way to the God we believe in. That's why we call these places of worship.' She concluded by telling the children that all these places are meant for prayer and devotion, and said, 'We'll continue our discussion tomorrow,' thus bringing the conversation to an end.

It was then time for a song; the teacher taught the children a song, and the children sang after her. Then, the children began to happily sing other rhymes they had previously learned and knew well.

Activity-based learning

After this, it was time for the activity-based learning session. The teacher had already prepared for it in advance. She had taken eight bowls and placed different quantities of rice and lentils in them. She placed a tray with the bowls in front of the children and explained the different quantities to them. She said, 'This is called *very much* because the bowl is filled to the top.' She continued explaining each quantity – *more*, *less*, and *very little*. Then she showed each quantity to all the children and taught them what to call it.

Next, the teacher called each child one by one and mentioned a specific quantity and asked the child to pick the bowl with that quantity and hand it to her. Most of the children answered correctly, but two of them were a little confused. The teacher gently explained it to them again.

Later, the teacher called a few of the slightly older children and asked them to pick and give her the number of stones she mentioned (fewer than five) from a box of stones placed in front of her. The children picked exactly the number she asked for - 3, 2, 1, 4, and so on - and placed them in her hand. Through this activity, the children got a chance to revise the numbers they had learned.

Since the day's concept was 'Places of Worship', the teacher introduced the letters 'ಸ' (Sa) and 'ಜ' (Ja) to the children using flashcards. She asked, 'Children, can you tell me words that begin with the letter ಸ?' Immediately, the children began responding with words like ಸಮ (sama), ಸರಸ್ವತಿ (saraswati), ಸಾಕು (saaku), ಸಂತೆ (santhe), etc. Then, using pictures and word cards that began with these letters, along with the letter flashcards, the teacher helped deepen the children's familiarity with the letters.

Figure 3. The wonder of learning something new.

Creative activity

The teacher divided the older and younger children into two small groups and seated them in circles separately. With the help of the older children, pencils, sheets, and crayons were distributed to all the older children. They were then instructed to draw pictures of places of worship and colour them. For the younger group, she provided pre-drawn sheets with pictures of places of worship and helped them colour the pictures.

Story time

After playing a short game with everyone, the teacher made the children clap like the sound of the rain. Then she asked, 'Children, what time is it now?' Immediately, all the children shouted joyfully, 'Story… story!' Their excitement and happiness were clearly visible in that moment.

The teacher began narrating a beautiful story related to places of worship, using pictures as visual aids.

The storytelling had a conversational style. It was about Rashmi visiting her grandparents' house, going with them to the village fair, visiting the temple there, offering fruits and coconuts for puja, and asking her grandmother questions about the temple, such as, 'When was it built?', 'Did the fair happen even when you were a little girl?' and many more. Further, it included moments where Rashmi participated in festival decorations at her grandmother's house, her grandmother prepared various snacks, and she shared those snacks with her neighbours. As the teacher narrated, she paused to ask the children questions. This encouraged them to share their own experiences of attending fairs, wearing new clothes, and other things.

Then, the teacher said, 'We have finished all the activities for today. Shall we now put back all these things?' As soon as she said this, the children, in a very disciplined manner, helped the teacher in clearing up the space and put everything back in its place.

Nutritious midday meal

Everyone got ready for lunch. The children who needed to use the toilet did so, and then everyone washed their hands and sat in a circle. That day's meal was greens and dal sambar with rice, along with an egg.

The volunteering mother assisted the children in washing their hands after lunch. She then cleaned the classroom, spread out mats, and made the space comfortable for the children to rest. The children lay down in rows on the mats. The teacher gently covered the sleeping children with bedsheets. By around 3:15 in the afternoon, the children began waking up one by one. Some of them went to the toilet on their own and returned to sit quietly. A couple of children were still in deep sleep, so the teacher gently woke them up. Then, the teacher facilitated a fun game called '*Topi beka topi*' (Do you want a cap?),[2] which the children played with great joy. As the parents arrived, each child was sent home.

Children were given plenty of opportunities to learn through play, activities, and hands-on experiences. They received nutritious meals, and the learning activities were thoughtfully designed to nurture all areas of their development.

My takeaways

Spending an entire day at the *Anganwadi* was, in many ways, a completely new experience for me. Now and then, silent conversations would unfold between the children and me through our eyes. Whenever the children answered a question asked by the teacher and looked towards me, I would smile at them, and in that moment, a sense of pride would clearly shine on their faces.

This visit helped me understand the vital role that the teacher and the environment play in a child's learning. When a teacher truly understands the children and responsibly engages them in age-appropriate learning activities, not only do the children learn well and become ready for school, but they also begin to feel confident and develop a positive attitude towards learning. In the *Anganwadi*, the young children had ample opportunities to learn by seeing, touching, and expressing themselves. The teacher patiently explained various concepts with great affection, using examples familiar to the children and giving them the space to share their own experiences. Children were given plenty of opportunities to learn through play, activities, and hands-on experiences. The children received nutritious meals, and the learning activities were thoughtfully designed to nurture all areas of their development. Since there was no co-teacher at the *Anganwadi*, the environment encouraged support and cooperation from the parents and community representatives, who stepped in to help the teacher.

Translated from Kannada. Translator: Niveditha Gowda Reviewer: Madhukara S Putty

[1] Pretend/Play Corner in an *Anganwadi* is a space where children arriving early engage in play until the scheduled activities begin. This corner is equipped with various free-play materials, such as building blocks, dolls, toy vehicles, etc.

[2] It is a children's game played in a circle much like the Englsih games, *Duck, Duck, Goose,* or *I sent a letter to my father.*

Rekha Chauhan has over 10 years of experience working with *Prajayatna*, a Bangalore-based NGO, working to improve the public education system. While her work has primarily centred around research and documentation, she plays a key role in preparing reports and guidance materials for teachers, parents, and children. Her studies and reports have supported educational policy formulation, holistic child development, and community empowerment.

Contact: rekha@prajayatna.in

Building a Bond with Books | An Activity

Deepali Shukla

The significance of a school library increases when teachers help children develop a deep friendship with books. This article is about one such interesting, joyful, and challenging activity of playing with books. Through the opportunities created by this process, children read storybooks together, reflected on them, and asked imaginative and fun questions. They responded to these questions, reasoned through them, and felt delighted when they identified books from the cues hidden in the questions.

Figure 1. Questions encourage thinking and consideration of different aspects of a story.

I was talking to children in a government school in Hinotiya in Madhya Pradesh. The children had started reading books from the school library. They said they had read all the books. We shared some stories. The children enthusiastically recounted the stories. Many said they had read the book but could not recall the story at the time. After discussing the stories, the children insisted on playing games. I started thinking what game would bring children closer to books, strengthen their connection with stories, and allow them to think deeply about books. Suddenly, it occurred to me that I could approach books through questions. This would give children a chance to read books and create questions. These questions would not be direct or limited to just yes or no responses, but instead, would encourage thinking and consideration of different aspects of the story.

Book reading activity

I selected four *Big Books* and divided the children into four groups. I gave each group one *Big Book* and instructed them to read the book together as a group and create some challenging and fun questions through which the other group could identify the book's name by interpreting the given clues in the question. And yes, they must be read quietly so that the other groups would not know which book they had.

All the children were from middle school. Initially, I saw that they were a little confused about forming questions. I visited each group, listened to their process of forming the questions, and gave suggestions. I encouraged them to ask questions in their own way. Children had sufficient time for this. They kept re-reading the story. Once all the groups had created their questions, each group began asking questions to the others. *Which book has a lot of birds? Which book has an animal on every page?* Members of the other groups tried to guess. One group successfully identified the book based on the first clue. The children were also responding to the questions. They considered whether the question was correct or if they could have asked something better. These questions encouraged the children to connect with books and re-read them. This spontaneously thought-up activity offered a glimpse into how readers respond after reading a book. Second, it also showed a way to understand how to work with questions. More importantly, reading a story, discussing it in a group, collectively thinking of questions, and reasoning through them, all of this seemed possible. Thus, the process of creating and answering questions across all four groups was completed.

> **The aim of the activity was not only to build a connection with books, but also to read deeply, think about characters and events, and formulate questions that are descriptive and thought-provoking.**

The children's response to this activity indicated the need to try it again with them. This is because the aim of the activity was not only to build a connection with books, but also to read deeply, think about characters and events, and formulate questions that are descriptive and thought-provoking. Also, it was important to see how children enjoy the challenge of creating questions and how learning with other children could be more effective through this process. Therefore, another activity was planned.

Book reading with Chakmak Club

The activity was planned with children who operate *Chakmak Club* (a library). These children have read more than one hundred books. Among these books, some had been read over ten times. Hence, the books chosen for this activity were their favourites, *Barasta Tarbooz*, *Khichdi*, *Geet Ka Kamaal*, *Joon aur Too*. *Barasta Tarbooz* tells the story of a boy named Sasau and the gift he makes. It questions many established norms. *Khichdi* is a *Bundelkhandi* folktale. In this, Birju's repetitive chanting of the word *khichdi* creates interesting situations that amaze the readers and highlight a serious issue in education. *Geet Ka Kamaal* is another *Bundelkhandi* folktale, which presents the marvels of a song in a delightful manner. *Joon aur Too* revolves around a girl's exploration of the world and questions related to it.

This activity was conducted twice with the children. One of the sessions was conducted by adults and another by the children themselves. The aim was to let children talk about books with peers, respond to questions, and experience the entire process. This time, six groups were formed. Each group received one book, wrapped in newspapers so that the other groups could not see it. The groups had some children who could read well and some who were at early reading stages.

Before beginning the process of creating questions, the activity was discussed with the children. They were instructed to read the story together, discuss it, and make at least three questions. An adult was assigned to observe each group. After this, work began in the groups. Looking at the book title itself, the children started discussing. More than half the children in the groups had already read the books assigned to them. Smiles appeared on their faces. Gradually, they began reading. The children knew the other groups had also read the books, so they had to think of fun and challenging questions that would not reveal the book too easily. They worked together to create the questions. Some groups had children individually create questions, and then they selected the ones to ask.

Let us look at some books and the questions children formed about them.

Book title: Ghar Ka Sapna

Who was the one who cried a lot, soaked themself completely? Who was very irritable, with a wrinkled nose? Who was upset by strangers and why?

Figure 2. One of the books used by the author for the activity.

If one reflects on these questions, they are based on characters and their traits as well as specific events in the story. The clues are quite closely tied to the book.

After forming the questions, each group was given the chance to ask the other groups the questions one by one, and the others had to guess the book title. The group asking the question was responsible for noting which team raised their hand first. One member of the group asked the questions.

When the questions on *Ghar Ka Sapna* began, one group identified the book from the second question. Interestingly, a child said that the house would get upset with guests who visited every time. This helped the group identify the book. When asked why the house behaved this way, the child replied that it wanted children to come and live in it. Children started talking about similar empty, crumbling houses in their village. They led this conversation – not only did they talk about the story, but they also discussed and reasoned about their questions. They explained why they had asked those specific questions. Children from other groups had their own reasoning for the questions. Discussions on the reasoning is also important. After this engaging discussion, children were motivated to create more questions. Four children volunteered to conduct this session the next day. They selected the books themselves. They also discussed how to give instructions along with the adults. The books that they chose were the ones that had recently arrived and been read by many. Let us look at one question each from two books.

Book title: Barasta Tarbooz

Question: *Eat me but spare my child. In which book does this line appear?* Several book titles were guessed in response to this question, but not *Barasta Tarbooz*. However, when the group mentioned that this book has three animals, another group correctly identified the book. It was interesting that one group then began discussing specific parts of the story, like Sasau buying three animals, eating the last watermelon, and making a new gift for his beloved. The children enjoyed explaining how much Sasau cared for his animals; he carried each one of them on his head.

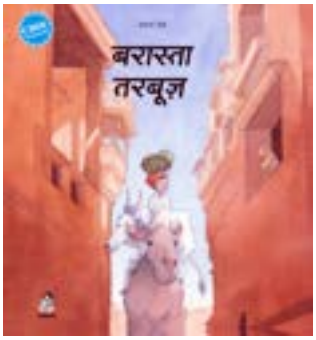

Figure 3. The second book that the author used for the activity.

This game-based process was a great opportunity for peer learning. This opportunity encouraged engaging with the book as a reader and thinking of questions that go beyond the text, more than reading itself. The children enjoyed this because they themselves had to carry out the process, form questions, and select the books. The adults acted only as facilitators. In a way, the children also felt a sense of ownership toward the books. Working on the questions was valuable in leading them to look at the details of the books and in helping them think of new aspects after reading. The challenge to shift from closed-ended questions to interactive ones was a positive step for the children.

There is a lot in a book, both in terms of text and illustrations. Reading and engaging with both can lead to the discovery of many new things.

Important points for teachers and facilitators:

- For this activity, use books that children have already read.
- Read the selected books yourself thoroughly so you can help children form fun questions.
- Allow all kinds of questions during the first round. Encourage peers to respond to questions.
- Observing the entire process will help you understand how children are engaging with the books, so do not rush by giving them the questions.
- Initially, the activity can be done with two to three questions.

Translated from Hindi. *Translator: Shabnam Sengputa* *Vetter: Sonam Kumari*

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Deepali Shukla has been associated with the publication programme at *Eklavya* for over a decade. She enjoys reading and working on children's literature and reading with children and teachers. She is associated with the *'Library se dosti'* programme.

Contact: deepalishukla99@yahoo.com

Second Language Acquisition | A Perspective

Akash Shandilya

What is the process that best helps children to learn communicative English as a second language? We tried out a pedagogical experiment with students of classes IV and V using songs and poems from their native language and attempting a balance between adequate grammar instructions and communicative opportunities.

The use of translation as a pedagogical tool in English Language Classrooms has for long been looked down upon. However, in Indian classrooms, the use of translation and grammar structure instruction remains a rampant practice, especially at the primary level, given the limited exposure of most learners as well as teachers to English. Recent research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), however, has led to a reconsideration of the importance of grammar. Many researchers now believe that grammar teaching should not be ignored in second language classrooms. Similar voices are also echoed by the teachers who teach English as a second language in limited-exposure settings and rely on grammar instructions for teaching the target language.

Considering these trends, a weeklong plan was chalked out to be executed with five students of class IV and twelve students of class V in a government school in a remote village in Barmer district. The objective of this plan was to attempt a balance between adequate grammar instructions and communicative opportunities in the classroom without resorting to the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM) completely. For this purpose, it was planned that a few *Marwari* folk songs would be translated with the students, and during the translation process, some language structures would be discussed with them so that they would eventually be at a level where they would be able to use those structures in communicative tasks.

> **Many researchers now believe that grammar teaching should not be ignored in second language classrooms.**

In terms of English language competency, 15 out of the 17 students were familiar with the English alphabet, and 14 of them could also name things in their surroundings in English. However, none of them used sentences in English. Among the 17, 2 students remained absent throughout.

How we executed the plan

The process began with a class in which attendance was low due to a wedding in the neighbourhood. In presence of five students, a few Marwari and Hindi songs/poems such as '*Dhora re Dhora re Mhari Railgaadi Chale'*, '*Mharo Man Kare Mawdi'*, and '*Ik Budhiya ne Boya Dana*' were facilitated. Among these, '*Mharo Man Kare Mawdi'* was repeated twice and pasted on a wall. Students were informed that we would be translating this song into English. The rationale behind choosing this poem for translation was that it incorporated some basic English structures in repetition. Students were also asked to be ready to recite the same to their other classmates the next day. The next day, as more students were present, they were asked to recite the rhyme twice while also pointing at the chart during one recitation.

After everyone was familiar with the text, they were asked to discuss the meaning of the given text. Children were able to explain the whole poem as a group. Following this exercise, the process of translating the text began. The first phrase to be translated was '*Mharo man kare* …'. The teacher supplied the phrase 'I wish…' for translating this. and students could translate 'kai-kai...' as 'many'. 'Become' was used for '*ho jaon'*.

The translation was also done on the blackboard, and the students noted the same in their notebooks. After this process, students were asked to use the phrase 'I wish…' in their own sentences, adding their own wishes. Students made the sentences shown in *Figure 1,* which were later discussed in the class. Students were given the structures 'I wish I become…' 'I wish I could…', and 'I wish I had…' and they added their wishes to these sentences. Usage of 'have' and 'can' was also discussed with the students,

and they could figure out that ‘can’ would be followed by some action (verb) and ‘have’ would be followed by something (noun).

Among 12 students who were present, 3 needed the help of the teacher for this exercise. While doing this exercise, the teacher realised while most children were able to add their inputs to the given structures, getting into the habit of using these structures themselves will require breaking ‘I wish I have’ into ‘I wish…’ and ‘I have…’ and working on ‘I can…’ ‘I am…’ and ‘I have…’ will give a smoother beginning to the learners.

The next day, the class began with revising the poem and the translation, and gradually the class went on to translate the next line. As the poem elaborates the wishes of a narrator, students were able to begin a new sentence with ‘I wish…’.

The other words were also familiar to the students, and they could translate them in English, except ‘*dhaura*’, which stands for a sand mound. While translating this sentence, the teacher also discussed the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure of English with the students, telling them that for these sentences, the one who is doing the work of being something will come first, the work will come second, and anything else will be placed after the work. The class also practised this exercise through some sentences like ‘I am reading a book.’ This exercise was done in the typical translation method, and the children seemed to be grasping the correct grammatical structure with each subsequent sentence. In the end, students were tasked with making three of their own sentences and translating and writing them in their notebooks.

The next day, another line of the text was translated while students practised replacing ‘I am…’ with ‘He/She/Name is…’, making some new sentences. To practise this, Worksheet 56 of class IV and the workbook of class V were also used. The worksheet required the students to ask their friends some questions and then prepare an introduction card for them. As children struggled with forming the questions themselves, the questions given in the worksheet were explained to them, and they were encouraged to ask their friends these questions in English. The worksheet was helpful in putting the practised structures in communicative usage through a guided writing exercise.

Other practice exercises

Similarly, the remaining lines of the poem were also translated each day. Along with translating one line of the poem and revising the previous text, students engaged in practising certain structures, playing vocabulary games and creating and translating their own sentences for the remaining time of the period.

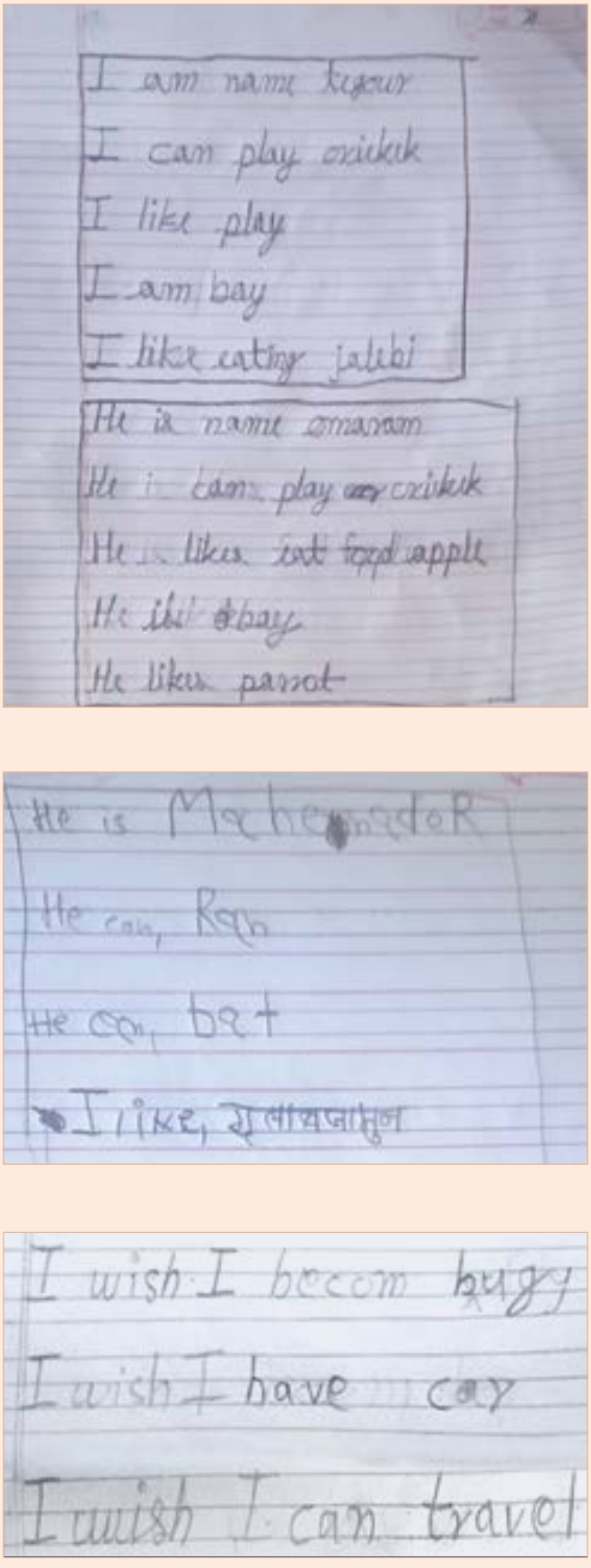

Figure 1. Samples of children’s work.

During these exercises, students were encouraged to correct their own errors by looking at the responses of their peers or by looking at the examples from previous discussions. Three students, who were not able to work at the pace, were helped by the teacher as the rest of the students engaged in their exercises. During these exercises, the class also developed a word wall where all the newly learned words were added, along with developing sentence strips for newer sentence structures.

Assessment

On day six of this exercise, after the complete translation of the poem, a small assessment of the students was taken to understand how many of them have picked up these structures for independent usage. Students were tasked with writing five sentences about themselves and then about their friends on the lines of who they are; what they can do (like they can run but cannot fly); and what they like.

Around 11 students were present for assessment, among them two were unable to perform these tasks and they were helped by the teacher; four could do these tasks independently without making mistakes, while another five required to check their responses again to correct them. The student whose response is attached in *Figure 2* has been able to grasp the correct usage of target structures, while another student (*Figure 3)* is still struggling with using them.

Reflections

While working with the students on this plan, the following reflections were drawn regarding the balance between grammar instructions, translation and communicative tasks:

Working on a contextual text

Translating a text from their surroundings helped in building confidence and motivation among learners as they could understand the context of the original poem thoroughly. The usage of words from their local language helped in garnering their interest in the process. This helped them in grasping the newer words and phrases at a faster pace.

The task of translation

Children seemed to enjoy the task of translation, which made them eager to learn new things. Many of them were observed trying to make sense of the new text. Barring three students, all of them could read the translated text and could make sense of most of it. Some of them also came up with specific queries regarding the meaning or translation of specific words or phrases. This task of translation seemed to be motivating them to learn more about the target language. In the end, students also proposed that we translate another rhyme from the set that we did on the first day.

Vocabulary

Connecting with the local context and the Marwari poem, children were able to grasp the new vocabulary with more ease. Most children were able to pick up verbs like 'to become', 'to wish', and 'to ride' with a sense of their meaning and usage.

Emphasis on structure

Figure 2. A happy child in a print-rich classroom.

Emphasising practising certain structures that were derived from the poem helped initiate the process of sentence making among the students. Explicit discussion on grammatical structure was only done to convey the SVO structure of English, and after discussing it once, children were encouraged to correct their own responses. By the end of five days, children, when prompted, could express a lot of what they wanted to say in English. For instance, when students said 'Hum khelna chahety hain', they were asked to say the same in English, and they could speak something along the lines of 'We want to play.' These exercises were done in class when such sentences came up during classroom conversations.

Limitations of translation

Children made and translated their own sentences. The process helped them in using and even reflecting upon the correct usage of some English structures (mainly SVO structure) and elements (correct pronouns, helping verbs, forms, etc.) of English. However, even when asked to write

a simple description of the last day, it was noticed that most of them followed some set structures, which shows that their focus was on correct structures rather than what they might really want to say. This also indicates that children were not yet able to think in English; instead, they are thinking in their mother tongue and then trying to express it in English. To achieve fluency that enables them to think in the target language directly, it would be necessary that their exposure to actual communicative English, both in listening and speaking, is increased, along with giving them more opportunities to speak and write in English.

Extending the structures

While doing the task of writing descriptions on the last day, some students also seemed to be using additional 'descriptors' in their own manner. For instance, extending the sentences, one student wrote 'He likes to eat food apple,' or another student who otherwise made few mistakes with his descriptions wrote, 'He can book read.' These kinds of extensions were also observed in classroom conversations. This indicated that even though a lot of emphasis was on specific and limited structures, these students, like every other language learner, seemed to be acquiring the language in their own way at their own pace.

> **Connecting with the local context and the Marwari poem, children were able to grasp the new vocabulary with more ease.**

Conclusion

Working on translation with an emphasis on structure was helpful in the context of these learners in initiating the process of learning communicative English. Children who otherwise used only words of English are now beginning to visualise how they can express their thoughts in English. As far as achieving communicative fluency is concerned, that seems to be a long process, and given the limitations of teaching and our contexts, even exercises around translation and instructions of basic grammar can be useful for learners. On the flip side, these exercises may never suffice in themselves unless they are complemented by some exercises that push the children into using the language without a continuous consciousness regarding the usage of correct structures.

In the last task, some students attempted to write their descriptions of themselves in their own manner, using mixed language, and without bothering about correct grammatical structures. It is of utmost importance that such expressions are not curbed for grammatical accuracy, and children are given time to correct their mistakes by gradually reflecting upon their language use themselves.

In the end, as pointed out earlier, given the current situation, only a balanced approach seems to be useful where such exercises are done for enabling the children in picking up some structures for initial usage and then reflecting upon their language while also giving them a lot of opportunities and exposure for engaging with whole texts in target language (orally and in writing) without any consciousness or fear of accuracy.

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Akash Shandilya is a Resource Person with the Azim Premji Foundation, Barmer, Rajasthan. In this role, he works on teacher capacity building and content development, particularly in English Language Teaching.

Contact: akash.shandilya@azimpremjifoundation.org

Motivation and Confidence are Necessary for Creative Writing

Vivek Soni

Writing is a kind of conversation through which children express their experiences and thoughts. Whether children can do this creatively depends on the teacher's response to their writing. When the teacher's response is encouraging and creates an environment that is motivating and creates confidence, then children's creative writing flourishes.

During my school visits over the past 15 years, I have experienced that in order to teach writing to children, they are often asked to copy what has been written in the books or on the blackboard, or in the form of answers to questions. This suppresses their creativity, and they always find it challenging to write independently. The same is also observed in the primary grades, where too, children do not get optimum opportunities for creative writing. Teachers often emphasise standardisation, grammar and spelling in writing. A tool for language proficiency in various grades over the past few months has revealed that around 40-50 percent of students from primary to middle grades find independent writing challenging.

Figure 1. Students write stories based on pictures from storybooks.

> **The objective of creative writing is to motivate children to think, articulate their experiences and move beyond the conventional structures of writing to create something new.**

The National Achievement Survey (NAS) of the past few years shows a similar trend. For example, a class V student had to write a couple of lines on two different topics. The topics were connected to their experiences, but they were not able to do this exercise properly. From this experience, I derived that they are not getting practice of creative writing in their classroom. The issue begins at the primary level and worsens as it goes on to higher grades. To articulate thoughts and express them well, students need practice. Regular efforts are required in schools to support this.

Why creative writing?

Children in the primary grades are often immersed in their world of imagination and frequently express new thoughts. They also express their feelings uninhibitedly and have a deep eagerness to learn. Often, we are not able to make room for their imaginativeness and curiosity, and our education process continues in its conventional manner. If they are guided well at this stage in the process of learning to write, they can become better writers.

The objective of creative writing is to motivate children to think, articulate their experiences and move beyond the conventional structures of writing to create something new. Whether the children are in class II or V, they should be free to pursue their imaginations. They should be encouraged to write about their interests and given the opportunities to experiment with various styles and forms

of writing— whether it is a story, poem or writing based on real-life events.

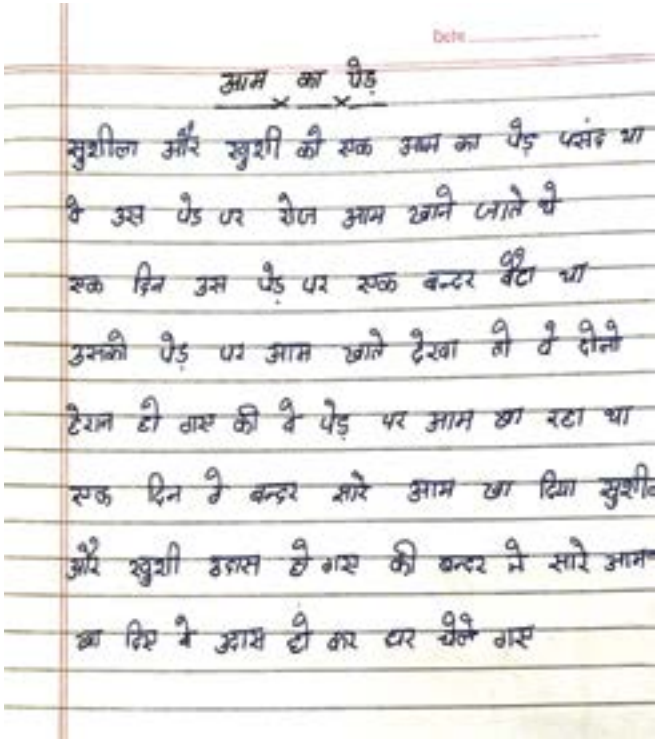
In the process of creative writing, writers express their thoughts creatively and imaginatively through stories, poems, dramas, and other forms. These forms are brilliant opportunities for children to express their thoughts in novel and unique ways. Creative writing is not about standard writing rules or improving grammar or spelling; rather, it aims to encourage self-expression, build confidence and inspire a genuine interest in writing.

Creative writing: Classroom experiences

Creative writing does not merely give children an opportunity to put words on paper; it also becomes a unique medium for them to freely express their imagination, thoughts and feelings. It plays a supportive role in their mental and emotional development.

To encourage creative writing in children, teachers would need to adopt new and diverse strategies. For example, storytelling, creating stories from pictures, creating poems and drama exercises, and similar activities. Developing the school library and book exhibitions may also encourage creativity in children. Students need to be given ample opportunities to develop their own perspective on a topic in creative writing sessions.

Story writing


आम का पेड़

सुशीला और खुशी को एक आम का पेड़ पसंद था
वे उस पेड़ पर रोज आम खाने जाते थे
एक दिन उस पेड़ पर एक बन्दर बैठा था
उसको पेड़ पर आम खाते देखा तो वे दोनों
देखते ही गए की वे पेड़ पर आम का रटा था
एक दिन वे बन्दर सारे आम खा लिया सुशीला
और खुशी उदास हो गए की बन्दर ने सारे आम
खा लिए वे उदास हो कर घर चले गए

Figure 2. A sample of a student's creative writing.

> **To encourage creative writing in children, teachers need to adopt new and diverse strategies, such as storytelling, creating stories from pictures, creating poems and drama exercises, etc.**

The children's responses during the creative writing activities throughout my school visits were truly unforgettable! In some classes, I asked the children to write stories, elaborating on their favourite places. Initially, they found it challenging to get started. But as they progressed and shared their thoughts, it was very satisfying to witness their creativity unfold. Children expressed their thoughts in interesting ways. Some children made a whole new world of imagination, while others described their favourite places with touching detail and emotion.

Later, I asked children to write based on pictures from selected books. These pictures were from *Sharbat*, *Mili ki cycle*, *Oon ka Gola*, *Mimmi ke liye kya loon* and *Paka Aam* books of the *Barkha* series. Based on the pictures, children penned their thoughts and feelings on paper. Inspired by a picture, one child wrote a story of a small village where everyone had a safe home. Through this process, the children got the opportunity to express their deepest feelings and imagination.

Poetry writing

I would encourage children to write poems as well. For this, children would be given some pictures and words. Initially, using words like 'clouds', 'jungle', 'fair', 'grandma', 'play', 'birds', etc., children would collectively create poetry, writing one line each on the blackboard, and then they would write their own poems in their notebooks. It was interesting to see how children brought their feelings into the verses using simple words. Sometimes, they would get so excited that they would read their poem in front of the entire class. Once, a child wrote about a bird's freedom as it flies in the sky, spreading its wings. The implied meaning in the poem touched the entire class. I have had diverse experiences with the creative abilities of children in various schools.

Daily diary writing

I observed that the writing skills of those students, with whom teachers regularly worked on diary writing, were significantly better than the others. During academic sessions, teachers shared their interesting experiences about the impact of daily diary writing in their schools.

Figure 3. A student's attempt at poetry writing.

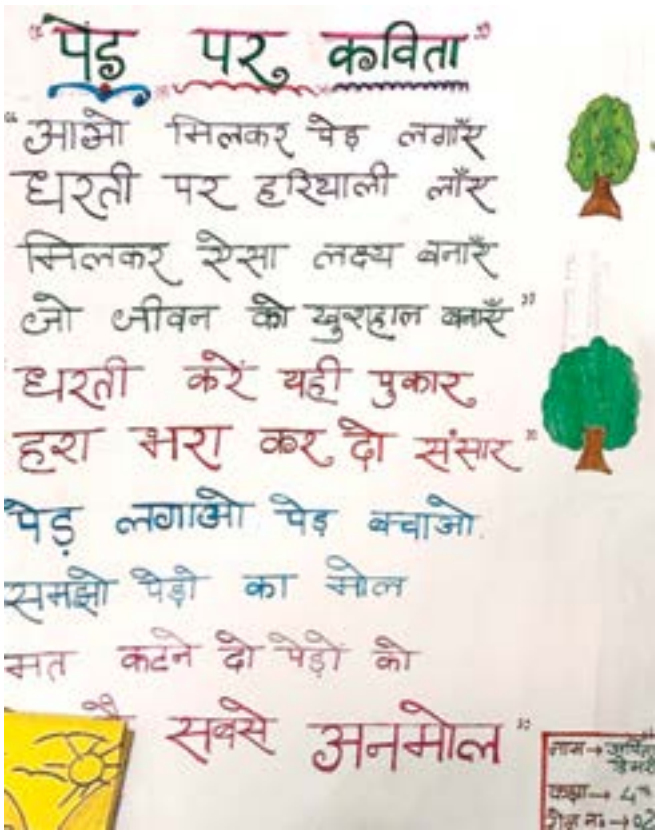


Figure 4. A poem written by a student.

Among them, Mahesh ji, a teacher from Primary School Bairangana, spoke about the positive changes he noticed in students' writing skills through consistent diary writing. He shared the positive effects of this practice, which helped students express themselves more confidently and led to noticeable improvement in their ability to articulate their thoughts.

After this, I visited Maheshji's school. There, I asked the children to write about their experiences of visiting the trout fish farming ponds near the village. The children clearly and thoroughly recorded the fish farming process in their notebooks. This demonstrated that they not only understood the experience but were also able to express it effectively in their own words. It clearly reflected the progress in their experiential writing skills, giving credence to my view that to improve writing, daily diary writing should be a top priority. When I encouraged students to practise daily diary writing, I had no idea that this seemingly simple activity could bring such a significant positive transformation in their writing skills. Teachers also shared that, initially, some children saw diary writing as just another dull task, and for some, it felt completely new and difficult. But as time passed, this practice not only improved their writing but also boosted their confidence.

I told the children that the purpose of diary writing is not just to describe daily events, but also to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences in words. It not only encouraged them to write but also promoted their thinking ability and the process of self-reflection. In this writing process, it was observed that initially, their writing was simple and inconsistent, but as they continued doing it daily, their words gained depth. Earlier, they would only write things like 'what I did today', but over time, they began writing about the feelings and experiences related to their daily routines. For example, one day a student wrote, 'Today I had a fight with my friend, but later I realised that I was wrong. Now I am thinking of accepting my mistake and apologising to him.' Writing such thoughts not only improves their writing but also allows them to learn from their experiences. I explained to the children that the practice of diary writing would not only improve their spelling and grammar but also help them express their thoughts and ideas more clearly.

Diary writing also connected the children with the process of self-evaluation. When they thought about their day and wrote it down, they themselves understood what went well and what needed improvement. Many children felt that writing in the diary brought out their hidden emotions, helping them understand their problems and joys more clearly. Diary writing should not be seen merely as a classroom activity but should become a habit. I encouraged the children to consider

the practice of diary writing as a creative and personal process, not just a school assignment. Their writing now shows confidence and maturity. This experience taught me that the main objective of a teacher is to help children grow not just academically, but also personally. Daily diary writing can be a very effective way to achieve this goal.

Conclusion

I feel that creative writing is extremely important for the overall development of children. It not only gives them an opportunity to improve their language and expression skills but also nurtures their imagination, confidence and problem-solving abilities. While working as a resource person, I understood that in the process of teaching writing, it is not enough to only teach correct writing, grammar or spelling — it is equally important to develop a child's creative perspective. Children need the right environment and encouragement to express their creativity. To foster this, a teacher's positive outlook and willingness to provide opportunities are essential.

Translated from Hindi. *Translator: Bansi Sharma* *Vetter: Bhumika Popli*

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Vivek Soni is a Resource Person with Azim Premji Foundation in Chamoli, Uttarakhand. He has studied Hindi and English language pedagogy and has been involved in the study and research of language and teacher education for the past 15 years.

Contact: vivek.soni@azimpremjifoundation.org

Before we teach them, we need to understand children

Deepika Doble

My primary school is situated in a rural area. I work with children from classes IV and V. When I first began working with the children, I noticed that they struggled to express their experiences and showed little interest in studying or attending school regularly. I have introduced some new initiatives in school to improve their attendance and provide more opportunities for them to speak and interact with each other. Here, I would like to share some of these experiences.

With the help of the children, I created welcome cards with options, such as 'Hug,' 'High-five,' 'Shake hand,' and *'Namaste,'* and stuck them on the classroom door. After the morning assembly, I greet each child as they enter the classroom. Children either point to or mention their preferred greeting, and I welcome them accordingly. This activity has greatly improved my rapport with the students. They have also become more open and comfortable interacting with one another and sharing their thoughts and feelings with me.

We collected some empty matchboxes and covered them with white paper on the outside. Each child was asked to bring their passport-sized photo, which was stuck on the top of the matchbox. On the inside, the part that holds the matches, we wrote 'A' on one end (for 'Absent') and 'P' on the other (for 'Present'). This activity was done together with the children. In this creative attendance system, students mark their presence by displaying their matchboxes. Similarly, I mark absentees. As a result, students have developed the habit of attending school regularly and marking their attendance. Their overall attendance has improved.

In order to encourage self-expression among the students, it became necessary to create a language-rich environment. We decorated the classroom with name charts of students, along with posters of poems and stories. We prepared word-picture cards and number-picture cards. We also created two 'Learning Corners' in the classroom. One for books and the other to display students' creative work. Now students use these materials for reading and learning purposes. These materials are also updated from time to time with their help. I regularly began holding discussions and conducting activities with the children around local issues such as experiences or incidents in the village, experiences of celebrating festivals, their experiences of trips or outings, and children's birthday celebrations. I also started conducting daily storytelling and poetry sessions, followed by discussions. Now the children talk openly and share their experiences comfortably.

Once, during 'letter writing', we discussed different means of communication and their usefulness. All the children participated enthusiastically and shared their experiences of using letters, emails, *WhatsApp* and phone calls with relatives, friends, or acquaintances living far away.

To provide children with opportunities for expression, they were encouraged to write, draw and paint. Instead of finding faults in their written work, we displayed their writing and pictures on chart paper on the classroom walls. This gave all children the opportunity to read each other's work, notice errors, and correct their own work. Now, all of them write down thoughts and feelings without any hesitation.

From my work with children so far, I have realised that I will have to understand each child individually and identify and learn about their learning needs and styles. The children have now developed a better rapport with me and also with each other. In their free time, they explore the books, materials, and posters in the Learning Corners independently and even discuss them. The children now attend school regularly and have gained the self-confidence to articulate and express themselves.

Deepika Doble, Teacher, Primary School Sandai, Rahli, District Sagar, Madhya Pradesh

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Bansi Sharma Vetter: Simran Luthra

Ma, I want to study, send me to school!

Rinku Singh

This dates back to the time when I was a teacher at the Upper Primary School in Nagla Sarangpur, a village in the Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh. I started talking and making friends with the children. During one conversation, I asked the students of class VIII, 'What do you want to become when you grow up?' Except for one girl, most of the children wanted to become doctors or engineers, while some aspired to join the army. But that one girl sat quietly. Her name was Razia. When I asked the question again, she said, 'I do not want to become anything.' I was surprised. When I asked her the reason, she said, 'My father does not want me to study further.' I said to her, 'I will talk to your father, you keep studying well.' Then I enquired about Razia's father from the other teachers and villagers. Together, we talked to him. He was clear that he did not want his daughter to study any further; that whatever she had studied was enough.

I understood that Razia's father would have to be approached differently. I started organising small group activities in the classroom and found that Razia was one of the brightest students in the class. We decided to organise group activities in science, mathematics, art, sports, and general knowledge at the school. The plan was that if Razia performed well in the activities, we would invite her father along with the other parents and honour him.

Razia's performance in all the activities was excellent. As per the plan, her father was honoured in the school. He was told, 'Your daughter is the pride of our village. She will make the village proud. You are a good father.' This continued until Razia completed class VIII. After Razia passed class VIII, I spoke to her father about her admission into class IX. He said, 'Masterji, I came to the school and saw that my daughter is good in her studies, but now I don't want her to study further.' When I asked him the reason, he repeated the same age-old beliefs about girls' education. Then, in a softer tone, he said, 'I do not want to educate my daughter too much. What purpose would it serve? Ultimately, she is destined to get married. If she goes out, she will be influenced by society, which is not good. That is why I do not want to send her out to study. She will stay at home and do the housework.'

Once again, I sought help from some socially conscious people of the village for Razia's admission. Everyone tried to convince her father again. I knew he might even say that he did not have the money to support her studies any further. So, we arranged for that as well. We went to their home and affectionately kept up our insistence. After our conversation, Razia's mother supported us. She said, 'Sir, I will convince Razia's father for her admission.' Razia herself was very eager to continue her studies. She said to her mother, '*Ma*, I want to study, send me to school!' Her mother said, 'I will educate my daughter further.' Finally, Razia's father said to me, 'I do not have money to support her education anymore.' As soon as he said that, I placed the required amount for the fees in front of him. He had not expected this and fell silent.

The next day was a joyful one for which we had been waiting eagerly. Razia's mother came to the school with her. We gave her money for the fee, and Razia was admitted to class IX. As expected, she passed her class X board exams in first division. Trouble arose again when it was time for admission to class XI. Her father once again declared, 'Sir, now I absolutely will not let my daughter study further. She's grown up now. Anything wrong could happen to her.' The struggle for Razia's admission to class XI was even harder. With the support of the villagers, I spoke to her father again and said, 'You must let Razia study. I take full responsibility for everything.' The father replied, 'She is my daughter. Why are you being so insistent about this?' I humbly replied, 'She is not just your daughter, she is a daughter of this country. As a teacher, I want to give a responsible citizen to the nation. A talent that can contribute enormously to the nation with her abilities – I don't want to see this go to waste.' The result was very heartening. The next day, Razia came to the school with her mother. She was admitted to class XI.

Razia also passed her class XII exams in the first division, and she is now studying in the first year of her undergraduate degree course.

But this question keeps troubling me – there must be so many Razias, Seemas and Nishas, who are unable to break free from the shackles of such circumstances. So many who may never receive the kind of support Razia did. I have been able to ensure the education of just one Razia. If only every girl and boy in this country could have the chance to study well!

Rinku Singh, Assistant Teacher, Upper Primary School, Nagla Sarangpur, Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Asfia Vetter: Anwar Jafri

How peer learning transformed my class!

Shruti V

The idea came to me one afternoon as I watched my students struggle with their reading tasks. Some breezed through the words effortlessly, while others hesitated, their fingers tracing the lines as they tried to decode the sentences. It wasn't a matter of intelligence – I knew that. It was about opportunity, support, and confidence.

I decided to introduce a simple yet powerful concept: peer learning. But I knew that if I was not careful, it could easily turn into a situation where some students felt 'less than' the others, while others saw themselves as 'better than' the rest. That was not what I wanted.

I first sat down with my L3 students – the ones who were fluent in English and academically stronger. Instead of telling them they were 'smarter,' I framed it differently: 'Some of your classmates don't have the kind of support you do at home. Imagine how hard it must be to struggle with something just because no one is there to guide you. And sometimes, family isn't the only support we need; friends can be even better mentors, don't you think?'

I saw their expressions change. They did not just nod out of obligation – they understood. Some even shared how they had once needed help themselves. That was my green signal.

Then, I spoke with my L1 students – the ones who hesitated to speak in English, who felt left behind. I told them the truth: 'You all are the same age, with the same ability to learn. It's just that some of you have had more practice. You wake up, eat, play, and laugh just like everyone else. You're not lagging behind because of your abilities – you just need a little push. And we're going to make sure you get it.'

I also listened. Some students admitted they did not like studying alone. Others said they felt ignored by teachers. A few confessed their parents could not help them with their schoolwork. Their honesty only reinforced why this plan needed to work.

Every Monday, during circle time, we talked – not just about studies, but about teamwork, struggles, and progress. It became a space where students felt safe sharing their thoughts.

When it came to reading, I paired L1 and L3 students together. But with a twist – L1 students had to read first and explain what they understood, while the L3 students listened. Then, L3 students would help them fill in the gaps. It was an exchange, not a one-sided lesson.

One day, as an L1 student read aloud in class, he hesitated over a word, unsure of its pronunciation. Before I could step in, an L3 student sitting beside him whispered the correct phonic sound to help him along. The L1 student repeated it, this time with confidence, and continued reading. That was the moment I realised that the students were not just following instructions anymore. They were supporting each other naturally.

Over time, something wonderful happened. L1 students stopped hesitating. They started speaking more, reading more, and even asking for help without hesitation. And L3 students? They became patient listeners, learning how to break concepts down in simpler ways.

Of course, it was not all smooth sailing. Some students developed a superiority or inferiority complex. A few L3 students started taking control, while some L1 students withdrew, feeling 'less capable.'

To handle this, I identified these students and paired them with L2 students – those who were at neither extreme but could bridge the gap. This balance worked better. And for the mischievous ones who refused to cooperate, I stepped in personally, giving them extra attention until they adjusted. Weeks passed, and the shift was undeniable. L1 students were no longer afraid to speak. L3 students became more empathetic. The gap between them started fading, and friendships formed naturally.

One day, as I observed a session, an L1 student hesitated over a word. Before I could step in, their L3 partner smiled and said, 'It's okay, take your time. I used to struggle with this too.' That's when I knew that this was not just about academics anymore. It was about trust, support, and confidence. Peer learning had done more than improve language skills. It had created a classroom where no one felt alone.

Shruti V, English Teacher, Azim Premji School, Kalaburagi, Karnataka

‘Collaborative efforts create a better school’ – Mamta Jain

Mohammad Tasleem

Figure 1. Games included in the morning assembly.

Mamta Jain

At EGS[1] Bedipura school in the Khargone district of Madhya Pradesh, the school principal, Mamta Jain, has developed a beautiful bond with every student at the school as well as their parents, which has contributed to the improvement of the school in many aspects. The school has around 125 students, all of whom attend school regularly. Mamta Jain has been part of the school since 2006 and witnessed several ups and downs, thereby earning the trust of fellow teachers and the community with the main objective of ensuring students’ joy and learning. Mohammad Tasleem from the Azim Premji Foundation spoke to the teacher, exploring issues ranging from what kind of plans help improve schools and the challenges encountered to the learning levels of her students. The following are some excerpts from the conversation.

Mohammad Tasleem (MT): **You consider the school environment critical to the education process. What efforts have been made in your school to improve it?**

Mamta Jain (MJ): A positive, inspiring, and supportive environment encourages the students to learn. A school environment thrives only when it is nurtured by the efforts of teachers, with active participation from students and the involvement of the community.

Our efforts are not limited merely to textbooks when it comes to the teaching-learning process. We also include TLM, sports, library, and other experience-based methods to ensure students learn. Every day during the morning assembly, which lasts around 40-45 minutes, students are engaged in stories, poems, riddles, general knowledge, yoga, and physical exercises, which contribute to their holistic development. On important occasions and the local social and cultural events, students are invited to share their thoughts and write on related themes, which fosters their skills of expression and self-confidence.

MT: Do you also interact with and involve students' wards in this process?

MJ: Yes, I consider regular communication with the parents an essential part of my work. I strive to ensure the participation of every parent in their child's education. When they visit the school, I discuss with them the progress, behaviour, and interests of their children. This helps in understanding the needs of the students and provides direction to our educational approach.

I have also observed that when parents realise that the school is genuinely committed to and serious about their child's overall development, they willingly offer their support. They actively participate in school activities, cleanliness drives, student assemblies, or the organisation of festivals. This builds a strong bridge of trust and collaboration between the school and the community.

MT: You mentioned the morning assembly in the context of creating a positive environment. Could you elaborate on its objectives and share more details about the activities?

MJ: The morning assembly is a time when learning and joy go hand in hand—a space where students get opportunities to express their creativity in front of a larger group. The activities conducted during the assembly have brought a remarkable change in students' attendance and interest in learning. Now students try to reach school early, eager to find out what new activities will take place in the assembly that day! Although, coming up with something new each time can be quite challenging.

We start the morning assembly with poems and stories from textbooks. Students also recite poems and stories—either original or ones they have heard—and share riddles. Then we conduct interesting activities on names of objects and months in Hindi, English and Sanskrit; synonyms; numbers; and riddles. Students who sometimes feel hesitant or are unable to express themselves in the classroom gradually become more confident and comfortable speaking during the assembly. Our effort is to ensure that every student participates in some activity or the other.

MT: The term 'print-rich environment' is often understood as classrooms with walls decorated with reading material. However, your school seems to have taken it a step further. Could you elaborate on how a print-rich environment supports student learning?

MJ: Initially, even I thought that a print-rich environment simply meant walls adorned with educational material. But over time, I realised that utility is more important than decoration. Learning materials should be accessible to students – they should be able to interact with them and integrate them into their play; teachers should be able to use the material in their lessons and even create new material.

Involving students in creating a print-rich environment turned out to be highly effective. Most of the materials displayed in our classrooms have been made by the students themselves. Learning materials, such as word webs, visual posters, poetry excerpts, math formulas, riddles, etc., are also created by the teachers. We replace and update these materials regularly based on the expected learning outcomes. It excites students to see the poems or stories from their textbooks displayed on the walls. They remember these more easily and enjoy singing, reading aloud, and acting them out together.

I encourage students to discuss the displayed materials. This shifts their focus from merely looking at them as educational content to reflecting on them. In this way, the print-rich environment in our classrooms helps students to learn in an active and enjoyable manner.

MT: *Reading Corners* are an essential part of a language-rich environment in schools. How are they used in your school?

MJ: Each classroom has a *Reading Corner* with books of poems, stories, and other genres appropriate to the students' language learning levels. These corners are used to foster a habit of independent reading among students. Students read books here during lunch breaks or in their free time and often discuss them with each other. Those who are still developing reading skills make up stories by interpreting the illustrations. This strengthens their imagination and oral expression. For example, Rubiya, a class II student, narrates engaging stories based on her experiences and imagination from the illustrations in the books.

Other than this, we have also started a new initiative to connect reading with students' lives. Students receive books as gifts on their birthdays. The aim is that students should read, feel connected with books, and share them with their peers. This effort is creating an atmosphere that promotes personal and independent reading.

MT: Mamta ji, you are the principal and also a class teacher. How do you balance both?

MJ: Balancing both roles is certainly challenging, but I try to manage things with structured planning and support from the team. I prioritise academic tasks and complete less urgent administrative duties before school, during lunch, or after school hours.

Additionally, a collaborative work plan has been developed with the support of the staff. When I have to leave the class for any urgent work, fellow teachers engage students in dialogue-based activities or share stories and poems related to the syllabus. This ensures that students' time is used effectively, and the environment of reading and writing also remains intact. I make every possible effort to ensure continuity in students' learning through a supportive and flexible environment in school.

MT: What efforts do you make for teachers' professional development?

MJ: I believe that continuous professional development enhances the quality of teaching and strengthens the culture of teaching-learning. Azim Premji Foundation supports us consistently in this regard. We actively participate in subject-based training, TLM creation workshops, and sessions focused on child-centric pedagogy from time to time. The insights and understanding gained from these workshops are not limited to only those who attend these but are shared at the school level with all the teachers. In this manner, an environment of collective practice is gradually being created.

For example, to improve English language teaching, in collaboration with the staff, we created 'word recall' teaching material using ice-cream sticks and other locally sourced materials. Such innovative initiatives enhance the resourcefulness and creativity of teachers.

We also create TLMs based on students' academic needs. This process helps our growth as self-motivated 'teacher-learners' and lays the foundation for a collaborative, innovative, and sensitive teaching community.

MT: Migration is a serious issue in this region. How do you work with children impacted by migration?

MJ: Seasonal migration, which is the result of exploitation, is a deep-rooted socio-economic issue in this region and directly affects students' education. We identify families impacted by migration, stay in regular contact with parents, tell them about the school's activities, and try to impress upon students the importance of education. Additionally, we advise migrating parents to carry their children's educational documents with them so that they can be enrolled in schools wherever they go.

If students migrate mid-session, we make efforts to ensure their emotional connection remains. This is why, at times, we remain in touch with them or their parents through the phone or over messages. Upon their return, we work with their parents to immediately enrol them back. We help them catch up on missed lessons.

MT: Your school has come a long way in many aspects, from student learning levels to infrastructure. What sort of challenges did you face on this journey?

MJ: There were indeed many challenges. And it is not that they are all resolved now. However, we have been able to make considerable progress. Initially, one major hurdle was earning the community's trust. The school was in poor condition – there was no boundary wall, the walls were faded and needed a coat of paint, and there were inadequate facilities for students. Some local miscreants used to vandalise the property, dirty the washrooms, and break the plant pots. Fortunately, teachers, such as Maya Patel, Maya Ravindra, and Dilip Patel, live nearby, which helped us build rapport with and gain the trust of the community. People who once damaged the school now support us. I believe that when your intentions are genuine and rooted in social responsibility, paths do open up.

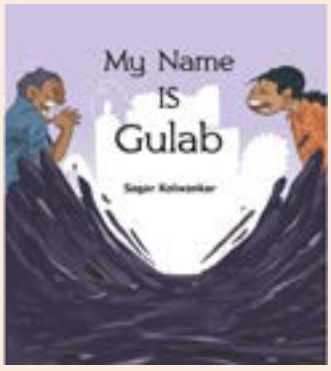
Translated from Hindi. *Translator: Simran Sadh* *Vetter: Simran Luthra*

[1] An Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) school is a type of alternative school, specifically a school set up by the government in areas without a formal school within a 1-kilometer radius.

Mohammad Tasleem has been working with the Azim Premji Foundation in Khargone, Madhya Pradesh, for the past 10 years. He is associated with Azim Premji Foundation through the foundation's Fellowship Programme. He has prior experience in the fields of media and public health. He currently works in primary school and tries to engage with and develop an understanding of environmental education and other subjects with his students.

Contact: mohd.shaikh@azimpremjifoundation.org

My Name is Gulab



Author and Illustrator: Sagar Kolwankar

Reading Age: 6-16 years

Print length: 32 pages

Language: Hindi, English, Kannada

Publisher: Tulika Publishers, Chennai

Reviewer: Dhruv Desai

My Name is Gulab is an important book to bring to all the students in our classrooms (and to adult readers as well). It addresses the issue of manual scavenging - an illegal activity in India that is still widely prevalent and is strongly linked to issues of caste discrimination and untouchability.

This book takes a close look at a troubling issue but does so gently and with empathy. Gulab's father is a manual scavenger, and Gulab hates that he has to do this work. She is angry for him, and she is sick of being teased for it by the bullies in her class. At some point, she decides to try and help solve this problem once and for all. To do this, she asks her father all about his work, and he replies with patience and honesty. This response from him is eye-opening and heartbreaking and is one of the best-written parts of the book.

Many people would look at this book and wonder if it is suitable for children. Often, adults assume that children do not have the capacity to understand such complex problems. As the author of this book, Sagar Kolwankar said in an interview:

'I have seen children questioning their parents about serious issues in society. The answers parents give will shape their minds. If parents lie, the child will believe in that lie. If they hide, the child grows up ignorant of the issue. On the other hand, if we make them aware, the knowledge will lead to empathy. And empathy is the first step to creating a sense of fairness and justice in young minds.'[1]

Some people also believe that children are perfectly innocent and have no thoughts of inequality in their minds. They argue that by reading such books, we are introducing these kinds of negative ideas and attitudes to children. To them, I would respond: Children also live in the same world as we do, and as any teacher knows, they are not to be underestimated – their power of observation is sharp, and always growing. Children already see these things in the world around them; they also know and may wonder about sewers, gutters, and waste. If some privileged students have never had to think about any of this, it is all the more our responsibility to bring these conversations to them, to help them grow with empathy and compassion.

Reading books like this one with our students is a starting point for important conversations with them, which are an essential part of their education.

When I read this book with my students in classes III, IV and V, the students were very moved by both the story and the evocative illustrations. Several questions came from all of them. It led to a discussion about the waste management systems in our homes, and students went home and asked questions to their parents and older siblings. We also did an art project where the students all drew their 'solutions' to the problem of waste management. We saw some wonderful 'inventions' - a machine that would turn human waste into diamonds and another that would pump toilet waste directly into the farms (underground).

One of the students in the class was also deeply troubled by the bullying she read about in the story and created a small play in which she portrayed the lead character, Gulab, 'giving it back' to the bullies. These discussions and activities also helped me, as the teacher, understand some of the dynamics in my classroom that I was previously unaware of. Though in a different way from what was happening in the story, students shared that they also unknowingly engaged in caste-based discrimination. This helped us as a school to start to address this issue.

In this story, while the tone is positive throughout, the author never allows us to fall for a magical 'perfect solution'. Gulab's parents quietly reflect that the problem goes beyond equipment and machinery and is much more prevalent in people's minds.

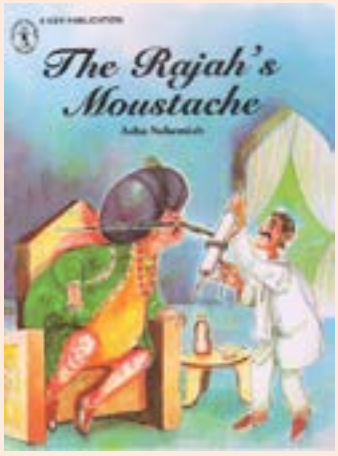
At the very end of the story, the bullies were still teasing Gulab. We are repeatedly reminded that despite our best intentions and efforts, change will take a lot of work, and there will always be people who are resistant to change and continue to further inequality. I believe this is one of the great strengths of this book, as it does not sell us a fairy tale, but rather it represents reality while being rooted in the hope of a better future.

[1] *https://tulikapublishers.blogspot.com/2021/08/my-name-is-gulab-interview-with-author.html*

Dhruv Desai is part of the teacher education team at Azim Premji University. He spends most of his time either playing and thinking about physical education or reading and thinking about children's literature.

The Rajah's Moustache

Review: Jai Shankar Chaubey



Author: Asha Nehemiah

Illustrator: B G Verma

Translator: Mahendra Yadav

Reading Age: 3-6 years

Print length: 16 pages

Language: Hindi, English, Bengali, Tamil and Telugu

Publisher: Children's Book Trust

The Rajah's Moustache is a story about a king who takes great pride in his moustache. His moustache is so unique and long that he wants everyone in the kingdom to admire it. The king's ego and strange obsession with his moustache become a problem for the entire kingdom.

The story's delightful blending of humour and satire makes it special. Just reading the title makes one curious. When this story was read out to children of classes IV and V, they thoroughly enjoyed listening to the techniques that made the moustache round and twirly.

Discussing a story with children sparks their curiosity and invites them to think critically. Some questions need to be prepared in advance, while others organically emerge during the discussions. For example: What methods did the king use to keep his moustache round and twirly? Have you ever seen anyone show off or boast about something they have? If you were the minister, what advice would you give to the king? If you were the king, what would you want to do in your kingdom and why? Why was the king so attached to his moustache? and so on.

Apart from discussing the story, children also enjoy role-playing it. In the role-play, one child can become the self-absorbed king, and another can play the minister who suggests solutions or tries to reason with the king. In another activity, we distributed small slips of paper to all the children in the class. Then we asked them to write one sentence about something that they were proud of about themselves and exchange it with their partners. Then, they were asked to write one special quality about their partners. Additionally, creative writing topics can be given, such as: If I were a king or queen, what would I do to prove my greatness? Children enjoy reading aloud what they have written and discussed in class. Such activities make children think.

Children enjoy this story because it contains many interesting and humorous events that engage them. Towards the end of the story, a new character enters whose common sense and behaviour lead to a cheerful outcome. The story also highlights how ego, pride, and excessive self-praise can create anxiety and restlessness in oneself and others.

A lot of the credit also goes to the translator for using simple language and everyday words. The writing style is so engaging that children are keen on reading it again and again. For example, 'The barber tried continuously for three

days and three nights. He applied special oil that shapes hair. He also applied special powder that makes hair curly…' The colourful and fun illustrations in the book expand children's imagination and make the process of understanding and thinking about the story even more interesting.

The Rajah's Moustache is an entertaining children's story. It not only gives children a chance to laugh but also subtly provides them important life lessons. The book draws readers' attention to the kinds of problems caused by self-absorption and ego. Examples of such self-absorption in distorted forms are available in plenty on social media. This story seems relevant for children of all ages and adults alike and allows us to look at our present, reflect on it, and make it worthwhile.

Translated from Hindi. *Translator: Simran Sadh* *Vetter: Sonam Kumari*

Jai Shankar Choubey has been working as a Hindi Resource Person at the Azim Premji Foundation in Rudrapur, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand for the past 16 years. He has an interest in reading satire and children's literature and conversing with children.

Condolences: The writer of this review, Jai Shankar Choubey, passed away recently due to a heart attack. The Paathshala team pays tribute to the memory of our writer.

Let's do some Activites!

Number Game

In this game, there is a number associated with each action. For example, the first action can be 'jump', the second can be 'run', etc. The teacher would need to explain the action clearly to the students and ensure that all the children have understood.

Easy level: Use two to three numbers/ actions. For example, jumping, running in circles, clapping, etc.

To start the game, the teacher calls out a number, such as 'one'. The action associated with it is 'jump', so all the children jump.

As the children become familiar with the game, the teacher can increase the speed of the game by changing the numbers quickly.

Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

Children have to be attentive to listen to the actions and perform them. Also, they have to focus on remembering the actions associated with each number.

The teacher should keep motivating them by saying, 'Your memory is sharp'; 'You all are playing very well'; etc.

Difficult level: Teachers can add more numbers and actions to make the activity more complex. They can also add activities, like form a circle, sit down, put their hands up, etc.

When teachers see a child making a mistake, instead of just drawing attention to them, the teacher can have the whole class say, 'Pay attention, pay attention!'

This activity is suggested by Asha Singh, who is a visiting faculty member with the School of Education at Azim Premji University. Her abiding interest is in using the arts in teaching-learning as a pedagogical tool for teachers and in developing curriculum.

Devising and following instructions

A fun activity for students of classes II to V teaches students how to think, decide, give and follow instructions. This is an activity played with two pairs of students at a time. All students get the chance to play.

Material required: Various fruits and vegetables, like onion, tomato, potato, banana, radish, carrot, etc., kept in a basket and covered with a cloth so children cannot see them. (*Teachers can use any other items available, as those in the school kitchen*.)

All the students form pairs. Two pairs come to the front to play.

One pair selects a vegetable from the basket and keeps it somewhere in the space in front of the class, where everyone can see it.

In the other pair, one student is blindfolded, and this student has to reach the vegetable. This student's partner has to give the instructions so the student can reach the vegetable. The other pair can mislead the blindfolded student by giving contradictory instructions.

If the blindfolded student reaches the vegetable, they have to pick it up and guess what it is through touch, feel and smell - without opening the blindfold.

Moderate level

Firstly, the items in the basket can be changed to objects like a duster, a mobile cover, small toys, etc. The partner of the blindfolded student is allowed to give only three instructions to the student to find the object. For example: Go five steps forward, turn left, move three steps forward and bend to pick.

Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

Difficult level

Keep things like a keychain, chalk, pebbles, and coins in a box, and the blindfolded student has to shake the box and guess what is inside. At this level, too, only three instructions can be given to the blindfolded student by their partner.

Through this activity, children learn to listen to instructions and decide which ones to follow. They also learn how to give correct instructions, adhering to a given limit. They learn to identify objects by using their senses.

Draw and see!

A drawing activity that teaches students how to break down and order tasks, and to think, give and follow instructions. This is an individual activity that can be done with all the students in the class/group in classes II to V.

There can be variations in the levels of cognitive complexity.

Materials required: Notebook, pencil, eraser, and a paper with a drawing.

Ask one student to volunteer as an instructor. Give this student a drawing of a simple animal/item/creature, ensuring that it is not seen by the rest of the class. The rest of the class has to follow this student's instructions.

Easy level

The instructor has to stand before the class and give instructions to the class to draw the picture that only the instructor can see, without disclosing what the followers have to draw. To do this, the instructor needs to break down the steps for drawing and the order in which it can be done. For example, in the cat picture shown here, the instructor can give the following instructions:

1. Make a round face

2. Add two ears
3. Draw a long tail
4. Add two legs
5. Make whiskers on the face

Ensure that the instructor gives instructions to the entire class and not to individual students.

After the task, ask the children to look at each other's drawings. Encourage them to discuss the following:

1. In what ways do the drawings vary? For example, someone has drawn a longer tail, and someone has missed the eyes.
2. Do you observe any variations in terms of shape, size or position? If yes, why? For example, someone has drawn the ears on the face.
3. If you were the instructor, what changes would you make to the instructions?

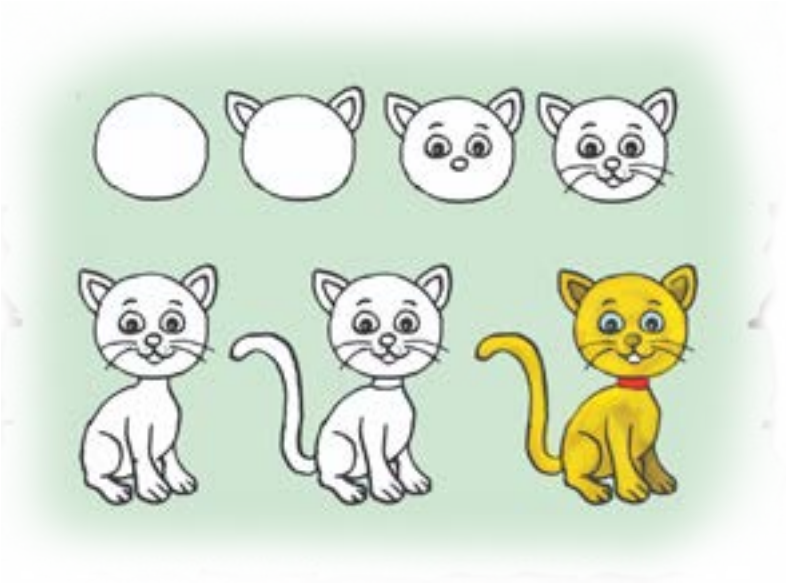


Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

Moderate level

The activity may also be given in the form of jumbled instructions to the children who can read and ask them to sequence the instructions. After they form the sequence, the teacher can ask questions to make them think about the sequencing, for example: Do you think the tail can be drawn first? Why not?

Complex level

The level of complexity can be increased by giving a kolam/rangoli pattern. This activity can also be done by students in pairs, with one being the instructor and the other a follower. But the condition is that the instructor should not see what the follower is drawing. Here, the follower can be allowed to ask questions to the instructor.

Through this activity, children learn to listen, observe things, connect to spatial sense (shapes, size, position), sequence, break down complex problems, give clear instructions and follow instructions, and, when in doubt, get clarifications by asking questions.

These two activities have been suggested by Krithika, a member of the Communications team at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. Krithika has a deep interest in computational thinking and has worked with Tamil Nadu SCERT on state textbooks.

We've got mail!

Children should enjoy studying science

I read Amrita Masih's article 'Nurturing Children's Curiosity in Science' in Issue 23. I am a science teacher myself. I try [to ensure] that the children in my class enjoy studying science and try to learn and understand it on their own. Reading this article helped me realise two important things related to my work. First, as a science teacher, my job is to give children opportunities to observe and understand science present in their surroundings, and second, to develop in them the skills to think, explore, observe, and ask critical questions. I will make efforts to improve pedagogy in this direction.

Ram Das Singh Dangi, Secondary Teacher, Integrated School Barodia Naunagar, Khurai, District Sagar, Madhya Pradesh

It is important for teachers to read children's literature along with children

Memories of my classroom experiences got refreshed while reading Shobhan Singh Negi's article 'Teaching Learning in Summer Camps and Vacations', published in the 23rd issue of *Pathshala*. I also agree that not just children, but teachers too, should read children's literature. My 12 years of experience working with children tells me that when teachers read children's literature with students in school, children become more attracted towards reading. Teachers also get to know about a wide range of poems and stories in this way, and it makes their work in the classroom easier.

Sushma Khakha, New Primary School Sarnatoli, Chainpur, District Gumla, Jharkhand

Learning through role play in the classroom

The suggestions for making children active in the classroom [that were] given in 'Learning Through Role Play in Class' by Asha Singh are good. Role play helps children not only develop their ability to learn by doing, but they also become more active. By making this process collaborative, children develop the abilities of quick thinking, problem-solving, and reflective thinking. Role plays with students fosters concept-building, cooperation, and a sense of commitment. All these skills are absolutely essential for life.

Saloni Goyal, Primary School Puranpur, District Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh

The early years in a child's life, the best years for learning and understanding

I liked Amrita Murali's article 'Role of Parents in Early Years' published in the March 2025 issue. Parents play an important role at every stage of a child's life, and this role is extremely critical during their early years. During this period, children have a greater capacity to learn and understand. The efforts being made by *Makkala Jagriti* in this regard are commendable. For the all-round development of *anganwadi* children, guardians must recognise the criticality of their role, participate actively in meetings, and make efforts through activities which help children develop their skills adequately.

Pooja Saxena, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Phanda, District Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

A need to promote new ideas beyond traditional thinking in education

In Raghavendra Herle's conversation with Vishwanath Gundigere in the column 'In the Spotlight', Vishwanath says, 'It is important for a teacher to be creative.' His fruitful efforts make us understand that it is important to organise activities in the schools well, as children benefit greatly from them. It is essential for teachers to engage in creative exploration, both personally and professionally. Vishwanath emphasises breaking away from traditional thinking and established models to focus on innovation and growth.

Sunita, Government Upper Primary School, District Bikaner, Rajasthan

The idea and implementation of summer camps

The articles in the 23rd issue of *Pathshala* highlight the importance of summer camps. The idea and execution of summer camps are highly effective. Parents witness concrete results in schools during these camps. Teachers also develop a better understanding of assessment through them. The information we obtain from annual examinations can also be used here, and we can focus more on foundational literacy, numeracy, grade-level competencies, etc., during this time. Children develop the habit of studying independently. In these camps, children work without pressure or burden, improve themselves, and move forward towards learning.

Kavita Gupta, Government Higher Secondary School, District Alwar, Rajasthan

My first feedback on an article

This is the first time that I am writing a response to an article published in *Pathshala*. My thoughts are on Rajoo Patel's article 'Student Morale and Learning: A Teacher's Perspective', published in Issue 23. It is generally seen that a child who is quiet and withdrawn in the classroom is unable to connect with school, studies, or other classmates. Such a child becomes the subject of ridicule. In such a situation, engaging with the child, talking to them, and assigning small responsibilities pave the way for the child to gain acceptance in the classroom and also boost their confidence.

Shivani, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, District Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand

Work with a focused plan on essential concepts

Jagmohan Singh Kathait's article 'Analysing Answer Sheets to Prepare for New Academic Session' in the context of annual examinations helped me understand that if a teacher has a clear grasp of their students' proficiency levels in each subject, they can prepare the teaching-learning process in a better way. Children too can analyse their peers' answer sheets. Children can also help teach each other in group learning.

Manju Bagadia, Teacher, Government Upper Primary School, District Sikar, Rajasthan

Teachers need to develop a clear perspective on assessment

The article 'Assessment as a Tool to Aid Learning' by Kailash Chandra Kandpal has developed the understanding of assessment extensively. It helped build the perspective on how children learn and in what way their sensitivities mature. It is worth considering whether assessment is merely linked to classroom practices or if there should be a logical reflection on it. Teachers must first develop a clear understanding of assessment within themselves. It is important to keep in mind that every child can learn and that learning is every child's right.

Poonam Bhatia, Principal, Government Upper Primary School Bambala, Sanganer, District Jaipur, Rajasthan

The goal is to make parents active partners in their children's development

I read Amrutha Murali's article 'Role of Parents in Early Years' in the 23rd issue of *Pathshala*. Through simple activities and conversations, the article shares the experiences and work done by an *anganwadi* worker with parents with regard to nurturing the diminishing warmth in the relationship between children and parents. This article will help me as a Resource Person to play a more effective and central role in the communication process with *anganwadi* workers and help in making parents active participants in the development of their children by raising awareness and giving suggestions for practical engagement.

Ajay Saini, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation Khurai, District Sagar, Madhya Pradesh

How often do good plans get implemented on the ground?

I found Jagmohan Singh Kathait's article in the 23rd issue quite insightful. In reality, examinations must have started to judge the shortcomings in the learning of students and resolve them. However, over time, the aim of both teaching and examinations has largely become focused on simply promoting children from one class to the next. Now, in continuous and comprehensive evaluation, the information about which questions the students answered correctly in the answer sheet, which were incorrect, and which were partially correct, is gathered to help overcome the learning gaps of the students.

Anita Dhyani, Assistant Teacher, Government Inter College Lakhwad Kalsi, District Dehradun, Uttarakhand

Assessment as a step toward better learning

Kailash Chandra Kandpal's article discusses several important insights on the subject of assessment. In my view, learning is central to the teaching process. Therefore, the goal of assessment should be to identify what children have not learned, why they did not learn it, and most importantly, what can be done to support learning and teaching. This can become easy when assessment is aligned with learning outcomes so that what is 'not yet learned' can be addressed immediately.

Deepa Jose, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Phanda, District Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

A downpour of articles quenches the thirst of exam season

The articles in Pathshala's March issue feel like a welcome monsoon shower amidst the parched landscape of the schooling system, left thirsty by the dry spell of March examinations. These raindrops in the form of articles address the what, why, how, and for whom aspects of assessment, offering clarity and much-needed relief. Kailash Chandra Kandpal's article describes how the methods of formative and summative assessment in schools have deviated from their original objectives. We need to connect assessment of learning with classroom processes, making it sensitive and social. We should always remember that every child can learn and that learning is every child's right. Jagmohan Singh Kathait's article clarified that through the formative analysis of answer sheets, we can identify the concepts with which children are struggling the most and can then develop special plans and teach them accordingly. Additionally, if homework is connected to the child's work at home, then it can catalyse learning.

Shubhra Mishra, Azim Premji Foundation, Teacher Learning Centre, Phanda, District Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

Summer Camps: A joyful space where children and teachers learn together

From the summer camp experiences shared in Shobhan Singh Negi's article 'Teaching-Learning in Summer Camps and Vacations', I got a fresh perspective on documenting summer camps more systematically. Similarly, Muneer's article, 'Impact of Summer Camps on Student Learning', suggested ways to assess activities that take place in camps. Currently, all of us are running summer camps. I have also had the same experience that not only do teachers and students join these summer camps enthusiastically, but they also learn new things for the next session.

Parul Batra, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, District Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

In my view, every child is equal

Two key points encouraged me, on reading Rajoo Patel's article 'Student Morale and Learning: A Teacher's Perspective'. First, I have always believed that every child is equally important and that it is my responsibility to nurture the capacity to learn and understand in all my students. Too often, as teachers, we allow our prejudices to shape the assumption that some students simply cannot learn. Second, as teachers, we tend to focus our attention on children who respond promptly. I, too, unknowingly and unwittingly, have made this mistake in my classroom. The article helped me understand that our focus must be on generating interest in learning among all children.

Kalpana Banchhor, Government Primary School Tatibandh, Sankul Kendra Gudiyari, District Raipur, Chhattisgarh

Every child is special

I liked Chotte Lal Tanwar's article 'Equal Learning Opportunities for All Children' in the 23rd issue because the author pointed out the reason for a child's absence in school as the lack of an inclusive environment. Sometimes our assumptions prevent us from encouraging children to attend school. I liked one more thing that every child is special, and when taught things in context, their learning becomes faster and effective.

Suman Sahu, Primary School Chhota Ashok Nagar, Sankul Kendra Gudiyari, District Raipur, Chhattisgarh

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Shabnam Sengupta Vetter: Simran Luthra

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Pratibha (Hindi) pratibha.katiyar@azimpremjifoundation.org

Shefali (English) shefali.mehta@azimpremjifoundation.org

Raghavendra (Kannada) Raghavendra.herle@azimpremjifoundation.org

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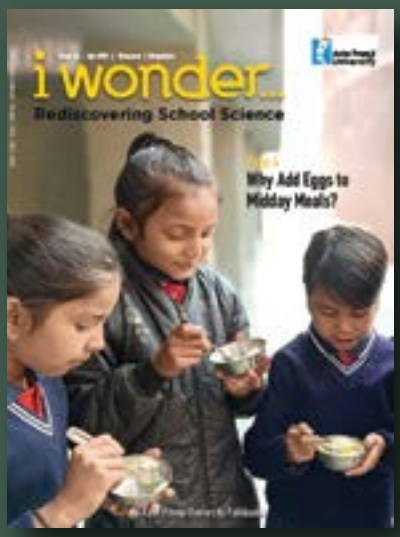

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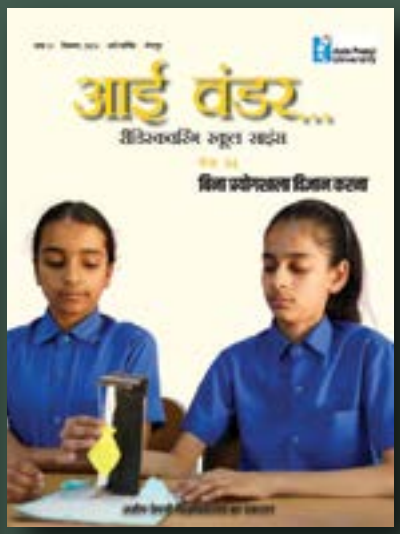

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