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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

It gives us immense joy to share with you the 25th issue of *Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar*. This joy comes from walking together on an academic journey where, through the articles published in the magazine, we try to understand the ground realities and challenges of education and also explore steps to address them. Right from its very first issue, the aim of *Pathshala* has been to reduce the distance between theory and practice, and to stand with teachers—not as distant observers, but as close companions and collaborators.

The journey of these 25 issues reflects the resilience and commitment of people working towards meaningful change in education. It reaffirms the belief in education as a medium for social transformation, as well as the aspiration that quality education reaches the last child in the social structure.

And what could have been a better way to celebrate the 25th issue of *Pathshala Bheetar Aur Bahar* than to bring together the classroom experiences of 25 teachers from across the country! This special issue presents the lived experiences of 25 teachers from 13 different states in our column, *Pages from Teachers' Diaries*.

In these diary entries of teachers, you will find the imprints of diverse classroom processes and experiences. You will see how these teachers, through their understanding and efforts, are adapting to innovative educational practices by identifying the barriers in students' learning.

This issue also includes articles that reflect on the preparations necessary for academic support. One of the articles carefully analyses what kind of threads need to be woven into teacher trainings so that teachers can overcome the real-life challenges they face. It also emphasises how essential it is for teachers to embody the values of *maitri* and sensitivity to truly fulfil their important role. You will also find glimpses of the 25-issue journey of *Pathshala*.

Through this 25th issue, we express our heartfelt gratitude to the more than 500 authors and the ever-growing readership from across the country who have been and who continue to be part of this journey with us. We hope you find this issue valuable.

We are also delighted to share that the upcoming December issue of *Pathshala* will be on the important topic that is also delineated in the National Education Policy 2020—Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

Your support continues to be our strength and inspiration. As always, keep reading and stay connected!

With warm wishes,

Pratibha Katiyar
Chief Editor

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

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The Teaching of Maitri

Amman Madan

We want education to shape children into good members of society. But children are pulled in different directions by different people. For us, a good member of society means someone who does not discriminate, seeks justice for all, and respects everyone. But children's immediate social environment often teaches them that their own group is superior and other groups (castes, religions, genders, classes and so on) are inferior.

Figure 1. Children form a large part of their knowledge of the world through stories.

My colleague, Tarannum Shaikh, observed among LKG children in a private school in Bhopal that many had internalised at that early age their families' belief that those who eat chicken are 'unclean'. Most of the children in this private school belonged to powerful castes. In India, non-vegetarianism is closely associated with caste and community. Several people draw the lines of high and low caste or community based on the food people eat. Through education, we want children to recognise themselves as Indians and as human beings, above all else. As Ambedkar noted, this is what the Buddhist term 'maitri' means; it is also what was called 'fraternity' by French and English speakers. However, within children's families and neighbourhoods, there is a lot of emphasis on the differences between groups and on recognising caste, gender and class hierarchies. Given this situation, the teacher has to put considerable thought into how to proceed with their educational objectives.

Several psychologists believe that children start mentally constructing 'social maps' as early as the age of one year. These maps are well in place by the age of 4-5 years. Children are conditioned by their surroundings to adopt certain social behaviours and biases. For instance, they learn to associate appearances with social status and learn to be wary of those whose clothes are different.

"Several people draw the lines of high and low caste or community based on the food people eat. Through education, we want children to recognise themselves as Indians and as humans, above all else."

Children learn that the amma who comes home to wash their utensils is spoken to in a different tone. Boys are mocked for playing cooking games, and girls are silenced when they imitate riding motorcycles. From this age onwards, children begin to feel closer to those who share similar clothes, hair, or complexion, while distancing themselves from people who appear different. This distance is taught both in the form of fear and also in that of curiosity. The form it eventually takes depends on a mix of their individual thoughts, the surrounding beliefs, and the counter-discourses that challenge those beliefs.

School education offers a chance to change the social maps that have already formed in the minds of children, where identities and emotions have created fixed images. Children feel happy when they see certain people and groups, and experience fear, disgust or anger towards certain others. It is not easy to erase these emotion-laden perceptions. One way to change them is to generate some fresh emotion-based images. After that, children themselves will strive to create harmony between the two contrasting images. Often (but not always), the result is the creation of new or blended images.

We weave the world through stories

Children form a large part of their knowledge of the world while listening to stories about it. They get immersed in stories and are transported to a world that is different from their own. Stories are a major source from which their emotions and mental maps of social groups are formed. They learn about relations of inequality and hatred to a large extent through stories. At the same time, these stories are also capable of teaching them about maitri and relationships of equality.

The difficulty is that if certain beliefs and emotions are already formed, then our minds are very efficient at holding on to them. Boys often learn that it is only men who perform heroic acts. When they are told a story in which Kamla climbs a mountain or saves her younger brother from wild animals, they enjoy the story but do not recognise the fact that Kamla is a girl. It is easier to not pay attention to this, and their original belief—that it is males who are brave and heroic—remains completely intact.

Many experts who have worked on prejudices and biases (Aboud 2009, Bigler & Liben 2007) argue that if we want to change a social map, it is important to emphasise the new map. It is not enough to just talk about the brave girl; emphasis has to be laid on that brave person being a girl. Many elements will have to be included in the story that emphasise her identity as a girl; only then will the understanding of girls being brave take root in the minds of boys. Otherwise, like the proverbial water, it will merely touch the feet of their prejudices and then flow away without wetting them.

> **Through stories, children learn about relations of inequality and hatred to a large extent. But stories are also capable of teaching them about maitri and relationships of equality.**

A good example is found in Munshi Premchand's famous story *Idgah*. Many children learn that the followers of other religions are evil, think only bad thoughts, should be feared, and so on. This is what some people of every religion—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians —teach their children about others' religions. Premchand's story has a reversing effect on those who feel anger, hatred and suspicion at the mention of some communities.

The protagonist of the story is clearly a Muslim, and the festival described is that of *Eid*. As the story progresses, we see a visit to a fair and the helplessness of poverty through a child's eyes. This helplessness is something that people of all religions know and recognise. And the ending of the story (which I will not reveal) is such that it evokes tears of admiration for this Muslim child and his very human struggles. Reading this story brings about a slight shift in the negative images and feelings about Muslims in the minds of children from other religions. They are as human as anyone else.

Similarly, sharing the story of Ambedkar's life is a means to tilt away from the prejudices that come from the caste system.

Games of cooperation, not competition

In school, children go out to play during recess. Not everywhere, but in many places, it is common to see children of one group playing separately from children of other groups. Boys and girls are often seen playing separately. In the plains of Uttarakhand, Bengali children are separate from the Hindi-speaking ones. Children from one area tend to play together, while those from other localities play separately. This leads to relationships characterised by conflict and competition. Who will play in the best spot (for example, in the shade during summer or under the sun in the winter months)? Even when they play together, they are on different teams. All of this further consolidates and strengthens the lines of social division.

A Canadian economist named Matt Lowe conducted an interesting experiment on the games played by social groups (Lowe 2021). He organised a cricket tournament

for the youth of different castes in Uttar Pradesh. First, he distributed advertisements announcing that a tournament would be held throughout the winter months with attractive prizes and inviting applications from players. Then, it was declared that the teams would be formed by Lowe and his associates, not the players.

The applications received were carefully screened, and the players were tested in bowling, fielding, and batting. Teams were formed of members with similar skill levels. Lowe made some teams consisting of players from the same caste and others comprising a mix of castes. Before the tournament started, individual players were asked a few questions without revealing the entire purpose of the experiment. For example, they were shown the full names of some players (from which their caste could be inferred) and asked whom they would choose if they were to form a team, etc. As it often happens, the names of the players they selected were largely from their own castes.

The actual single-caste and mixed-caste teams chosen by Lowe played through the entire tournament season. Everyone in a team worked together and learned to coordinate with each other, trying to defeat other teams through cooperation. At the end of the tournament, Lowe once again asked them similar questions, for instance, among these names, who would you choose for your team; if you were to send anyone for further training, whom would you send; and so on. Now, the responses of some of the players were different compared to earlier. There were no differences in the players who played in teams of the same caste. However, among those who played in mixed teams, there was an increase in the selection of players from other castes. It should not be concluded that the entire mindset of these players and their mental and emotional maps had changed, but a change was certainly visible in them.

The basis of Matt Lowe's experiment was the *Realistic Conflict Theory*. This theory states that people inevitably form groups; it is human nature after all. However, whether they will hate each other or try to harm one another will depend on what the circumstances are and on the perspectives of the individuals involved. The most famous example of this is seen in an experiment conducted by Muzaffar Sharif and his colleagues in America in the 1950s.

Eleven-year-old white boys came to attend a residential summer camp. Sharif divided them into two equal groups. Activities, such as racing and tug-of-war, were done with both groups, in which the victory of one would imply the defeat of the other. The winning team would be applauded while the losing team would be ridiculed. Within a short span of time, unity formed within each group. The children realised that when they helped their group members, they too benefited. Along with this, they began to make fun of the other group and take pleasure in their defeat. The relations between the two groups began to sour very quickly. Within a few days, these children, who did not even know each other earlier, started behaving like old enemies. So much so that one day, during mealtime, things escalated to physical pushing and shoving.

Figure 2. In school, new friendships and fresh realisations emerge in children's minds.

At this point, Sharif put a stop to the competitive activities. A day's rest was given. Then, they were called upon to do some activities in which both groups were forced to cooperate. They were told that the truck bringing food to the camp had broken down and that everyone would have to push it together. Then, the pipe going to the water tank had to be replaced, for which everyone would have to work together. Slowly, the children of both groups became friends, and the conflicts between them dwindled.

Sharif and many other experts believe that when conditions foster competition, hatred and suspicion increase. Conversely, when circumstances make mutual competition advantageous, friendship and love flourish. This involves other factors as well—ideologies have an impact, inequalities matter, the struggle for political power plays a role, and so on. However, there have been thousands of experiments that have supported this fundamental understanding—create conditions that make cooperation beneficial—and millions of educators have adopted this principle to promote *maitri*.

Teachers have organised games in which children from different social groups have cooperated with each other instead of competing against one another. Teachers have deliberately created mixed groups for every classroom activity by ensuring that the children in each group have nearly similar skills; otherwise, cooperation is not possible. But the result has generally been that strong friendships have emerged between children from different social groups.

Impact of social, political, and economic structures

Activities and stories like these alone will not change everything. More often than not, hatred and suspicion between groups are caused by social, economic, and political structures. These issues will not end only by increasing friendships among children. The basis of casteism lies in the fact that some families have more resources while others have less. Their ideologies and customs maintain hierarchies. Competition between different castes persists—for jobs, for respect and so on. The basis of conflict between religions stems from their lack of intermingling, along with differences in their leaders and political systems. Their internal ideologies, functioning and various customs all help them maintain internal unity. When two different religions see each other as rivals for jobs, power, and respect, mutual fear and anger increase. Meanwhile, the basis of patriarchy lies in men's control over resources and their cultural dominance. In a patriarchal system, men and women get caught in competition with each other over who will make decisions and who will obey.

There are multiple causes for hatred, prejudice, and exploitation. Ultimately, only by changing these structures can they be eliminated. But the school still provides us with an opportunity to build relationships that are different from those in society. When new friendships and fresh realisations emerge in children's minds to counter pre-existing prejudices, it has a significant impact. Previously, it seemed that there was only one voice in their hearts; now, a contrarian voice also speaks softly. How the children will resolve this contradiction is ultimately not in the hands of teachers. It is the children who must navigate this. Some will find resolution, while others may not. Some will resolve it in one way, while others may have a different way. Yet, the teachers and the school will have added a new stream to the thousands of streams of their lives—the sweet stream of *maitri*.

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Valuing Teachers Means Supporting Their Growth

Anurag Behar

Teachers grow by watching each other teach. Structured peer observations—where colleagues visit each other's classrooms to focus on specific practices—can be transformative. Debriefing afterwards helps both the observer and the observed to refine their methods.

Education is the foundation of a thriving society, and at the heart of education is the teacher. The role of a teacher is deeply creative, dynamic, and profoundly consequential. Every day, teachers navigate complex classroom realities, adapt to diverse learning needs and human situations, and foster intellectual, social and emotional growth of their students. Given the enormity of this responsibility, it is absurd to assume that a teacher's preparation ends with initial training or occasional workshops.

Even more than other high-stakes professions—medicine, engineering, or scientific research—teaching demands Continuous Professional Development (CPD), because at its core, teaching is a social-human process with all its unpredictability and variability. Simply put, children have different needs, their behaviours are diverse – even that of the same child across time – and they have a large number of other influencers that the teacher has little control over – all of which require a continuous honing and broadening of the capacities of the teacher, which is what CPD must do.

Yet, in many education systems, teacher development is treated as a box-ticking exercise—a sporadic training session here, a mandatory workshop there. This approach is not just inadequate; it reflects a deep misunderstanding of the profession and is detrimental to students.

True professional development must be ongoing, embedded in daily practice, and responsive to teachers' real challenges. It must take multiple forms—collaborative learning, mentorship, classroom-based support, and peer networks—all aimed at helping teachers refine their craft and gain the pride and satisfaction that comes from doing one's job more effectively with each passing day.

Teaching is not a mechanical act of delivering content. It requires creativity and improvisation to address the 'then' situation and evoke deep empathy. A teacher must constantly adapt to new pedagogical approaches, the unique dynamics of their classroom, changing societal expectations and context, and more. Unlike many other professions, teaching is alive with unpredictability – an approach that works with one group of students may fall flat with another; a concept that seems clear may need multiple explanations with different children, and students' curiosities and conflicts open up new learning avenues. This is why one-off training programmes fail. Imagine a surgeon who does not learn with each operation or a musician who never practises. The very notion is ridiculous. Yet, teachers are often expected to function with methods that rely on initial training that may have been theoretical and disconnected from real classroom contexts.

“Teaching is not a mechanical act of delivering content. It requires creativity and improvisation to address the ‘then’ situation and evoke deep empathy.”

Effective CPD must be continuous because teaching itself is a process of perpetual learning. Every interaction with a student, every lesson plan, and every assessment offers feedback that a reflective teacher uses to improve. But this reflection cannot happen in isolation. It must be supported by structured opportunities for growth. Traditional 'training programmes'—where teachers sit through lectures on pedagogy—are often ineffective because they are disconnected from actual classroom practice. Instead, teacher development must be experiential, collaborative, and sustained.

One of the most powerful forms of professional learning is teachers learning from each other. Small, structured groups where educators discuss challenges, share strategies, and reflect on their practice create a culture of collective improvement. These discussions must be facilitated but not overly controlled, allowing organic exchange. When a maths teacher explains how she helped

a student struggling to grasp fractions, or a history teacher shares a debate technique that sparked engagement, these real-world insights are far more valuable than theoretical training.

Workshops are useful only if they are practical and immediately applicable. A workshop on 'active learning' should not just define the concept; it should involve teachers designing activities that they can use the next day. Follow-up is critical—did the new method work? What adjustments were needed? Without this loop of implementation and feedback, workshops remain abstract.

The most effective professional development happens inside the classroom. Instructional coaches or mentor teachers can observe lessons and provide real-time, non-judgmental feedback. Did the questioning technique encourage deeper thinking? Were all students engaged? Such support must be constructive, not evaluative, fostering a growth mindset rather than fear of criticism.

Teachers grow by observing one another teach. Structured peer observations—where colleagues visit each other's classrooms to focus on specific practices—can be transformative. Debriefing afterwards helps both the observer and the observed to refine their methods. Teachers should be part of broader networks—within their school, across schools, or even digitally. Platforms where educators exchange ideas, discuss research and seek advice create a culture of continuous learning. A physics teacher in a rural school should have access to the same innovative practices as one in an urban school.

A teacher's sense of pride does not come from hollow praise or ceremonial awards. It comes from the quiet confidence in doing their job well. When a teacher sees a struggling student finally understand a concept, when a lesson goes exceptionally well, when former students return to express gratitude—these are the moments that sustain educators. But these moments are not accidental. They result from refined skill, experimentation, and relentless improvement. If a teacher feels stagnant—repeating the same lessons year after year without growth—their motivation erodes. Conversely, when they see themselves evolving, their engagement deepens.

This is why professional development must be intrinsic to the teaching profession, not an add-on. Schools must create time and structures for CPD, recognising it as essential, not optional. Policymakers must move beyond tokenistic training and invest in long-term, embedded support systems.

When teachers grow, students thrive. A teacher who continuously hones their craft fosters deeper understanding, critical thinking, and curiosity in their students. Over time, this shapes not just individual lives but entire communities. Consider this: every professional—doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs—was once shaped by teachers. If we want a society of lifelong learners, innovators, and thoughtful citizens, we must start by valuing the people who nurture these qualities. And valuing teachers means supporting their growth at every stage of their careers.

Figure 1. One of the most powerful forms of professional learning is teachers learning from each other.

> **When a maths teacher explains how she helped a student struggling to grasp fractions, or a history teacher shares a debate technique that sparked engagement, these real-world insights are far more valuable than theoretical training.**

The transformation needed is systemic. It requires schools and school systems to dedicate time for collaborative teacher learning, governments to prioritise CPD in policy and budgets, teacher education institutions to shift from one-time certification to sustained engagement, and society to recognise teaching as a dynamic, intellectual profession. Teachers are not just transmitters of knowledge; they are intellectuals, mentors, and lifelong learners themselves. Their development cannot be an afterthought. It must be continuous, meaningful, and woven into the very fabric of education. Only then can we truly do justice to their role; and only then can we build the future our children deserve.

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Education and Teachers | The Need to Understand Ground Realities

Gautam Pandey

The first and foremost step towards bringing about positive change in education is one's own thorough preparation. This preparation has two parts. The first is building connections with teachers, children, parents, and the community, and understanding them and their contexts, while the second is academic preparation. For everyone engaged in education, whether they are part of the government system or a non-government support structure, such preparation is essential. This article is about this preparation and the clarity of understanding that must come with it.

There are many people working in the field of education who are not teachers themselves but visit schools to support teachers, let us call them 'supporting teachers'. What is their preparation for this? What are the schools' expectations of them, and what expectations do they have from schools? These are some fundamental and crucial questions, especially for those who intend to work within the government education system, whether as government officials or through non-governmental organisations.

We can broadly classify people who are in this field into two categories. The first category comprises government officials, including education officers at various levels, such as Block Resource Coordinators (BRCs), Cluster Resource Coordinators (CRCs), and those associated with District Institutes for Education and Training (DIETs). The second group consists of those (supporting teachers) from voluntary organisations who visit schools and wish to support teachers in their teaching-learning efforts. Both categories of people work towards improving education in government schools. But the question remains: Is there clarity of purpose when they visit schools? Here, I will present some points about the preparation of both these categories of people, as well as the expectations of schools from them.

For meaningful change in education by focusing on government schools, preparation has two important parts. The first is connecting with and understanding teachers,

Figure 1. To support a school, it is important to understand its ground realities closely.

children, parents, and the community. This includes understanding their economic and social circumstances, their culture and their language, among other things. Such an understanding will provide the sensitivity, the appropriate language, and approach through which meaningful communication can be established with them. Remember: meaningful communication that is mutual and not one that imposes one's point of view.

> **The first step to bring change in education is not about trying to change others, but to prepare oneself.**

The second part is academic preparation. If you truly want to work effectively in this field and make an impact, then you must first strengthen your own subject matter knowledge and then learn how to teach and explain it to others.

The first step in bringing change in education is not about trying to change others, but to prepare oneself. This is especially important for those who are new and just entering this field. It is critical that they experience the ground realities of schools themselves.

One needs to know and understand schools from the inside. This cannot be achieved through a few visits or meetings. One must stay and teach for an extended period in at least three types of schools because this experience will be worthwhile only if one works in a variety of schools. One of these can be, say, a Navodaya Vidyalaya, a model school, or an inspiring government school. The second can be an average-performing state school. And finally, a school that people usually dismiss, saying, 'Nothing happens here!'

In reality, it takes more than six months to understand any school in depth. I am not saying every person must teach for six or seven months in each of these three types of schools. If one can, it is excellent. If doing this is not possible, then at least two to three months of continuous teaching in one such school is essential.

You will then see that some teachers are so committed that wherever they go, they connect with children, teach, and keep experimenting with new things. They are constantly striving to learn and teach. On the other hand, you will also find teachers who, year after year, do the same things; nothing changes; no matter how hard you try, they will not change. What is the reason for this difference?

There are deeper reasons behind the attitude of the latter set of teachers that must be understood. How is their self-confidence? What is their family and social situation like? What are their attitudes and beliefs, especially regarding caste, religion, gender, and marginalised communities? For instance, what is their attitude towards women colleagues? How is their behaviour towards the poor, marginalised, and Dalit children in their own school? Do they genuinely believe that these children can learn and progress? Or, deep down, do they consider them weak, inferior, and 'incapable'—a hidden belief that reflects in their behaviour, teaching methods, and communication. Government schools are where children from disadvantaged sections study. In such a scenario, the deeper a teacher's or colleague's understanding of caste, class, gender, and society, the more effective their role will be.

Now, let us talk about students. In the same classroom, some children are active, answer questions, and can read and write, while others remain silent, sit at the back of the classroom, and perhaps do not learn much at all. Yet, they come to school every day.

However, many times, comments are made among teachers or colleagues about these children: 'They come just to eat the food', 'They cannot learn', 'They are slow' and so on. At times, these comments are made in front of the children themselves, which is humiliating.

In reality, education is a living process that emerges from a continuous dialogue between teachers and students, whether inside the classroom or in any corner of the school. Education is what takes place in this relationship. If we do not understand this fundamental relationship, this living bond, then no matter how good our plans are, they will not have a real impact on the ground.

When we try to truly understand a child, we need to know why they do not like attending classes. Did they have food before coming to school? Did they eat the night before? Perhaps something happened on the way? Were they teased, threatened, hit, or insulted? It could be that they have walked a long distance to reach school. How much do we know about them? As teachers, it is our responsibility to thoroughly understand their circumstances. So, while observing them, it is important to go beyond external displays of behaviours—who answers questions and who remains silent, who listens attentively and who sits withdrawn, who speaks a lot and who does not speak at all—to try and understand the reasons behind these.

For those of us who come from outside and wish to work in this field, even if not as teachers but as friendly supporting teachers or on-site resource persons, some fundamentals are essential:

- Know your subject deeply and develop the ability to explain it to others in simple, clear, and effective ways.
- Build the capacity to communicate with others and to listen with patience, understanding, and sensitivity.

> **While observing children—who answers questions and who remains silent, who listens attentively and who sits withdrawn, who speaks a lot and who does not speak at all—it is important to go beyond these external behaviours to try and understand the reasons behind these.**

- Develop an understanding of schools, and the students—their learning processes and their contexts. Teach them, spend some time in classrooms with them, and try to understand their backgrounds.
- Try to understand the circumstances of the school and the teachers, too. It is essential to understand their families and social backgrounds, their mindsets, behaviour, challenges, and the potential that exists in them.

If you do all this, you will be able to answer the question: What am I going to do in school when I go there? This question will arise only when one has a deep understanding and adequate preparation.

Anyone supporting the education system must also understand the basis and the objectives with which the textbooks used in the school have been selected. These objectives are usually stated clearly at the beginning of the textbooks. If not, they are certain to be found in the curriculum documents. These documents are primarily for teachers, but those who help them must also read them.

It is often seen that teachers merely read the lessons in the textbook that are to be taught to the children. But the 'preface' at the beginning of nearly every book is written for teachers. Nowadays, it is even published under the clear heading 'For Teachers'. However, unfortunately, it is often ignored. If teachers read it, they will understand why the lessons were chosen, how they are structured, and what competencies they are meant to develop in children. While visiting schools, one can have informal discussions with teachers about this, so that the important link missed due to their busy schedules can be restored. However, this is possible only when supporting teachers themselves have such an understanding.

Now, let us come to teaching methods. A lesson can be taught in many ways. Education experts can suggest some effective methods based on certain principles. However, it is not necessary that the same methods will work in every context. Everyone has their own experiences and understanding. They can develop their own methods suited to their contexts. Children's backgrounds, their learning styles, and supporting teachers' own understanding of subjects can help them develop their own methods.

Now, let us talk about those teachers who frequently seek assistance from their supporting teachers, 'I keep trying, but some children still do not learn. What should I do?' At times, those coming from outside, like us, are also asked for help: 'Sir, please suggest another approach.'

It is important that outsiders do not rush to give instant solutions to teachers' challenges. First, they must understand the challenges properly, and then, along with the teacher, try to find solutions in the context of that school and community. Such solutions will be more sustainable and acceptable, as they will be suggested by teachers themselves.

However, to do this, supporting teachers should themselves know some experience- or evidence-based approaches. If they have their own work experience, it is most effective. For example, if they say to the teacher, 'Sir, when I was working in a village, I faced the same problem. None of the children there could learn anything, either through my first or second method. Then I tried a third and fourth method, and they finally understood.' Sharing

Figure 2. Collaborating with teachers to explore new ways of learning is also a form of supporting them.

such real experiences carries weight. The authenticity and practicality of experience affect teachers. They get a few more ideas and think, 'Let me try these methods as well.'

Teachers come from the same background as we do. Sometimes, some very important things are neglected. As conscious supporters, we can remind them of these.

One important point remains: How do teaching methods develop? Can someone with only a superficial understanding of a subject teach it in multiple ways? This is not possible. Only when you understand your subject thoroughly, understand why specific content has been included in the textbook, and what is expected from it, can you successfully teach it in multiple ways. That is why it is imperative that both teachers and their supporting teachers have sound subject knowledge. Learning for oneself never ends. They must keep reading about their subjects because, without being aware of new knowledge in the subject, they can neither do justice to its content nor create new ways of teaching-learning.

> **Only when you understand your subject thoroughly, understand why specific content has been included in the textbook, and what is expected from it, can you successfully teach it in multiple ways.**

Now, let us talk about government functionaries from the district to the school level, who have long been associated with school education and work in supportive roles towards quality school education. Their work is mainly administrative and, therefore, should be seen as distinct from direct teaching. For example, the role of a CRC (Cluster Resource Coordinator) or *Janshikshak* is not to teach children, but to organise meetings for teachers, provide academic support, collect school data and send it to the Block or District Resource Centre. Often, their role remains limited to the administrative level, while academic duties and academic support remain neglected.

Another crucial point to understand is that functionaries are not meant to teach subjects themselves. For example, a CRC is not expected to teach in classrooms. Their role is to organise academic dialogue, create a collaborative space for teachers, and foster collective thinking. Since they have been teachers themselves, they may be able to teach, but their main role is to prepare the platform for teaching-learning and enable the space for dialogue.

A positive attitude and outlook towards schools and teachers is important for everyone. Even if an official stays in a school for just an hour, they can observe many positive things. For instance, cleanliness in the school, children's uniforms, the quality of the mid-day meal, a beautiful kitchen garden created by children in the school compound, and so on.

Government school teachers are usually posted in remote villages. They, too, have family lives and challenges, but no one sees that or asks them about their lives. In such a situation, one simple sentence like, 'You are doing good work. The children's circumstances are difficult, but you are making sincere efforts,' from an official can be the greatest motivation for a teacher.

What is needed is for officials to try and understand the conditions at the school during their visits. For instance, where the school is located, what kind of families send their children there, what their circumstances are, and so on. At the same time, they should try to understand the teachers and their family situations. Very often, they live far away from their hometowns or villages, often without accommodation, and do not know the local language. Working in such places is very challenging, especially for women teachers who face many additional difficulties ranging from access to clean toilets to personal safety. If officials cannot do much about their problems, the least they can do is encourage the teachers to stay there, if they consider the teacher as the most important person in their department.

The main work of the education department is to provide education, and it is the teachers who actually do this. Teachers, despite all adverse circumstances, are engaged in the department's most important work, and hence they must be appreciated. If officials appreciate teachers' work, understand their problems, and show empathy, much change is possible. If they criticise, it should be constructive, polite, and solution-oriented. Not just criticism, but a spirit of cooperation and support is what can bring real change in the education system.

This article is based on a conversation between Gautam Pandey and Siddharth Kumar Jain.

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

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Teachers Shape Individuals

Rishikesh BS

Teachers truly shape the future of our children - and, therefore, the future of our nation. It is because of this noblest role that the teacher in India was the most respected member of society. Only the very best and most learned became teachers.[1]

Figure 1. Children look up to teachers not only to learn but also for support, guidance and care during their early years.

As Gowri helped her 10-year-old daughter with her maths homework, she was reminded of her primary school teacher, Yasmeen Miss. It was because of her that Gowri not only overcame her fear of numbers but went on to complete her postgraduate degree in maths. Her maths teacher had done much more than teach maths – she had given the confidence to Gowri that girls are as good as boys with numbers (contrary to what everyone else around her seemed to believe). Yasmeen Miss had encouraged her to even think of maths as a career option. She had done all this with a lot of patience by slowly building Gowri's confidence through classes I to IV.

When Anjan gets stuck at any point while coding, D'Souza Ma'am comes to his mind – his go-to person all through school. She was his science teacher in classes VI and VII. Whenever a new concept was introduced, Anjan would feel overwhelmed, and because of this, he would not be able to grasp it properly. When D'Souza Ma'am realised this, she started the practice of spending 15 minutes with him during the lunch break. During this time, she would patiently explain the new concept to him. A calm mind, she would say, is the first step, and the rest is about focusing on the problem. This mantra remained with Anjan even as he became a successful coder. The mentorship of his teacher deepened his interest in science, and he went on to pursue an engineering degree. Anytime Anjan was in a difficult situation, it was his science teacher's gentle mentoring and guiding words that came to his mind.

> **"At many points in our lives, we look back at our early life and, often, there is a teacher whose wise words or caring actions come to mind and help us find the way out of our problems"**

As she wrote her essay as part of her LLB coursework, Richa struggled to connect her law course with the issues people face in society. Immediately, her social studies

teacher, Ananthraman sir, came to her mind. He was the one who had instilled in her the desire to look at the problems people face, because of which she had chosen to study law after school. The stories Ananth sir shared in social studies in classes VI, VII & VIII were not only inspirational but also raised many questions, such as why there is so much disparity or discrimination in society; why do some people always remain poor; what are our duties and responsibilities as citizens, etc.?

These class discussions over three years of middle school came pouring back into Richa's mind, and soon enough she was able to get the disciplinary connections across law and societal issues for her essay. Silently, she thanked Ananth sir, who went beyond textbooks to introduce real-life conflicts and situations to make his students feel deeply about the various issues that social science presents.

These are just a few of the many such illustrations that we hear from colleagues, friends and family. Each of the above indicates that at many points in our lives, be it as a parent, an early-career employee or a university student, whenever we are faced with tough challenges, we look back at our early life and, often, there is a teacher whose wise words or caring actions come to mind and help us find the way out of our problems. Many times, we just recollect early school memories and cannot but think and be grateful for the teachers who have been supportive, patient, pardoning mistakes and, most importantly, being kind.

Why is it that a teacher's act of many years ago stays in our mind decades into our adult life? Psychologists and neuroscientists have scientific explanations, but as teachers, it is clear to us that children in school look up to us not only to learn but also for support, guidance and care during their early years.

School education, particularly elementary education (classes I to VIII), is fundamental in many respects. Not only is it the foundational platform to construct our learning, but it also provides the ingredients that shape our identities and the basic skillsets to deal with life's complexities, which often include the values our teachers themselves demonstrate. Teachers, therefore, play a role that is far greater than 'completing the syllabus' year after year.

There is nothing new in teachers shaping individuals. In ancient and medieval societies, the elite had teachers for their children to help them get a holistic education. However, since the establishment of mass primary schooling a few centuries ago, beginning in Prussia in the latter half of the eighteenth century, it spread across Europe and through the colonialism route to its colonies across the world. Since the last few decades, most countries across the world have made school education, particularly up to the elementary level, compulsory and a fundamental right of every individual. In India, we arrived at this landmark after nearly a 100-year struggle – from the time Gopal Krishna Gokhale petitioned the British Government of India in 1910 to the introduction of compulsory education through the landmark legislation – Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, also known as the Right to Education (RTE) Act. This guarantees free and compulsory education to children between the ages of 6 and 14 years.

> **Teachers have been bestowed with the greatest of responsibilities in modern society – that of facilitating the development of individuals**

Shaping identities at each stage

Given the criticality of school education in an individual's life, we, who have the opportunity to contribute to this domain, must consider ourselves fortunate as we have been bestowed with the greatest of responsibilities in modern society – that of facilitating the development of individuals. This development occurs across multiple stages of school education, and the facilitation differs at each stage, but also has some fundamental principles that govern all the stages equally.

The draft NEP 2019 (Kasturirangan Committee Report 2019) states that, 'educational opportunity is created when students and teachers engage in purposeful learning experiences that help students develop in various ways.' The document articulates the development that is expected at each stage and the appropriate pedagogy aligned to it to ensure the optimum progress of each student. Teachers are the experts who create these experiences differently at different stages of a student's school life. If we are where we are today as a society, the contribution of every teacher is paramount in this developmental journey. The gaps that exist are those that are there despite what teachers have accomplished in challenging circumstances.

Though the role of a teacher comes with multiple challenges, the complete satisfaction that a teacher derives after a fruitful engagement with their students is an experience that is hard to describe and one that every teacher desires all the time. To this end, the teacher goes beyond the call of duty – beyond the call of their teaching role. This manifests differently at different stages of school education.

Figure 2. All teachers are significant contributors to the well-rounded and holistic development of their students.

At the Foundational Stage, where children between ages 3 and 8 years are enrolled, teachers primarily use 'play' to engage with these students as they focus on multiple aspects, 'Physical Development, Socio-emotional-ethical Development, Cognitive Development, Language and Literacy Development, Aesthetic and Cultural Development' as represented in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023. A good teacher uses play-based pedagogy with an 'emphasis on nurturing and caring relationships focusing on all of the above as well as developing foundational capacities in literacy and numeracy.' (NCF 2023). Thousands of teachers are daily engaged in this manner, ensuring that children enrolled in schools across India are provided with the required foundations.

The next stage of school education, as per NEP 2020, is the **Preparatory Stage** – the stage corresponding to classes III to V, where NCF states that the pedagogy should be 'activity and discovery-based, gradually encouraging students to be active within a formal classroom arrangement'. There are lakhs of teachers across the country who help students at this stage to get adequately prepared for the middle classes, irrespective of how strong the Foundational Stage has been for them. The biggest challenge for teachers at this stage is that students arrive at this stage with varying levels of learning. It is an extraordinarily difficult task to ensure that students grasp foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) and then go on to get prepared to tackle concepts across middle and high school. It is an enormous responsibility that teachers at this stage take upon themselves to accomplish.

The last three years that make up the elementary level are called the 'Middle School' in the NEP 2020. This is the stage where disciplinary boundaries become stronger, and there is a specific set of subjects that students study, and many abstract concepts are presented across the syllabi. Till this stage, teachers engage with students on topics across all subjects. However, at this stage, subject teachers are the key, given the deeper concepts that the syllabus in each subject presents. The vast number of high-quality teachers ensures that there is 'a balance of direct instruction and opportunities for exploration and inquiry' (NCF 2023).

The teachers focus on students gaining 'conceptual development and becoming fluent in methods of inquiry' as stated in the NCF. This pedagogic effort requires a professional approach that is of the highest quality, which a large number of teachers in our country display at all times. It is these teachers who guarantee the fundamental right of every child in the country to receive high-quality elementary education as stated in the RTE Act.

All teachers, irrespective of the stage of school education they teach, are significant contributors to the well-rounded and holistic development of their students. Every teacher I know wears this 'badge of honour' with pride, and they show other stakeholders that the desire to perform this role with the highest integrity and uphold values that are important for human civilisation is the

> **There are lakhs of teachers across the country who help students at the Preperatory Stage get adequately prepared for the middle classes, irrespective of how strong their foundational stage has been.**

sole motivation to do so. This exemplary behaviour is a very good example of what the Dutch popular historian, Rutger Bregman, calls 'moral ambition' in his latest book by the same name. This is the ambition not merely to succeed for one's own sake, but to make a difference to the world we live in. Finally, this is what most teachers I have met have, and that which every stakeholder working in elementary education ought to have!

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The Journey of 25 Issues of Pathshala Bheetar Aur Bahar

Gurbachan Singh

This is the 25th issue of *Pathshala Bheetar Aur Bahar*. Needless to say, the biggest contribution in this journey has been that of its readers and writers. At a time when we often hear about the continuously shrinking culture of reading and writing, the steadfast journey of this academic magazine is indeed heartening.

Looking back, I recall the intense debates and discussions that preceded the publication of the first issue, where we deliberated on the magazine's relevance and purpose.

The journey of Pathshala began in July 2018, intending to provide quality academic reference material to school teachers, educators and others interested in the field of education. At the same time, it sought to serve as a forum for individuals and institutions engaged in or concerned with education, offering them a space to share their experiences. In doing so, it worked to deepen and lend authenticity to the discourse on education. One of its broader goals has been to encourage the culture of reading and writing among those working in the field of education.

In the beginning, it was decided that the magazine would be published biannually, and accordingly, the first four issues were published at six-month intervals. The magazine carried articles on various topics related to school education. On the one hand, it featured research-based, theoretical and practice-oriented writings, while on the other, subject-specific articles on the teaching of language, mathematics, science and social studies.

Change has been part of the journey

After the publication of four issues, feedback was sought from readers about the magazine and its contents. Based on the suggestions, certain changes were made in the nature, format and presentation of the articles. The number of pages was reduced while the frequency of issues was increased. Instead of 200 pages published biannually, it became a 100-page quarterly magazine, with four issues a year. Articles were shortened, and efforts were made to make them simpler and more reader-friendly. To make the magazine more useful, members with direct field experience in schools were included in the editorial team.

The magazine then began publishing analytical articles written with reflective and critical perspectives on various aspects of elementary education. These writings balanced theory with real experiences, making them easy for teachers to understand and apply in classrooms, where positive changes soon became visible in their practices.

At the same time, efforts were made to provide opportunities to teachers and education practitioners working at the grassroots level to document their own experiences by adding depth and dimension. The magazine thus became a medium for enhancing the professional capacities of teachers and teacher educators, providing them with opportunities to read, reflect and engage in dialogue.

Articles in Pathshala have included subject areas in language, mathematics, science, social studies and arts education, exploring perspectives, theories, objectives, teaching-learning methods, and experiences in each discipline.

Currently, greater emphasis has been placed on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and the professional development of teachers. Aspects of language teaching, such as creative writing, teacher diaries, wall magazines, multilingualism and the creation of print-rich environments, have also become part of the content.

Alongside subject-focused content, the magazine has engaged with broader issues in education, including assessments and examinations, the use of local and home languages as mediums of instruction, and the promotion of constitutional values, such as inclusion, fraternity, equality, and gender equity. It has also carried articles on developing scientific temper, fostering mathematical reasoning, and working with text-based questions. Further, *Pathshala* has documented school and field-based activities, summer camps, morning assembly, *Bal Sabhas, Bal Shodh Melas*, voluntary teacher forums, and educational excursions.

Pathshala's connection with its readers and its usefulness

Regular discussions with teachers and colleagues in the field revealed that if the reading material and articles were closely connected to their work, they would certainly be read and used in multiple ways. Teachers not only read these articles but also use them in workshops and voluntary teacher groups. Discussions on articles, sharing of experiences related to them, and reflections on changes implemented in classroom processes after reading them became part of these interactions.

Teachers reported that in subject-based workshops organised by institutions, *Pathshala* articles are used to develop understanding through reading and dialogue, which in turn, enhanced teaching-learning processes. This was seen in the '*Pathak Chashma*' column, which is now called 'We've got Mail', in which readers share their feedback.

For instance, after reading the 'Library Special' issue, Barkha Sharma, a teacher at Primary School, Changorabhata West, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, wrote:

> *'It occurred to me that to awaken children's interest in reading and to connect them to books, I should open a Muskaan[1] Library in my school, bring out the books locked in cupboards and provide children with opportunities to use them regularly. To further develop interest in reading and writing among children, I will also dedicate one library period in my class.'* Issue 20

Similarly, the 'Inclusive Education Special' issue helped readers develop a deeper understanding of inclusion. They became aware of the subtle forms of exclusion faced by children from disadvantaged groups. Approaching the issue with empathy and human dignity, they were able to grasp practical measures to include excluded children and relate these strategies to their own classroom and surroundings.

The comments expressed by readers in the 'letters' section highlight the significance of the 'Inclusive Education Special' issue:

> *'Reading the article "Menstruation in girls and its relation to learning" made me realise that we tend to view inclusion only in the context of children with special needs, while a large group of seemingly typical students also face various challenges. Without addressing these, the idea of inclusion will remain incomplete.' Anil Singh, Teacher Educator, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh,* Issue 23

> *'The Inclusive Education Special issue compels us to consider inclusion in its entirety. Articles such as "Inclusion at Enrolment Level is Not Enough" and "Everyone Has an Equal Right to Learn" were insightful.' Rani Kumari, Teacher, Darbhanga, Bihar,* Issue 23

Several critical reflections from readers have been received on many *Pathshala* articles. These reflections indicate readers' attachment to the magazine and its usefulness. Furthermore, these responses also help the editorial team understand the kind of content readers seek. Some examples are presented below:

> *'I am not a school teacher, yet I regularly read all the articles of Pathshala. This magazine does not merely offer articles to read but gives readers a new perspective, enabling them to see things differently and helping those engaged in teaching children to do their work more effectively.' Tripti Yadav, Anganwadi teacher, Sagar, Madhya Pradesh,* Issue 19

> *'Reading the article "Madam, My Answer is Correct!" changed my perspective as a teacher. I realised that asking questions is a natural and essential part of the process of learning and knowledge construction. It must have a place in the classroom. We need to be attentive to children's curiosity.' Vishnu Kumar, Head Teacher, Jaipur, Rajasthan,* Issue 12

> *'I am a regular reader of Pathshala. The magazine provides many pathways to address challenges that arise during teaching-learning with children.' Pramila Bhati, Teacher, Jaipur, Rajasthan,* Issue 16

> *'The article "Reading, Beyond Alphabets and Syllables" highlighted the importance of reading skills in a very simple manner, presenting it as a vivid portrayal of our classroom experiences.' Arti Bahuguna, Teacher, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand,* Issue 16

Loosening the rigid notions in education

Readers' comments on 'special' issues also reflect that readers were able to reconsider and change their pre-conceived notions and beliefs about educational issues. Similar entrenched notions exist regarding other topics and processes, which often pose challenges in educational discussions, writing and classroom practices. Children's

learning, children from marginalised communities, girls' education, mathematics teaching, inclusion of children with disabilities, equality in education, theatre in education, print-rich environments and children's literature are some such issues.

Established notions often create problems in teaching and learning. Addressing these through dialogue is part of the responsibility of *Pathshala*. There are many narratives and cases in the articles of the magazine that attempt to loosen these notions through discussion. Here is an example:

> *'Before sharing my experience, I want to clarify that presenting any concept or lesson in the form of a play is not "Theatre in Education". I say this because during school monitoring, I found that teachers were teaching stories, poems and travelogues from the Hindi textbook by converting them into plays and claiming that they were using "Theatre in Education" as a pedagogical tool.*

Figure 2. A glimpse of some previous issues.

> *Similarly, in environmental science classes, while teaching water cycles, force and energy, plays were enacted, and it was said that "Theatre in Education" was being used to clarify concepts.*
>
> *I wish to emphasise that choosing a few children from the class, giving them dialogues related to the text, asking them to memorise and present before the class, is not in any way "Theatre in Education".'* Issue 5

Ongoing efforts to make the magazine better

The journey from the 1st to the 21st issue has been significant in terms of connecting with readers. Based on these experiences and the expectations of both the institution and its readership, further changes were introduced from the 22nd issue in the nature, purpose, format, presentation and reach of the articles. These changes are also visible in this, the 25th issue.

The magazine's primary focus is now on the Foundational Stage. To expand its reach, it is being published in three languages, first in Hindi, followed by translations into English and Kannada. This has enabled knowledge and understanding gained by authors from one linguistic and geographical region to reach readers in others. This exchange of knowledge and experiences has expanded the possibilities for richer and deeper dialogue. In its new form, the magazine's focus and reach are pan-India. Most of the content is based on the experiences of teachers and teacher educators, aligning closely with the principles outlined in NEP 2020, NCF-FS 2022 and NCF-SE 2023. Nearly all content is carefully selected with classroom use in mind, ensuring that it contributes meaningfully to teachers' professional development.

Pathshala is now printed in 60 colour pages, making it visually more attractive and handy. New columns, such as 'Pages from Teachers' Diaries', 'Teachers Inspiring Hope', 'In the Spotlight', 'In the Company of Books' and 'Let's do Some Activities' have been introduced, leading to a significant increase in experiential writing by teachers.

Challenges and solutions

One major challenge was the limited availability of quality articles despite repeated efforts to solicit contributions. As a result, the magazine was often published weeks later than scheduled, creating hurdles in timely delivery to readers. Another challenge was the limited availability of quality articles in certain curricular areas, such as mathematics, science and social studies.

The magazine has now overcome this challenge. All issues of *Pathshala* are not only being published on schedule but are also reaching subscribers regularly. The inflow of articles has increased significantly, and there has been an expansion in terms of both the number and geographical reach of writers and readers. The trilingual publication of the magazine has also contributed to this growth. As a result, readership continues to rise steadily, and contributions are now

coming in from across the country. For instance, this issue includes teaching experiences shared by teachers from 13 different states. To ensure that teachers who are performing effectively in classrooms can document their experiences accurately, efforts are also being made to conduct writing workshops aimed at encouraging and supporting them in their writing.

Professional development and reflective writing by teachers

Training programmes for teachers' professional development usually lack space for 'experiential writing' and have no systematic plan for it. As a result, trainee teachers often struggle to feel connected to these training sessions.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 also emphasises that teachers' professional development requires different types of content at different stages of their growth. This content should be comprehensive, relevant, classroom-related and address challenges faced by teachers. Teachers should constantly engage in their professional development through multiple means, and collaborative learning platforms must be made available to them.

The platform of *Pathshala* and the experience-based articles published in it contribute, in their own way, to meeting these expectations. The effort of the magazine has always been to ensure that as many teachers and resource persons as possible continue writing about their rich experiences and share them through *Pathshala* with the wider community of aware teachers.

In the process of inviting articles for *Pathshala*, authors are encouraged to elaborate on their concrete experiences with examples and evidence. The editorial team reviews these articles and also provides constructive feedback to help improve them. Teachers themselves also revisit their articles, reflect on nuances of their teaching and writing and make necessary changes. When other teachers read these, they learn from them and also reflect on their own teaching practices. This creates opportunities for peer learning.

Experiential writing gives teachers a critical lens through which to examine their teaching. They gain deeper insights into the challenges and problems they face and are able to find solutions by refining their methods. It is through such reflective practices in teaching and writing that the journey toward becoming a thoughtful professional teacher begins.

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[1]Muskaan is a Bhopal-based voluntary organisation. www.muskaan.org

Translated from Hindi. *Translator: Shabnam Sengupta* *Vetter: Bhumika Popli*

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Riddles: A fun way for children to learn

Dharmpal Gangwar

During library time/period, it is routine for students and teachers to have conversations about poems and stories. This helps build children's interest in reading. Along with this, we also engage in activities centred on non-fiction books, where children learn to create useful items from discarded or everyday household items.

It occurred to me that we could also include riddles in these sessions. When children solve riddles, compile and write them down, it helps develop their language skills as they guess and reason. They listen attentively and answer by visualising things in new and creative ways. This enhances their logical and thinking skills and also introduces them to new forms of language. Solving riddles becomes a joyful educational activity for them. Usually, riddles are in the form of questions or statements in which the meaning of a word is hidden. However, 'riddle poetry' has its own charm – children read poems and solve the riddles hidden in them.

For this activity, we chose the book, *Boojho-Boojho*, written by Rambachan Singh 'Anand', illustrated by Subhash Vyam and published by Eklavya.

The children sat in a circle in the library, and we began talking about the book. I asked them, 'Do people at your home ask riddles?' Hearing this, the children got excited and started firing riddles one after another. I said, 'Wait, wait! Look, I have a book full of interesting riddles written as poems.' I asked the children to look at the pictures in the book carefully. I turned each page and showed them the illustrations, helping them recognise what they saw. I told them that the answers to the riddles were hidden in the poems. I read one of the poems aloud and, in the manner of thinking of an answer—placing my index finger on my forehead — I sang it out. The children repeated after me. The riddle poem (original in Hindi) was like this:

A ploughman without a plough,
Guess, guess, guess!
Strain your brain and figure it out!

A ploughman without a plough
Still tills the field somehow.
Breaking clumps, softening the land,
He works with no tools in hand.

He looks a bit like a snake,
But no poison does he make.
A soft brown ribbon, thin and neat,
He lives on soil that he eats.

With eight hearts inside,
It lives with royal pride.
Born from an egg, both he and she,
One creature, two roles, as we see.

I twist and turn, I gently squirm,
Touched it, the finger got wet!
Who, who…?

I asked the children, 'Use your brains and tell me, what is it?' The children kept thinking, but they could not guess the answer. So, we tried to understand each line of the poem carefully. 'It tills the fields, eats the soil', etc. The line about 'having eight hearts' confused them a lot, as to who could have eight hearts. Finally, another hint was revealed -- the answer is also hidden in the last word of the line just before the final two lines of the poem. The answer is a rhyming word for this last word.

Once again, I showed them the pictures by turning the pages. This time, one child recognised it. Excitedly, he shouted, 'Earthworm!' I said, 'Absolutely correct!' In the same way, we read all 22 riddle poems from the book. Slowly, the children came up with their own ways of solving the riddles and continued giving answers. The children had a lot of fun.

After the session, I asked them, 'Did you enjoy this book more or the storybooks?' Many children quickly replied that they were enjoying this book a lot. Some children said they like both kinds of books. When I asked, 'What did you like about this book?' Nizarish replied, 'I liked that the answers are hidden in the riddles themselves. We can sing riddles like poems, and this makes us put our brains to good use.' Now, I told the children that the next day they should bring riddles from their homes, the ones which are commonly told in their families.

The next day, the children gathered in the library at the scheduled time. Most of the children brought riddles they had written at home. In all, they were able to discover more than a hundred riddles that were commonly spoken in the village. Sitting in a circle, they took turns asking their riddles while others tried to answer them. When children could not guess the answer, they would ask for hints. Then everyone would think again and try to answer.

In this way, we played many rounds. In the end, we chose some interesting riddles, which the children wrote on chart paper and put them up on the display board. Later, Deepika said, 'Let us sit here again tomorrow. I do not like sitting in class as much.' Sohail said, 'These two days were so much fun! Sir, please teach us from books like this!'

While working with this riddle book, the children collected many riddles from their homes and discussed them. This gave them the chance to explore their local folk traditions and see the richness of their cultural heritage.

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Pragya Vetter: Bhumika Popli

Exams too can be fun!

Vaishali Gedam

I wrote the word 'Exam' on the blackboard and asked my students, 'What should we have the exam on?'

The children began to think.

I said, 'Let's have an exam on classification.' I had already decided that in my mind.

'Yes, teacher!' The children were excited.

All the children from classes I-V knew the word 'classification', and many of them understood the concept. On the blackboard, I wrote: Task – Classify.

Below that, I listed the names of animals, mixing the names of domestic and wild animals.

I formed two groups of students, making sure that each group had children from classes I-V. Each group sat in a circle.

On the other side of the blackboard, I wrote the rules:

- The task must be done together.
- The group must discuss.
- Both groups must pass.
- The work must look neat and beautiful.

Beyond that, I did not explain the question or the task. What to do and how to do it—I left it to them. I only read the rules out loud to highlight them since those were the criteria for passing, and it was important for the children to know them clearly.

The students who could read, read the question from the board; some came to me seeking clarification. I gently told them, 'No one is allowed to talk to me. Don't ask me anything. Talk to each other. Ask each other. Discuss.'

Still, Shreya, Limra, Sakshi, and Arjun kept trying to talk to me instead of their groups.

'Teacher, we have to make six groups, right?' said Sakshi.

Seeing thirteen animal names on the board, Shreya said, 'We need to make thirteen groups.'

Limra said, 'We need to make six groups.'

I said, 'If you talk to me, you'll fail. If you talk to each other, you'll pass.'

That finally got them to stop coming to me. They turned to their groupmates and started talking.

I watched with great joy. They had already learned the concept of classification through direct experience and the demonstration method three months ago. While introducing this concept, I simply told the children, 'Go outside and bring some leaves, flowers, stones, and twigs.' After they brought the items, I asked them to separate them, and that is how the learning of classification began. Then, the children themselves suggested further topics for classification.

They demonstrated classification based on the hair and clothes of their classmates. Later, the children independently classified utensils from their kitchen and groceries bought from the market using illustrations. After that, they classified the lessons from the Bal Bharati textbook. How can children possibly forget a concept that they have learned so thoroughly and proactively!

As they began discussing with each other, even the younger ones from classes I and II could relate to the word 'classification'. The ten-to-twelve-day learning journey came back to them. Slowly, their discussions became clearer.

They were speaking in the Gondi language, and I began hearing words like 'hunter,' 'leaf-eater,' etc. I realised that they were classifying animals as herbivores and carnivores. I was deeply impressed.

In my mind, I had imagined they would classify animals only as domestic and wild, but they were thinking more deeply. It was a good thing I had not drawn a table with 'domestic' and 'wild' on the blackboard. If I had, their task would have become very easy. They would not have had to think at all. And it is only when they think for themselves that true learning happens.

I heard them mention the word *yeli* (rat). I was confused because I had not listed 'rat' among the animals. Where did they get that from? Then I realised: they were debating where to place the cat, and from that, the rat came into their conversation. The discussion was fascinating.

One of the rules said: 'Both groups must pass.' I had told them, 'If one group fails, the other fails too.'

So the students asked me, 'Then should we help each other?'

I said, 'That's for you to decide.'

I could see them beginning to support each other.

Soon, I heard words like 'table' and 'chart.' The older children began taking the lead and involved the younger ones in the task. They pulled out their notebooks and pens. Following their instructions, even the younger ones brought theirs out.

They only had two rulers. I gave out seven or eight rulers that I had, distributing them between the groups. They had bought rulers earlier but lost them.

'Make it 9 cm long,' Limra instructed the other group.

'Oh no, we made it 11,' said Shreya.

'Make it 2 cm longer,' Limra told her group.

Apparently, Limra's group had decided the table length would be 9 cm and informed the other group. But the other group had already drawn theirs at 11 cm. So Limra's group extended theirs by 2 cm to match.

They probably did this because one of the rules was: 'The work must look beautiful.' That meant their notebooks also had to look neat.

Every notebook began to fill with tables. The students preferred the word table over the chart. The older ones drew tables in the younger students' notebooks too. I was capturing some of this on video.

The older students had finished their work and started helping the classes I and II students, especially those who were falling behind.

The exam had begun at 11 in the morning. Lunch break was at 1:30. After playing for a while, the children returned to work by 2:45, and by 3:45, the classification 'exam' was complete.

I was full of love and admiration for them. I read out each rule again. The students had met every single one. When I said, 'Well done,' the students clapped in rhythm, 'One, two, three—well done!'

The children had spent three and a half hours on a single concept. And even after such a long exam, they were full of joy. They ran out to play. Although the subject of the exam was classification, in truth, it had been an integration exam. And the children had passed with flying colours.

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I created a ‘Big Book’ for my students!

Khangembam Nisha Devi

I am an English teacher of class II in a school located in Thoubal district of Manipur. I always look for ways to make learning more fun. However, despite my best efforts to teach language by explaining and translating textbook content into *Meiteilon* (our home and local language), my students still struggle to comprehend or seem disinterested. English is not a familiar language for my students; they find it difficult to understand certain words. So, I thought of trying something new.

For an upcoming chapter, *Mother Nature*, I decided to create a *Big Book*. I poured a lot of creativity into making it. The cover page had various elements related to nature, such as the sun, moon, trees, and more. The title was written in bold and large size. The book had four pages – I had deliberately kept the number of pages to a minimum. Since all my students are beginning to read, I kept the content short and repeated familiar words and phrases, such as ‘Ema’, which means mother in *Meiteilon*. Some words were in *Meiteilon*, but the majority were in English. After completing the book, I took it to my class.

I was eagerly looking forward to the class. As I entered, I told the students that I had a surprise for them. Everyone was excited. I made them sit in a semicircle so that everyone could see the book clearly. The moment they saw the book, I could see big smiles and all eyes were glued to it. Then I asked them questions, such as:

- Do you like the surprise? What does it look like?
- What do you see on the cover?
- What could the story be about?

The children came up with several different responses, as all the questions asked were open-ended.

Then, I started to read aloud from the book with proper expressions and paused from time to time to check if everybody was following the story. When I read words like ‘Ema’, I could hear giggles, and the students kept repeating ‘Ema, Ema!’ My students loved that some of their familiar words were in this book. Throughout the story, they remained interested. Even students who rarely spoke in the classroom were sharing their thoughts.

After reading the story, I gave the book to my students. They took a closer look at the illustrations. Some were able to recognise the repeated words and phrases; some were even attempting to read it on their own. It was also nice to see that my students were sharing the book while looking at it.

I have realised that making a *Big Book* takes extra time and effort, but the results are worth every minute of it. I have also realised that making such books for all the lessons in the textbook is not always possible. However, I can select one or two chapters and make them fun for the students.

I have kept the book in my classroom. I often catch a glimpse of my students trying to read it during their free time. There are other books kept there as well, but they like this book the most because I made it for them. They feel connected to me through this book.

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Mathematical conversation in the classroom

Sandhya Singh

I have always been interested in learning and teaching mathematics. I teach mathematics in primary classes. Each day in the classroom brings a new mathematical experience. During teaching, I observed that while students are able to solve oral and practical questions and can perform addition-subtraction operations with numbers, they struggle with word problems. The reason behind this is that their logical understanding of mathematics has not developed as per their class level. Instead of asking questions about mathematical problems, they try to solve the problems mechanically. This absence of questions and answers prevents mathematical conversation.

It has been a challenge to involve students in 'maths talk' or mathematical conversations. The struggle has been to identify the kind of questions that should be asked so that students think independently, arrive at logical conclusions, and build their understanding to help them solve word problems. Keeping this in mind, I created some questions based on the topics given in the curriculum and began discussions on these one by one. For example, I gave the following word problem to the class I students:

Smriti collected five leaves for her class project, and her friend Jeevan collected seven leaves. How many leaves did they collect in all?

I initiated a discussion to assess students' responses:

I: Geetika, would you like to answer?

Geetika: No.

I: Why?

Geetika: What if it is wrong?

I: That is okay, we will make it right together.

Geetika: 12?

I: How did you get 12?

Geetika: I kept the number 5 in my mind and added 7 to it one by one. The answer came to 12.

I: Well done, Geetika! Your answer and method are absolutely correct. Samarth, what is your answer, and how did you get it?

Samarth: My answer is also 12. I drew the 5 leaves collected by Smriti and then drew the 7 leaves brought by Jeevan. Then, I counted them all together.

I: Would anyone else like to answer this question?

Rashika: My answer is also 12, ma'am, but I did it differently. I divided 7 into two, that is, 5 + 2, added 5 + 5, and then added 2 to it.

I: Excellent! All your answers and methods are absolutely correct.

Initially, the students were hesitant to answer and were afraid of being judged, which made them reluctant to think. But eventually, as I asked them one by one, I was successful in making them feel comfortable with this process.

This set the stage for more probing questions that they now felt more comfortable answering. Here are the types of questions I put before my class to make them think and answer. For example, while teaching equivalent fractions to class V students, I showed them half of an object or shape and asked how much more was needed to make it whole. Would they need more than what was shown or less? I was careful about choosing objects from their surroundings. For example, a roti.

I used the five stages of mathematical conversation that I had learned during my college days:

1. Revoicing: The teacher repeats the students' responses to clarify their thinking.
2. Rephrasing: The teacher asks students to repeat someone else's ideas in their own words.
3. Reasoning: The teacher asks whether a student agrees or disagrees with another student's idea.
4. Elaborating: The teacher encourages other students to add on or elaborate on the idea to deepen understanding and increase participation.
5. Waiting: The teacher gives time to the students to process and test the ideas taught by teachers in other situations.

Let us understand these through an example:

Revoicing:

I (showing half of a roti): Tell me, how much more roti is needed to complete this half roti?

Student: Half a roti more.

Rephrasing:

I (to another student): Was this answer correct?

Student: Yes.

I: Can you say in your own words how much more roti is needed to make it whole?

Student: To make this roti whole, we need another half. That means we need the same amount again.

Reasoning:

I: Well done! Do we all agree with this?

Students: Yes.

I: Why?

Students: Because two halves make one whole.

Elaborating:

Teacher: Absolutely right! Do two halves always make a whole? Can we also observe this with apples or guavas instead of rotis? Let us join the two halves of these fruits and see. (I had already cut an apple and a guava into equal halves.)

Waiting:

I: Let us try joining a few more halves to see whether they always make a whole. (I cut various shapes into two equal parts and gave the pieces to the students to observe while waiting for their responses.)

To take this further, using a fraction bar, I asked the students how they would determine whether a fraction was greater or smaller than ½, how they found their answer, and if they faced any difficulties. The students said that they checked it by placing one piece over the other.

They also figured out that fractions can be drawn to estimate which part is bigger or smaller. It was difficult when the fractions appeared almost equal. For example: $\frac{4}{6}$ and $\frac{4}{5}$

So, I asked: Can we figure this out by drawing their pictures?

Here, I used a fraction kit to compare various fractions with like numerators.

Figure 1. It is important to involve students in 'maths talk'.

1. $\frac{4}{5} > \frac{4}{6}$

2. $\frac{3}{5} < \frac{3}{4}$

3. $\frac{5}{8} < \frac{5}{6}$

4. $\frac{4}{10} < \frac{4}{12}$

I: Do you agree with all these answers? Do they all have the same numerators?

Students: Yes.

I: Do they all have the same denominators?

Students: No.

I: So, can we say that when the numerators are the same, the fraction with the smaller denominator is greater?

Some students agreed, while others did not. I compared more fractions using concrete objects with the students who disagreed.

I would like to add here that abstract mathematical conversations are not very effective in primary classes. One must use real objects as far as possible. For example, during the conversations on fractions, I used a fraction kit, and for addition and subtraction, I used leaves. Moreover, it is essential for students to actively engage with mathematical objects, as they are not yet proficient in fully grasping abstract concepts at their age.

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

My ‘wow’ moment in teaching and how it transformed my classroom!

K James Kumar

In every teacher’s career, there comes a moment that shifts their perspective, deepens their understanding, and redefines their purpose. For me, that transformative moment came when I met Dr K N Anandan, who completely changed the way I viewed language teaching.

Twelve years ago, I stepped into a rural primary school in Karaikal, Puducherry. With minimal infrastructure and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the challenges were enormous. Most of the children struggled to read and write. Like many of my colleagues, I relied on traditional methods – starting with alphabet recognition and then moving to two- and three-letter words. The classroom followed a chalk-and-talk approach: read aloud, explain in the home language, write questions and answers on the board, and have students copy and memorise them for tests.

Multigrade teaching added another layer of difficulty. I believed I was doing my best, and to some extent, I saw improvement in my students. After two years, I was transferred to a better-equipped school with more resources and a diverse student population. Though I had become more confident in classroom management, my teaching methods remained largely unchanged.

Then came the turning point. During summer vacation, I attended a five-day workshop organised by the Azim Premji Foundation, where I had the privilege of meeting Dr K N Anandan, an Indian Linguist, ELT specialist and social activist. His sessions were nothing short of an awakening. With passion and clarity, he challenged many of the beliefs I held about language acquisition. He introduced us to the idea that language is not taught—it is acquired, much like how we learn our home language. His approach centred around 'discourse-oriented pedagogy', a method that encourages children to use language meaningfully.

Dr Anandan conducted live classroom sessions, showing us exactly how this pedagogy worked in practice. I watched in awe as children, even those with limited exposure to English, began using the language creatively and confidently.

With my class V students, I followed the discourse-oriented pedagogy, using description, conversation, song generation and narration. For each of these, I took five days and two consecutive periods a day. Throughout, I kept the textbook aside and used only pictures. The process was structured, interactive, and highly engaging, helping learners not only express their thoughts but also refine their written English through guided editing.

We began by displaying a village scene picture to the class. I encouraged learners to observe and describe what they saw, allowing them to respond in a mix of English and their home language. I elicited key vocabulary, such as *farmer, hen, straw, cartwheel,* and wrote it on one side of the blackboard to build a shared word bank.

Asking guiding questions, I extracted observations, actions, and opinions from students and wrote these on the blackboard. Students came up in pairs to read aloud each sentence, and we worked together to organise the ideas into three paragraphs:

1. What is seen in the picture?
2. What actions are happening?
3. What is their opinion of the scene?

Students copied the revised description into their notebooks, following writing conventions such as capitalisation and punctuation.

The next day, I divided students into small groups and introduced a second, thematically connected picture. They brainstormed ideas as a group and shared sentences orally before writing them down. Each group worked collaboratively to create a paragraph-based description. Some groups struggled with word order or tense consistency, so I asked questions like, 'Does this sentence sound right?' What should come first?

Next, we selected one group’s work for whole-class editing. I guided students to identify and fix different types of mistakes by asking these questions:

- Thematic: Is the description organised and complete?
- Sentence structure: Is there a word missing? Is this the correct word order?

- Morphological and grammar: Children is playing, or Children are playing?
- Spelling and punctuation: Students referred to the textbook or class chart to correct errors.

We used coloured markers to highlight corrections and kept a chart of the final version in the classroom for reference.

Figure 1. Reading, making and talking about stories, helps students' writing skills.

Finally, the students were given a new picture and asked to write descriptions individually. They applied what they had learned in earlier sessions. I randomly selected a few to present their work and facilitated peer feedback by asking, 'Is this well-organised? Are there any word-form errors? Did they use proper punctuation?'

This recursive interaction helped students refine their language use. This step-by-step approach — from group support to independent work — helped learners internalise the features of description writing while using peer and teacher interactions to correct their mistakes constructively.

I followed the same structure as we went on to conversation, songs, and narration.

For conversation, I initiated the discussion by showing a familiar picture and asking who the characters were and what they might be saying. Students suggested different lines, which I wrote on the blackboard. After a democratic process of choosing the most appropriate responses, we constructed a conversation between the characters.

Students then worked in groups to write short conversations with 2–3 exchanges. While they were doing this, I monitored their interactions, ensuring each student contributed and prompting corrections when necessary.

Song writing began by sharing a song in class: *'Happiness is something if you give it away ...'* We listened to it, clapped along, and gradually each group built their own class version by substituting key lines. I guided the class in identifying the song's pattern and tone. We sang the group versions aloud, which made the learning joyful and memorable. I selected one group poem for class editing and discussed whether it followed the pattern and conveyed the intended message. Finally, learners wrote their individual songs. It was remarkable to see how even struggling learners attempted full stanzas with confidence, often singing their lines before writing them.

Narration began with whole-class storytelling based on a picture. We discussed the starting and ending and brainstormed the sequence of events in between. With probing questions, I elicited ideas, gradually forming a class narrative on the board. Students then copied it into their notebooks, internalising both structure and language use. In groups, they created their narratives, which they later edited with guidance. This helped students understand the importance of coherence, logical sequencing, and appropriate use of tenses. When asked to write narrations individually, learners were well-prepared. They developed short, meaningful stories, showing growth in their ability to express actions, characters, and emotions clearly.

Implementing the discourse-oriented pedagogy transformed my classroom into a vibrant space of learning, expression, and confidence-building. Over three months, my class V learners developed their skills in description, conversation, narration, and song/poem writing through meaningful interaction and guided support. The impact was visible when we held a Literature Expo, where students proudly released their first classroom magazine!

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Understanding of a child's difficulties with sensitivity is key

Shanti Thakur

During a workshop, I was speaking with teachers about how to identify children with special needs and how to work with them. After the session, the headmaster from a primary school approached me and shared his concern about a girl in his school, Neha. I was pleased to see that the teacher was sensitive to the matter and wanted to understand and help Neha overcome her difficulties.

From my experience, the first and most important step is to understand a child's difficulty with sensitivity, with the intention to support and help the child. I told the headmaster that I would come to the school to meet Neha. I visited the school for several days and observed the child's behaviour, classwork, and mischief from a distance. I noticed that Neha had difficulty speaking. She tried to communicate through gestures and make some sounds in her attempt to speak loudly but could not speak clearly.

This inability to communicate with others had led to frustration, because of which she had a lot of pent-up anger. Pushing other children, pouring water, snatching things, hitting, throwing pencils, tearing notebooks, and even hurling water bottles at others had become a part of her behaviour. It was becoming very difficult for the teacher to get her to sit in class or to include her in any activities. Neither reasoning nor scolding had any effect on her.

In that very workshop, I had spoken to the teachers about the '*PRASHAST* App' developed by NCERT. It provides a screening facility for disabilities among students from pre-primary to class XII. If children in school appear to be struggling with any kind of difficulties, the app can be used to identify the issues. Referring to the points provided in the *PRASHAST* App; I discussed Neha's behaviour with the headmaster and tried to understand it further. According to the parameters on the app, Neha fell under the category of 'intellectual disability'. After this, the headmaster and I took Neha to a hospital to understand her condition from a medical perspective. The psychiatrist diagnosed her with intellectual disability and also issued a disability card for her.

We had now understood Neha's problem. The next step was to work on resolving it, which required everyone's collective effort. The challenge was to communicate this to Neha's parents as well, so that she could receive support not only in school but at home, too. Parents very often do not want to accept or understand such matters about their children. They tend to consider such behaviour as a matter of habit, carelessness, or anger. This, in turn, leads to punishments and strictness with the child. However, this is not the solution; rather, it aggravates the problem. After several conversations with the parents and explaining things to them, the school staff was also consulted. It was important for everyone around Neha to understand the situation. It was critical to not get angry with the child but rather to support and understand her.

We also had to consider how to channelise Neha's energy, which usually resulted in her breaking things and getting into fights, in a constructive way. It was important for her to get tired. She would not sit still unless she felt tired. We made some plans for Neha, some of which were also suggested by the app.

Figure 1. The most important step in understanding a child's difficulty is to do it with sensitivity and an intention to help.

For instance, to help her expend more of her energy through games, we would tell her, 'Run, touch that tree and come back.' The teacher included some more students in the game so that Neha did not feel isolated or neglected. She would run with joy and feel even more delighted for having quickly run and returned after touching the tree. Having tired herself out, she would sit for a while. This process continued for a week.

Next, we introduced another activity. Different kinds of grains, such as chickpeas, peas, black gram (*urad dal*),

rice, and wheat, were mixed and placed together, and the children, including Neha, were asked to separate and sort them into bowls. This helped improve concentration, and the children also enjoyed themselves. Neha too participated in the activity with excitement. She made mistakes, too, but kept trying to sort and fill the bowls quickly. Encouragements like 'Well done!' made her happy.

Similarly, another task involved separating flowers and leaves. It was important to change activities for Neha from time to time. She enjoyed new activities. These activities were conducted for approximately a month.

During this time, we also gave her short painting tasks. This entailed filling colour into shapes, like circles and squares. These activities were conducted for a month. The good thing about these activities was that Neha was not alone; other children also participated.

While the other children were also learning to read and write, Neha remained engaged in these activities. The teachers understood this and gave her ample time instead of rushing her. Gradually, Neha started sitting in class. She became more interested in the activities, and before she could get bored with one activity, the teacher would surprise her with another. She had now begun playing games related to numbers and letters. Instead of sorting grains or flowers and leaves, it was sorting numbers and letters. This task required a great deal of patience.

Since Neha also had difficulty speaking, we began activities for this as well. These included blowing a whistle, blowing air to inflate balloons, blowing out candles, blowing bits of paper into the air, and playing the flute. Conversations with the parents remained ongoing. They were encouraged to engage her in activities at home, such as helping with small household tasks – sorting vegetables, drying clothes, offering water to family members, combing her hair, wiping her mouth, and so on. Seeing her progress with all this, her parents felt happy. All of this required significant effort on their part.

Educational activities were introduced for Neha in class II. These included joining dots, making pairs, sorting flowers and leaves, counting and separating pebbles, and playing with flashcards. She is now in class III, and there is a significant change in her. She has begun reading and writing. The activities with her are still ongoing. What I found most significant about this experience was that the teacher understood Neha's challenges and worked with her patiently and compassionately, without giving up.

Link to PRASHAST App https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/DSCS_booklet.pdf

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How I used storytelling to foster emotional intelligence

S Kavitha

Though my class IV students were blossoming beautifully in their learning journeys – each at their own pace – a subtle restlessness lingered in the corners of my mind. Each day, I was met with a chorus of minor grievances:

'Ma'am, she always walks in front of me when we play!'

'Ma'am, she broke it while playing!'

'Ma'am, she took my eraser without asking!'

'Ma'am, she told him not to play with me!'

One complaint followed another, weaving a tapestry of constant interruption. A considerable portion of my day was spent soothing and settling them. But these were not complaints stemming from serious misbehaviour; rather, they were small instances that could easily be brushed aside. Through daily conversations, we began to explore the difference between real mistakes and simple misunderstandings.

As an educator, I have always tried to cultivate a classroom space that builds not only intellect but character as well. Yet, the children's habit of pointing fingers at each other's smallest flaws was proving challenging. Direct advice? Children may hear it, but will they listen, reflect, and change?

So, I turned to storytelling, my favourite recourse for most challenges. Stories have always been my magic wand, not just to introduce language or ignite imagination, but to gently polish young hearts and minds. I decided to bring in the beloved tale of *Gajapathi Kulapathi*.[1]

I printed the characters, let the children colour and cut them out, and used these to narrate '*Gajapathi Kulapathi Achooo*'. As I told the story, I posed open-ended, higher-order questions to deepen their thinking:

'How might the elephant have come to the village?'

The children answered: 'Maybe he lost his way…'; 'Someone could've lured him with his favourite fruit – bananas!', 'Perhaps he was looking for a friend…'

The room came alive with ideas. Their imaginations danced.

'Why didn't the postman or banana seller get angry with Gajapathi Kulapathi?'

One child, Nishitha, answered with moving clarity: 'Because Gajapathi Kulapathi didn't mean to hurt anyone. He was sick. He even tried to hide when he realised his sneeze had caused trouble. So why should anyone be angry?'

Figure 1. Stories help children develop empathy.

That response stunned me. How often do we, as adults, fail to see the world with such compassion and understanding?

Children began retelling the story in their own unique ways – some using exaggerated actions, others focusing only on the key events. One emphasised the dramatic 'Achooooo!', another infused humour. Even the quiet narrators brought their own flavour. Every version was unique.

Next, we split the class into four groups and gave students ten minutes to assign roles, then draft scripts, and rehearse. Though it was a home assignment, I found them huddled over lunch, whispering lines and adjusting scenes. The next day, each group performed, encouraging and supporting peers who needed help.

In the same four groups, children analysed character traits – both admirable and improvable. Each group chose a character: Gajapathi Kulapathi, Grandma, the children, or the banana seller. After the group discussion, each group shared their views.

For instance: 'Gajapathi Kulapathi is kind and considerate; he stood behind the wall so he wouldn't disturb others.' 'The banana seller built him a house, even though he caused trouble because Gajapathi Kulapathi never meant to hurt anyone.'

I gently extended the activity inward. 'Close your eyes,' I said. 'Think of one friend. After two minutes, tell us one good quality they have, and one they can improve.'

The room fell silent, then began to buzz with insights they shared: 'She makes friends with everyone.' 'She never scolds anyone.' 'He has beautiful handwriting.' 'He shares his food with everyone.' 'She always has a smiling face.'

No child mentioned a trait that could be changed, even after gentle encouragement. What positive-spirited little souls! I compiled all the qualities and put them up on the classroom wall. The joy was instant. 'This is my quality!' 'That's yours!' They beamed with pride, pointing out each other's strengths.

This journey reaffirmed my belief that the most profound lessons are often learned not through instruction, but through experience, especially the kind that touches the heart. Through a simple story, the children began to look at one another with gentler eyes and more open hearts. Instead of finding faults, they discovered virtues. Instead of complaining, they began to appreciate each other.

What began as a tale about a sneezing elephant evolved into a powerful lesson in empathy, kindness, and emotional intelligence. No reprimands, no lectures… just gentle guidance through imagination, reflection, and shared storytelling. At that moment, I did not just see a classroom. I saw a community of young minds learning not only how to read and write, but how to live and care. And that, I believe, is the true purpose of education.

[1]https://www.tulikabooks.com/all-picture-books/gajapati-kulapati-english.html

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My first day of teaching

Manohar Hiremath

My first day of the art class as a teacher was a day I will never forget. The children in the class sat quietly for a while, but after 10-15 minutes, they started making noise. I was trained to teach the children in a fearless environment, so I knew I had to manage the situation without getting angry or shouting at them. I was also a little intimidated. But I tried talking to them. I asked, 'Do you like drawing? Do you like to paint? Shall we draw?' Some children responded, but the others started playing in class.

This went on for two to three days. No matter how hard I tried, I could not control them. I was not able to complete any activity I had planned for the class. Most of the class time went into handling the noise and issues among students. All kinds of complaints kept coming from the children, one after another. I got tired and frustrated because instead of doing the activity I had prepared, I was only solving their problems and listening to their complaints.

I met with our school principal and shared my problem. The principal advised me to observe the classes of other experienced teachers. I started observing two different classes each day and noted how those teachers conducted activities and how they involved students in them. I also noticed that the same students who were very noisy in my class were behaving differently in other classes. I started thinking about why they were behaving well in other classes but not in mine. I spoke with the other teachers and took their suggestions. Gradually, I started applying those ideas in my classes.

Meanwhile, I prepared some charts for the class on different types of patterns, the use of various brushes (tools and techniques), the names of different brushes, and how to use them. I also made charts showing how to mix primary colours to create secondary colours. All these charts were designed to support learning through hands-on activities. When the children came to class, we would start with the activities that involved tools and techniques. But this too did not work well, and I realised that I had to prepare the activities based on the children's interest in art and their learning level.

Malavika, our Resource Person, helped me in preparing activities based on the children's learning levels. I realised that if children create pictures from their own imagination, they become more interested in painting. As per Malavika's suggestion, I encouraged the children to create line drawings using their imagination, and I observed that the children started drawing with great interest.

While teaching children how to create patterns, I first explained to them how a pattern is made and showed them some patterns. But the children started copying exactly as I had done. Again, I followed Malavika's suggestion to give children space to think on their own and focus on their ideas. She said, 'When you teach children how to make a pattern, they will simply follow what you have shown. Instead, first, introduce the concept of a pattern, but don't give them paper immediately. Give them chalk and let them draw directly on the school floor.'

She also added, 'Ask children to observe patterns they see in daily life, like on clothes, curtains at home, or the marks that shoes leave on soft soil. These are all different types of patterns. Let them explore freely and then begin drawing on the floor based on what they observed.' This suggestion helped me a lot. It gave the children more space to think creatively and do the activity in their own way, which increased their creativity in the classroom.

The next challenge that I needed to work on was to ensure that students did not disrupt the class and paid more attention to what we were doing. I started by asking the class I students to meditate before the class for five minutes. After the children sat down in the classroom, I told them, 'I will now play some music, and you must listen to it with your eyes closed. When I tell you to, you can open your eyes.' During the meditation, one child started laughing, another child started blinking, one child started talking, and another started making a noise. Despite this, I thought it was useful. After five minutes of meditation, the children started the activities.

Another challenge was that when children were given paints and crayons, they would not share them with others and would hide crayons in their pockets. This is not their fault; they love crayons. Noticing this, I started a new practice in class. I gave one group of children the box

of crayons, but not the other group. The children in that group asked for crayons, but I said no.

'Why, sir?' the children asked.

'Because some of your friends took the crayons from the previous class, and now we have only one box of crayons. So please use pencils.' They insisted, 'No, we also want crayons.' I told them, 'I will give you crayons too, but there are some rules in the classroom. If you follow those rules, I will provide you with pencils, colours, brushes, everything.'

The children agreed to follow the rules. I told each group to count the number of colours in the crayon box given to them. After finishing their colouring, I asked them to put all the crayons back in the box and have one person take responsibility for this task each week. The children agreed. After two or three months, this activity became a routine for the children, and they followed the rules. Now, the disappearance of crayons in the classroom has significantly reduced. I believe this was a good practice.

Manohar Hiremath, Art Teacher,
Azim Premji School, Kalaburagi, Karnataka

Discussions are important in the classroom

Vinita Chauksey

I have always had a deep interest in teaching. My journey began in 2001 when I started teaching the children in my village. After 12 years of doing this, I joined a government school. At present, I mostly get opportunities to teach primary classes. Since this is work I truly enjoy, I constantly try to bring in new ideas and do something meaningful with my students. I prepare in advance and make use of different approaches, such as learning through activities, games, teaching-learning materials (TLMs), and by spending time with children in the library.

This year, I was assigned to teach Class V. As in every new session, a few new students were admitted. These children had come from another village, so they were finding it difficult to mix with the rest of the class. The older students were also not making any effort to include them. Observing this, I felt it was important for me to step in. I regularly conduct different activities with my students, and very often, we also have discussions linked to their everyday lives. Many times, I try to extend these discussions and activities to the *bal-sabha* (children's assembly).

This time, I thought of introducing conversations on new and engaging topics so that students would have opportunities to listen to one another, share their thoughts, and gradually develop a better understanding among themselves. Some topics were selected by me, and some were finalised after discussions with the students. These included topics like your first journey by bus or train, helping a family member in their work, apologising to a friend after a fight, a memorable day in school, a time when you felt very happy, rules that would help your class, your daily routine, your dream, and special qualities of your village. All these topics were found to be interesting by the students, and they were eager to talk about them.

To conduct this activity, I first paired up the students to discuss the given topic with each other, write down their ideas, and then read the written points aloud to the class. The students showed interest both in discussing and writing on the topics, which created a comfortable atmosphere in the class. They listened to each other, appreciated one another, and both new and old students got opportunities to interact with one another. As a result, new friendships began among the students.

Students faced some difficulties in the beginning and asked me questions, such as How should we say this? What should we write? So, I started with myself and gave them some examples related to the given topics. This helped the students feel at ease, and they started sharing their experiences and stories.

Aman chose the topic: 'Who did I help with household chores?' He wrote, 'I helped my mother, brother, sister, and grandfather with household chores. I made *roti* with my sister, filled water for my grandfather, and helped my father with painting work. One day, when my father was teaching my brother, his phone rang. The caller was asking

Figure 1. The practice of moving from conversation to writing has proved to be highly valuable.

him to come to work. I told my father, ''You go, I will teach my brother!'' My mother had a fever, and she was not able to do the housework. I told her to rest, and that I would make rotis.'

This was the first time that a boy was openly talking about helping with household chores, especially those that are specifically linked to women, like making rotis. Initially, some students found it strange to hear this, but after listening to Aman, the other boys also expressed a desire to talk about the work they did at home.

Sunanda wrote a fun story about her first train journey. Rajveer shared an incident about a fight with a friend. This process continued, and throughout the exercise, I let the students speak in the language that they were comfortable with, whether it was their home language or the school language. Now, students have begun considering speaking and writing on any topic as an important part of class. They ask every day, 'Ma'am, what topic are we going to talk about today?' One day, I told them a story related to superstition. They also started sharing their unique, entertaining stories, and in this way, an open discussion took place on the subject. These stories included things like considering a cat crossing one's path or sneezing as bad omens, and about ghosts. We talked about these openly and discussed them rationally.

In one instance, a conflict arose between two students in the classroom in which one of the students, in anger, addressed the other using a casteist remark. I chose not to intervene immediately. Instead, I waited for a more opportune moment to address the issue. The next morning, during assembly, the song '*Hum sab bhartiya hain*' (*We are all Indians*) provided a meaningful context. Since all the children were familiar with the song, I asked them to write about what they understood from its message. Their responses reflected values, such as equality, unity, and mutual respect. This exercise allowed me to link the earlier conflict to broader social values and initiate a constructive discussion on caste in a natural and non-confrontational way.

I also observed that students often involve their family members while preparing for these conversation-to-writing tasks, and within the classroom, they actively support one another, particularly encouraging those who are usually less confident in participating.

The practice of moving from conversation to writing has proved to be highly valuable. It provides opportunities for students who generally remain quiet or lag academically to express themselves. Over time, I have witnessed a visible growth in their confidence, self-expression, and critical thinking abilities. Furthermore, this approach is strengthening their overall language skills, enabling progress not only in speaking and listening but also in reading and writing.

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

Learning to write by turning texts into comic strips

Nivedita Negi

This incident is two years old. I used to teach students of classes IV and V and would have them participate in various language-related activities. To make them interested in books and reading, I would take the help of children's books available in the school. Despite doing that, they did not develop an interest in reading, and I was unable to think of any way to make them do so.

Then I was suddenly reminded of the days from my childhood when I would be scolded for reading comics. Suddenly, this memory seemed to open a new path for me. I thought, why not give comics to children to read? Perhaps it might instil in them an interest in reading. I looked for some comics at home and managed to arrange some more from here and there. These included comics like *Chacha Chaudhry*, *Vikram Betal, Lambu Motu* (popular Hindi comic titles), among others. I placed some comics on the outer side of the Reading Corner and left some on my table. I did not say anything to the children.

After a few days, I found the idea to be working. Children had started flipping through the comics. I was delighted. However, my wish was that the children who were still not reading should also pick them up. Gradually, even those children were attracted to the comics and started picking them up. Those who were not proficient in reading would ask me and their friends for help while reading. While helping the children, I noticed that they were highly curious to find out what happened next in a story. I also noticed that they enjoyed speaking out the dialogues in the story. Slowly, dialogues from the comics got incorporated into their games, and it was great fun to listen to them.

All this inspired me to make comic strips with the children. It would put them on the path to reading, writing, and critical thinking. In preparation for this, I first spoke to the children. For example, I asked what their favourite comics are, which dialogues they find enjoyable, which characters they like, and what the highlights of the characters are, etc. The children said, 'Chacha Chaudhary's brain is faster than a computer', 'Pinky is very naughty, she irritates her grandfather', etc. I also read with them the story, *Golu* written by Ram Babu from the class V textbook, *Rimjhim*, and the comic strip *Dabbu ji* written by the famous writer Aabid Surti. They enjoyed these conversations. They had developed some understanding of dialogues and how they are presented. Hence, I encouraged the children to share incidents that had occurred in the class or school in the form of dialogues. They had also started creating and using dialogues among themselves. Seeing their interest and self-confidence, as the next step, I assigned them the task of reading folktales, such as *Raakh ki Rassi, Jaisa Sawaal Waisa Jawaab, Sunita ki Pahiya Kursi* from the textbook. All these lessons were chosen because they contained dialogues. I believed that reading these lessons would help them understand the structure of dialogues and how they are created.

Using the context of these lessons and comic books, I discussed with the children how dialogues are created and what kind of pictures should be drawn to accompany dialogues. Since most of the lessons chosen already had dialogues, they were able to understand how dialogues are created. The biggest task was that of involving everyone in the activity. For this, I created groups in which some children had good writing skills while others were good at drawing. They created dialogues by discussing them with each other and asked for my help when needed. The drawings made by the children were not perfect, but acceptable.

Even after all that discussion and preparation, it was not as though the children were able to start writing dialogues at once. As preparation, the first story needed to be written in the form of dialogue. Although they tried to write the dialogues with great enthusiasm, they ended up copying word-for-word what was written in their books. You can assume that they were writing paragraphs instead of dialogues and would get disappointed when they were unable to draw suitable pictures. I also noticed that children who were not able to draw would cut and paste images from old books. I wrote modified versions of their dialogues on the blackboard and explained these to them. I had to do this repeatedly, and gradually some children began to understand how to present dialogues. Further in this process, they picked a book from the library and created a comic strip out of it using illustrations and dialogues. They would place their drawings and dialogues at a designated place in the classroom and read

them along with their friends. Gradually, all the children got involved in this activity. They started making their own comic strips by choosing their own stories and began enjoying the process.

After experiencing this process, the children began to find their textbook lessons more interesting. They found it so pleasurable that they even started attending school regularly. They would turn stories into comic strips at home. When this engagement was compared to the set learning outcomes, I realised that their abilities in reading with understanding, writing, and being creative and imaginative had improved manifold.

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Manjari Singh Vetter: Shabnam Sengupta

Where did the gap remain?

Rajesh Prasad

There is a lesson in class VIII science syllabus, 'Metals and Non-metals'. It took me about ten days to teach this lesson. During the process, I often asked students questions. They answered both collectively and individually, and their answers were mostly correct. They were also given homework. In April and May, admissions were going on in the school and new students were joining, so the lesson was taught at a slower pace with multiple repetitions.

One day, I conducted four experiments to demonstrate the physical properties of metals. For example, first, I took an aluminium wire and hammered it flat. I asked the children, 'Tell me, which property of metals does this experiment demonstrate?' Their answer was 'lustre'. Not a single child in the class was able to give the correct answer to any of the experiments, even though earlier they had written and explained all the properties of metals quite well, both orally and in writing.

The question was, why did the children say 'lustre' instead of 'malleability'? In fact, their answer was also correct in a way, because the wire was a little dull at first, and after hammering it, it became lustrous (shiny). However, I was not satisfied. I asked one child, 'Do you have metals at home?' He said, 'No.' I asked the same question to five or six other children. All of them answered, 'There are no metals in my house.' Yet, when asked about the properties of metals, they were able to explain them. It made me wonder: Where exactly was the gap? Was it a language problem? Were they unable to understand the heavy and complex words written in the textbooks?

While discussing metals and non-metals, I had explained to the children that door and window grills, nails and bolts, desk and bench frames, utensils at home, and even many kinds of pens are made of metal. However, it seemed that they were unable to relate to any of this, and because they could not understand the meanings of words, they were unable to connect the lesson to their daily lives. One possible reason could be that although they see and use many such things every day, they fail to establish a connection between what is written in the textbook and what they experience in real life.

Before going further, let us look at what is written in the textbook about 'malleability' and 'lustre':

Malleability: Metals are malleable, that is, on hammering and beating, they do not break but can be converted into thin sheets or utensils. For example, gold, silver, copper, etc.

Lustre: Generally, metals have shine. This is called metallic lustre.

Children generally understand hammering as beating, a sheet as a cloth used for covering, and nailing as fixing nails into a wall. I had noticed that they were somewhat uncomfortable with words like malleable, malleability, transformed, metallic, etc. In fact, words such as metal, malleable, sonority, and brittle, which were repeated in the lesson, had never been part of their language before.

Figure 1. Students showcase learning by doing in a learning mela.

When I realised this, I started trying to bridge this language gap. I spoke to the children about the whole lesson in their local language. For discussing metals and non-metals, I chose words that they commonly use in daily life. For example, to explain the word 'metal', I spoke about iron, steel, brass, gold, silver, etc and told them that all these are called metals, whereas plastic and rubber are not. Other words from the lesson, like hammering (*kuchna* in their dialect) and sheet (*chadra* in their dialect), were also discussed. We all know that whenever we hear a word, a mental image forms in our minds. If a word does not create any image or picture, we can never truly understand it. Perhaps this is why it is said that even in science, it is important to teach children in a way that helps them understand the meaning of words and concepts, instead of just memorising definitions.

I also realised that many concepts in this subject are almost impossible to internalise without linking them to daily life.

After this experience, I taught the same lesson in another section of class VIII. All discussions were held keeping in mind the children's language. I explained malleability as the change in shape and form that happens when metals are hammered (*koochne* in their dialect). I told them that this change could be in length, in width, or in both. Along with this, children were asked to bring any piece of metal from their homes. Then we carried out the hammering experiment. The result was encouraging. This time, without hesitation, the children answered in unison, 'Malleability'. In the science textbook, there are many more words like *samparikshitra* (conductor), electricity, current, circuit, etc. Now, collective efforts are being made to understand all of them.

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

My print-rich classroom

Seema Arora

A 'print-rich classroom' is one where a language-enriched environment is created to help students develop an understanding of reading and writing skills naturally. It also helps to cultivate in them the habit of reading and writing regularly.

In class I, I decided to teach the names of fruits. Children already knew the names of many fruits, but to draw their attention towards how those names are written, colourful charts were displayed on the walls. These charts had pictures of different fruits, such as mango, banana, apple, and watermelon etc. Below each picture, the first letter and the complete word (अ for आम, क for केला and so on) were written in large letters. As part of the classroom activities, the students themselves drew pictures of fruits and labelled them. These drawings were also displayed in the classroom.

A few days after this activity, a 'Word Wall' (*Shabd Deewar*) of terms related to fruits was created. This word wall had words related to fruits, such as sweet, juicy, yellow, sour, seed, green, round and so on. Students were asked to add more words. I wrote and added the words that they suggested to the word wall.

In another activity, students were given an open-ended sentence: 'I like mango because…' They had to complete it orally. Some students tried and completed the sentence. I wrote their responses on the word wall.

We came across another aspect of reading, writing and understanding when I was telling them a story. The title of the story was 'Mango Tree (*Aam ka ped*)'. I started the story with some of the words and small sentences displayed on the word wall. Along with listening to the story, students

were also able to see these words and sentences on the wall. After the story ended, students selected new words from the story and added them to the word wall with my help. Finally, they were asked to draw the ending of the story, which each one of them did enthusiastically.

In one corner of the classroom, I set up a reading space for reading books on fruits and other themes. A similar space like this was created for writing where students could draw and write sentences, stories, or their own experiences. During all of these activities, students were surrounded by different aspects of language, such as words, sentences and letters. This approach helped them deepen their connection with language.

Although class 1 students are not very skilled in writing, I found that these activities encourage them very strongly towards reading and writing. Visual materials have proved to be quite helpful in building interest and understanding among students. I witnessed this happening. Students took pride in the posters and pictures they created, and these made them more active in class. Their parents also became more involved now. Earlier, there were challenges with enrolment and retention, but these activities helped in getting more students enrolled in the school. In particular, the retention of younger students improved.

In a language-rich classroom, it is important to refresh word charts and the word wall regularly. At the beginning of the session, I displayed a list of new words along with their corresponding pictures for classes III and IV. Almost two months later, I added some simple idioms and sayings with pictures in the class. A poetry corner was created for students' favourite poems as well as their own poems. Along with this, a 'sentence corner' was created for the students of classes III and IV, for them to learn sentences. Each activity was planned for about 15 days before moving on to the next, giving students varied opportunities to participate and engage.

This approach proved highly beneficial for both the students and me. Students were regularly learning to read, looking at words, sentences and pictures. This was gradually strengthening their language and vocabulary. With the help of drawings, colours and activities, students started taking an interest in learning and were actively participating in class activities. It was observed that even when teachers were not present in the class, students would still try to read the posters, charts and stories on their own.

A print-rich environment helps students learn independently. When students initiate learning, it strengthens their confidence. While working in groups during activities, students develop a sense of cooperation and the ability to express their feelings. Teachers do not have to repeat themselves, as the visual materials support student learning and frees up time for planning. A well-organised, colourful and engaging classroom keeps the students more disciplined and focused.

Displaying students' poems, stories and drawings on the walls showcases their progress, something their parents and visitors also find impressive. A print-rich classroom creates a lively, interactive and enjoyable atmosphere for learning. It not only encourages students to learn independently but also makes the process interesting for them while motivating teachers to design new activities and experiment with the students.

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Pragya Vetter: Bhumika Popli

Using local language makes learning easier

Shashank Shekhar

I am a Hindi teacher at a school in the Kaimur district of Bihar. Bhojpuri is the most widely spoken language in this region, and I am from the same region. Yet, I had faced many challenges while working on Hindi language skills with students of both higher and lower classes.

I felt that I was not able to communicate with the students properly. My 'standard Hindi' (*Khari Boli*) often did not make sense to them. They felt distant from the language, which affected their learning. Teaching language and linguistic skills took a lot of my energy, yet I did not get the desired results. In other words, the poem, story, or

lesson taught in the class did not become a part of their understanding. They could not express their current understanding either in their own language or in *Khari Boli*. Their ability to express themselves was weak, and in reading and writing, they did not reach the expected level.

I would discuss this issue with other teachers and experiment with different genres and methods. For instance, I worked with students on stories and poems in various ways, worked out detailed lesson plans for each lesson given in the book, maintained an intensive dialogue, and even used children's literature. Such work was meaningful for and successful with some students, but for most students, it did not yield satisfactory results. They lagged in the development of language skills, such as deep reading, meaning making while reading, independent writing, and creatively expressing their thoughts.

During my conversations with primary class teachers, an important point emerged. The point being that the use of local language for discussions and drawing examples from students' surroundings to explain a lesson could help them develop confidence and connect them with the learning process to learn better.

Although I do not hesitate to use local or home language while writing poetry, I freely borrow words and idioms from the same. But as a Hindi teacher, while teaching language, I was never consciously or unconsciously aware of this. My students and I had to pay the price for this because we did not get the expected results despite additional efforts.

I engaged with my fellow teachers' classes for a few days, observed them teaching closely, spent time with students, and tried to understand the methods of teaching language. These teachers spoke in the local language with all the students, and even with their parents. This built a sense of familiarity and closeness between them. The same language that students heard and spoke at home, they also heard in school during the process of learning and teaching. This made understanding and learning easier.

I started working according to the advice and observations of the fellow teachers. Earlier, I rarely used the local language in the classroom, but now I started using it. The use of local words and language also sparked students' interest in Hindi. I began discussing various words with them intermittently, and with the help of the library, I exposed them to various forms and rhythms of the local language. After all, language is made of words. The more we work on understanding and using words, the stronger and more effective our language becomes. After some days, I realised that the students with whom I had previously faced difficulties were now gradually beginning to take an interest. I felt that things were going quite well.

Currently, I am trying to make the students of primary classes discuss poems and stories in Hindi along with the local language by reading these to them. At the same time, with senior students, I try to explain the literary forms of language by discussing references and examples connected to the local language and environment. In these efforts, local Bhojpuri literature has been a great support. However, in the beginning, all of this had felt quite challenging.

This is a continuous and multidimensional process. Along with the students, my own vocabulary and linguistic world are expanding and taking shape as I have realised the importance of using the local language.

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Translated from Hindi. *Translator: Sandeep Dubey* *Vetter: Sonam*

The importance of sports in education

Kharul Nisha

The *National Education Policy 2020* underlines that every student has different kinds of abilities, and that each one should get opportunities that match their potential. But it is not that these opportunities are limited to the classroom. There are several spaces in a school where children get various opportunities to explore and polish their abilities. One such space is the sports ground. Sports are essential for all students. But there are always some children in every class who stay away from sports. There can be several reasons for this. For instance, they may be physically weak, shy, overweight, and so on. Some students may also be fearful or suffer from a sense of inferiority. And this is where a teacher's role is important. The teacher needs to help alleviate each child's fear and fill them with confidence.

In my school, I never looked at sports just from the perspective of competition, but more as a means for facilitating social bonding and developing mental strength. Through sports, I was able to connect many children to their school and classmates. To explain how this was possible, here are some examples.

Nimish and Ratna took flight on the wings of confidence

Nimish, a class V student, and Ratna from class VII both had slightly above-average body weight. This also impacted their self-image. They would often avoid sports and quietly keep away from activities, using some excuse or the other. Initially, it seemed like they were simply lazy or that they were just not interested in sports. But over time, it became clear what the real issue was.

I spoke to them individually and tried to understand what was going on in their minds; what was the reason that they avoided games that typically children enjoyed. That is when it became clear that because of their physical appearance, they were caught in a loop of self-consciousness and inferiority. They also feared being teased by other students.

Figure 1. Children can cross their physical limits if given suitable opportunities.

Now it was time to help them step out of this shell. For this, I decided to use sports as the tool. I encouraged them to attempt small, achievable tasks. For instance, running a short distance in an obstacle race, playing light games like catching the ball, or leading their peers in gsroup activities. To help them shed their fears, we practised falling and rolling in various judo positions while lying down, such as *Ushiro-Ukemi, Yoko-Ukemi, and Mae-Ukemi*. I also made small adjustments to activities so that both these students could do them easiyly.

Gradually, Nimish and Ratna developed an acceptance of sports. Now, these two not only participate in sports but also inspire others with their confidence.

Aryan turned small steps into big dreams

Aryan, a class I student, could neither jump, run, nor do a front roll in judo in the beginning. Every time he tried, he would fall and start crying. But I never considered his efforts, his failure. I would remind him that falling was also a part of the game. For him, too, I broke down the activities into smaller steps. For example, one day just rolling on the floor, the next day walking on the knees, then gradually learning to stand and balance, and so on. Within a few weeks, Aryan began running, jumping, and developed a special interest in judo. Although this was not an easy journey, his progress filled me, the other teachers, and his own parents with a mix of satisfaction and astonishment.

Lily and Riya befriended their fear

Both Lily and Riya, from class I, were scared of sports. The playground was a fearful and stressful place for them. They would refuse to take part in any games. So, I thought of some simple activities for them. For instance, collecting colourful balls, hopping in little steps, walking on a line, going on a friend's back and carrying a friend on theirs, playing tug-of-war with a partner, and so on. I put them in teams with friends they liked. I told them that they could just watch if they did not feel like playing. Gradually, their fear began to fade. From watching games, they began to play them. They also started making friends, and conversations started flowing.

Ayesha's journey to independence

Another example is that of Ayesha. In the early days, when she stood up, her legs would tremble, which said a lot about her physical and mental state. However, I worked with her specifically to strengthen her self-confidence. Slowly, Ayesha overcame her fears and hesitation. Now she can climb a tree without any support and can jump down from a height of six feet. This is not only proof of her physical strength but also of her willpower and confidence. This change became possible due to her own effort, the support of her teachers, and an inclusive, encouraging atmosphere at school.

When we understand students' abilities and give them suitable opportunities, they can cross their physical limits and become stronger mentally as well. I truly believe that every student can do far more than their current capabilities. All they need is the right guidance and the right opportunities.

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Richa Goswami Vetter: Simran Luthra

Diverse learners need diverse teaching pedagogies

Rita Kotoky

I am a teacher at a primary school near the tea gardens of Assam. Our children predominantly come from the tea garden communities. Over the years, I have observed that enrolments have gone up considerably due to various reasons. One major factor is the government's intervention in terms of providing meals, books, school bags, uniforms, etc. The reality is, however, slightly different – children are enrolled, but they are not in the classrooms! As a teacher, I wondered what the reasons could be for the children not attending school. Here's what I found out when I focused my attention on one child who was hardly ever present in school.

Seven-year-old Jadav studies in class III. His parents are tea garden labourers, and he is the youngest of three children. His parents are happy to have enrolled him in a school, but beyond that, they do not care. They do not know anything about his attendance, homework or anything related to his school education.

One day, when Jadav came to school, I made it a point to be in his class and observe him. I decided to take the Environmental Science class and gave the students an activity – think and make a list of all the various sources of water they are aware of. It was the last class of the day. All but Jadav made and shared their lists. I was frustrated to see that Jadav was not even trying to write. I took this as a challenge and announced, 'I won't leave school until Jadav submits his list.'

I sat with him for almost 20-30 minutes after school. All the children had left the school premises by then. I tried to help him by asking him some guiding questions, such as, 'Think of where your parents get water from?' 'Did your grandmother ever talk about how she got water for her family?', etc. Unfortunately, he was silent throughout. His body language was also restrained. I wanted to give up, but decided to give it one last try. I got up to get my water bottle from the staff room. As I was walking up to the staff room, I heard a loud sound and, turning around, saw Jadav running towards the school gate. He threw his school bag and his books in the air and ran away. I felt humiliated and helpless. However, my colleagues were there to witness this and suggested that we, collectively, try some other strategy to ensure Jadav's socio-emotional development.

For the next few days, Jadav was not seen in the school. I was prepared to handle the situation when he returned. After a couple of weeks, when Jadav came to school, I asked his class teacher not to mention the incident to him. All of us, teachers, decided to treat him with care, love and compassion. Whenever we gave activities in class, we would give him extra time, we never forced him to speak if he did not want to, and we tried our best not to draw attention to him.

Figure 1. Teachers use various strategies to ensure that learning is engaging.

Over time, we noticed that Jadav was responding to the questions asked in the class, but only through art. As soon as we got to know of his interest in art, we decided to give him the option to draw his response to questions in the classroom. For example, if the task was to think and write about different means of transportation, we also gave the students the option to draw their answers. We also began to emphasise that the children could bring in their own experience to the activities and go beyond the textbooks.So, for a question on means of transportation, along with Jadav, children began mentioning the traditional ways of transportation, such as buffalo carts, and also modern ways, such as ferries over the Brahmaputra River. These were the few vehicles they were familiar with and connected to, along with cars, bikes, tractors and trucks. This approach was followed by teachers across all subjects, and as the teachers started seeing the changes in Jadav, they began applying it in their other classes too.

The results were phenomenal. All the students enjoyed the tasks, and some were creative enough to also think

of a role play based on their chapter on 'ways of living'. This experience, rather, this success story, made us all realise that Jadav was a teacher who taught us the lesson that learners are diverse, and we, as teachers, need to use various strategies to ensure that learning is engaging, meaningful and relevant to each one of them.

Rita Kotoky, Teacher, Mackeypore Garden LP School, Nazira, Assam

Developing language skills through letter writing

Shivaditya

I am a language teacher at Azim Premji School, Barmer. In our school culture, communication is of utmost importance. This communication, over time, began taking place through letters. The main purpose of letter writing was to reduce children's fear and hesitation in writing and to help them express their thoughts better in written form.

There are 34, 31, and 36 children in classes VI, VII and VIII, respectively. Out of these, 12 students were struggling with basic competencies. Writing posed several challenges for children at competency levels 1 and 2. For example, their writing contained many spelling mistakes; they could not figure out what to write or how much to write on a given topic; they used incorrect punctuation; and they repeated words and ideas in their writing.

Keeping these challenges in mind, we turned to 'letter writing'. The reason for choosing to work on letter writing was the warmth and personal connection that the genre lends. Here, there was no fear of who would read it, what they would say, or what would happen if there were mistakes. It was simply about writing and sending one's thoughts to someone close. With this, the fear and hesitation children have for writing began to diminish.

This is how I began this process in my class. Every day, students would drop a few slips of paper into a box, expressing their thoughts and feelings. In these, they would share complaints about someone, gratitude or appreciation. We would read out these slips on Saturdays. To build an understanding of letter writing, I also shared a format with them. Gradually, these thoughts turned into long-form writings. Then, the pot was replaced by a letterbox, and the slips by longer letters.

For the children, this was a fun activity, and for me as a teacher, it was like a window opening where they overcame their hesitation and began writing their thoughts. The errors in their writing gave direction to my lesson plans. We also worked in class on the shortcomings that appeared in their letters.

To enhance their letter writing, children were not interrupted or corrected for mistakes in *matras* (vowel signs), choice of words, or finer details of language. This encouraged them to write more.

Here are some examples that will help you understand this process better.

- Supriya is currently in class VIII. She is at her class level. In her early writing, her sentences were long and complex and lacked clarity. For example:

  'सर मेरी मम्मी सई कहती है। की तुम हर मेसा पढ़ाई मे घर आकर पाठ पढ़ते हो और नहीं पढा तो हरमेसा नहीं पढोगे';

  'सर आज हमने खाया और मे जब कक्षा में आई ता मेने देखा की एकता कक्षा मे बेढे थे।'

('Sir my mother is right. That you always come home and read your lessons and if you do not read, then you will never read'; 'Sir, today we had food and then I came to the class, then I saw Ekta sitting in the class.'

Her writing overused conjunctions, such as 'और' (and), 'तो' (then); her ideas were not structured into proper sentences; there were many spelling mistakes; some punctuations were missing, some were correct; and repetition of words was also a common issue.

For improvement, I read her letter with her. This helped her understand the mistakes and sentences better. Words from the class 'word wall' were used to correct spellings in her letters and writing, for example: *dhvani* (sound), *baithna* (sitting), *ooncha* (high), *aisi* (such as), *nanihal* (maternal grandmother's home), *pahunch* (reach), *baahar* (outside), *kar raha hai / tha* (is/was doing), *mushkil*

(difficulty), etc. She was encouraged to use new words. We had detailed discussions on how to begin and end a letter.

After feedback, Supriya's letters now include a formal salutation and a clear beginning and end. The sentences are short, structured, and clear and convey her thoughts. The topics of the letters are clear, and there are fewer spelling mistakes. She is writing with more focus. For example:

'सर मैंने आपको यह पत्र इसलिए लिखा है क्योंकि मुझे समझ नहीं आ रहा है कि मैं हर रोज पत्र किस टोपिक पर लिखूँ।

तो आप जब इस पत्र का जवाब दोगे तब आप बता देना कि मुझे किस टोपिक पर ज़्यादा पत्र लिखनी है।'

('Sir I have written this letter to you because I am unable to figure out the topic on which I should write letters every day. When you reply to this letter let me know on which topic I should write more letters.')

After this, she also listed some topics.

Now, Supriya is actively seeking the involvement of other people in the learning process of writing. She asks for suggestions on her own, 'Sir, please tell me how I can make it better?'

- Munmun is in class VIII. Her reading and writing are at par with her class level. She expresses emotions in her writing. Her early writing was repetitive, with sentences lacking clarity, which made it difficult to understand her ideas. For example:

  'मैं अब ज्यदा गुस्सा नहीं करती पर कभी कभी गुस्सा आता है, जब अति हो जाती है किसी चीज कि तो गुस्सा आता है जैसे शौर।'

('Now I do not get angry too often but whenever something gets too much then I get angry like noise.')

She made spelling errors; punctuation marks were missing, and it was difficult to say when a sentence ended or where to pause.

To improve, I read Munmun's writing with her. At the same time, we discussed the importance of thinking before writing. She practised writing in paragraphs. Repetitive words and sentences were marked while reading. For punctuation, we worked on her writing line by line. This helped Munmun understand that a full stop is used when a thought is complete. This was practised with other children too.

After feedback, Munmun's writing uses shorter sentences and is clearer and structured. For example:

'यह बुक आपने कहीं न कहीं जरूर पढ़ी होगी।
जिसमें एक लड़का होता है, उसका नाम मोगली होता है।'

('You must have read this book somewhere or the other. In it there is a boy, whose name is Mowgli.')

She now expresses her experiences and feelings better. For example:

'मेरा भी जंगल में रहने का मन करता है।' ('I also feel like living in a forest.')

'इस बुक के कई पार्ट हैं, जब मैं उन्हें पढ़ती हूँ तो मुझे बहुत अच्छा लगता है।' 'This book has several parts, when I read them, I really like it.'

- Sameena is also in class VIII. She actively expresses her thoughts orally, argues, and participates in discussions. In the beginning, Sameena's writing had errors in sentence structure and spelling. Her sentences missed verbs and cases. These made it difficult to understand the meaning of her sentences.

For improvement, her writing was read repeatedly. However, she would often read it as what she had intended to write, not what was actually written, meaning assumption-based reading. I then read out exactly what she had written, which helped her notice her mistakes. I pointed out to her the words in textbooks and on the 'word wall'. Mistakes with vowel signs were explained repeatedly. Following the correct word order and using verbs and cases properly was emphasised. Her interest in writing was used as a catalyst for continuous practice. As a result, Sameena's writing began to improve, and she can now present her ideas in an organised and elaborate way.

Through these efforts, almost all children from classes VI to VIII have started writing in greater detail. Except for those still struggling with basic literacy, the rest of the students now write their thoughts in paragraphs of 7–8 lines. They now write letters to their friends and teachers about their problems, guest visits to the school, book reviews, their feelings, apologising to friends, and so on.

This entire process made me realise that if children's oral expression is not elaborate, it will not appear in writing either. Therefore, listening to their letters and thoughts in detail and helping them develop their ideas through questions, is important. Reading aloud what they have written and giving them opportunities to identify their own mistakes proved effective. Sameena's example showed that some children read what they think they have written, not what they have actually written. It is crucial for teachers to understand this.

At the same time, it is important not to interrupt children repeatedly at the initial stages of writing for the finer details of language. Instead, encouraging them to write as much as possible is more beneficial. Connecting personal experiences with writing reduces hesitation in writing.

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

How a child was nurtured with innovative practices and care

Vidyashree S S

A child from the rural community came to school (joined UKG) for the first time at age 5+ years. He spoke Urdu fluently and could understand Kannada, but could not speak in Kannada. Faced with a new environment and unfamiliar language, this child, who has several developmental delays, struggled with motor skills, social behaviour, and communication.

The new child was welcomed to the classroom. The teacher told him her name and asked all the children to similarly introduce themselves to their new classmate.

Very soon, it was observed that the child could not sit still in a circle with the rest; he was constantly doing some mischief and disturbing others. His attention span was less than 5 minutes, and he needed individual attention at all times.

After one month in the school, I did a baseline assessment, which highlighted that the child needed to develop fine and gross motor skills; socially, he was aggressive; he was not engaging with any of the activities; and he was lagging behind in vocabulary. It was as difficult for him as it was for the teacher to teach him, beginning with the basics to bring him up to par with the rest of the children, even as they progressed ahead.

When we examined his family and community background, we learnt that he was the seventh child in the family, and being the only male child, he had been pampered by his parents, who had not even sent him to an *Anganwadi*.

We started by focusing on his nutrition since he was not eating proper food at home. Every day without fail, he was given milk and eggs. To improve his gross motor skills, we gave him ample opportunities to climb, skip, run, throw, catch, etc., while balancing his body. The child was not able to balance his body and run 20 to 30 meters; he could not jump over one foot, so this training continued.

In the language domain, since it was difficult for him to read and write in Kannada, we focused on listening and speaking. In English, too, the teacher mainly focused on his speaking skills. It was challenging to help him develop his language skills. We started introducing words from his surroundings and used concrete objects. But he could only remember two to three words from pictures. We continued this for many days and asked him to copy words from pictures. Slowly, he picked up some vocabulary, and then, we introduced action words and instructions in English. His peers helped him with this, trying to make him understand the words with actions. Next, we started introducing him to small situation cards. Initially, we started reading the cards aloud, asking the child to repeat the same, and his pronunciation improved. With this support, he was able to complete two to three sentences without using helping verbs.

After he had picked up some basic vocabulary, we started teaching him the alphabet along with related images. The child still struggled to remember four to five images of the same letter, and when asked to draw, he could not do so. So, we began to introduce just two images for each letter. For drawing, we made him trace the picture. The child was so comfortable tracing the pictures that gradually, he was using the vocabulary related to the theme (of the picture), using more action words in his conversation and gaining confidence in writing the alphabet in a four-line notebook and drawing pictures. It took almost eight months to train the child to gain this basic L1 competency. His classmates helped him throughout the period.

Here is an example of one of the activities we tried with him to develop his vocabulary.

Activity: Five-Finger Sentences

This activity helps children describe an object or situation using five complete sentences. It is conducted after introducing a theme and aims to transition children from using single words to full sentences and eventually to small paragraphs. For example: Tiger – 1. Tigers are wild animals; 2. Tigers live in forests; 3. Tigers eat meat, etc. Children use one finger per sentence and close each finger as they speak.

The teacher may choose the object randomly from the classroom, home, or surroundings. Children are asked to describe it based on name, colour, size/weight, where it is found (home, park, hospital, etc.), and its use. This activity builds vocabulary, basic maths concepts (like size/weight), and thinking skills. It also helps teachers assess the child's holistic understanding while encouraging every child to speak confidently and participate equally.

Now in class I, the child is reading and writing all the three-letter words and speaking in English with confidence. The class I English teacher is trying to help him in framing sentences by using the given vocabulary, writing these down and reading simple paragraphs.

This child has overcome many challenges, and all this has been possible with consistent support, individualised attention, and peer involvement.

Vidyashree S S, Teacher, Azim Premji School, Kalaburagi, Karnataka

How our students overcame their fear of public speaking

Arun Shankar Rai

Once, an officer from the Education Department came to the school for an inspection. At that time, the morning assembly was in progress. The officer asked the students a few questions, like 'Who is the Prime Minister of our country? And 'Who here likes their school?' and so on. Most of the students raised their hands to answer. But when he asked, 'Why do you like your school?', they fell silent. There were some other questions too, such as the name of your school, the name of your village, the names of the teachers who teach you and poems and stories in your textbooks.

Students were easily answering questions that required them to respond in 'yes' or 'no' or in one word. But when asked questions that required longer, more descriptive and thoughtful answers, they hesitated. When the inspector asked them to tell a story, none of them came forward, even though a range of different activities related to the library and books were being conducted regularly in the school.

The day left me feeling uneasy. A question kept bothering me: despite all the efforts, why were the students hesitating to respond? The reason behind this uneasiness was not that I expected my students to memorise and answer like robots. Still, the question remained: What exactly was the issue that we had failed to acknowledge or had not addressed?

I love reading books, and I constantly try to encourage students to do the same. I even went back and re-read some of the books — *Divaswapna* by Gijubhai Badheka (famously known among students as *Muchhon wali Maa*) and *Totto-Chan*: *The Little Girl at the Window* by Tetsuko Kuroyanagi.

These books taught me that teachers should be calm, simple, soft-spoken and friendly. I also learned that children learn best when they do things themselves. It makes their experiences real and concrete. Along with this, it also gives them the courage to take on new tasks, builds their confidence and helps them overcome hesitation. Simply talking to or explaining concepts to students is not enough; what truly matters is that we plan things in a way that every student participates and gets a chance to come on stage. Perhaps, this is what we were

Figure 1. We need to involve students in their learning process.

lacking — we were not involving students enough in their own learning process.

I began to plan monthly, weekly and daily activities. For example, spending some time with the students in the library daily, introducing them to books suitable to their reading level, encouraging them to read books of their choice, discussing the books they read in detail, asking them to write and share their experiences, etc. We started doing all of this. Along with this, students were asked to make daily journals to encourage them to write regularly. This phased approach continued for a few months. *YouTube* played an important role in this process. We showed class-appropriate videos on topics, such as how to present oneself on stage, speak confidently on stage without hesitation and fear, prepare oneself before going for public speaking and other skills essential for effective speaking. Additionally, we tried involving students in the process of issuing, maintaining and returning books.

We started involving students in all planning activities in the school related to reading and writing. This brought a positive impact. Now, students were opening up to teachers and began to see school as a space where their voice mattered in decision-smaking. I believe this role made them more responsible. They started to take an interest in all aspects of school life. Their learning improved, as did their ability to express what they had learnt and their overall confidence. Our efforts continued consistently, and about a year later, we began to see clear, positive results. We realised that this process should be continued in the long term, without a pause.

We made a list of all the students and invited each one on stage to present something based on their abilities. We also began recording videos of their presentations. By watching both their own and their peers' videos, students started reflecting on areas for improvement, such as standing confidently, staying focused on the topic, speaking fluently and using gestures effectively.

Over time, their confidence grew. We then introduced impromptu speech competitions, where students would pick a random chit from a box and immediately speak five to ten sentences on the topic, with no preparation. This kept them alert and excited. To prepare for these spontaneous challenges, they began reading more widely, sharing their thoughts and asking questions. Today, most of our students speak with confidence.

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Pragya Vetter: Bhumika Popli

Music, too, is a medium of teaching

Priya Pandey

While working and interacting with the students at Azim Premji School, Dineshpur, Udham Singh Nagar, I learnt that music can be used as a way to enhance students' personalities and make learning more enjoyable. Music classes were a huge learning opportunity for me as a teacher. They also strengthened my belief that education is not merely confined to textbooks.

I teach in a school where most students belong to displaced Bengali families, whose mother tongue is Bangla. The families belong to the economically weaker sections of society. Currently, however, the number of Kumaoni-speaking students from the mountain region is also steadily increasing in the school.

Initially, while teaching music, I felt that connecting classes I and II students with music is an engaging process, especially when music is taught using patterns. My goal was to build in each one of them an understanding of rhythm so that they could develop an interest in music. It is not essential that we always have musical instruments; rhythm can be understood through various other ways and methods. For example, the rhythm of claps, the rhythm of stones, the rhythm of a ringing bell, the rhythm of footsteps, and so on.

Students began to feel the pulse of rhythm by learning simple 4-beat patterns like 1, 2, 3, 4 (*Teen Taal*), or 8-beat patterns like 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (*Keherwa Taal*).

Figure 1. An environment of cooperation and collective learning rather than that of competition works best.

They internalised these rhythm patterns. Many students quickly took to playing instruments like the bongo and the conga. Some students found it challenging initially, but those who had already learned helped their peers with it. In this process, an environment of cooperation and collective learning was created as opposed to a spirit of competition. Through mutual encouragement, everyone understood the rhythm and enjoyed themselves.

However, it is not necessary to have a bongo or a conga. Rhythm can be created by clapping or tapping on any household item or even a table. The children also learned these 4-beat and 8-beat patterns through body percussion (clapping, finger snapping, tapping on the chest or thigh). For example, in a 4-beat pattern, clap on 1, snap fingers on 2, tap chest on 3, and tap thigh on 4. The students continued to follow this pattern. Learning this pattern involved learning, music, and joy, all rolled into one. Such activities not only improve musical sensibility but also help to create connections with mathematical concepts.

My students learn Hindi, Nepali children's rhymes and English poems with great enthusiasm, and sing them with fine rhythm. Sometimes, we dance and play games together along with the rhythm. For instance, we make twelve boxes on the ground with chalk and play any folk song. Then we jump into those boxes in the rhythm of the song, just like we would clap our hands to a song. The students' smiles and laughter in these moments are worth witnessing. They do not just learn music during these activities; instead, they experience the joy of community and togetherness.

Along with their singing, my experiment was successful in nurturing the students' creativity. I wanted them to be able to write their own songs so that their language skills would further develop. I divided the students class-wise into groups of 5-6. Some would write the lyrics, others would set the rhythm, some would create the tune, and then, each group would perform in the classroom. In this series, students from classes III to X created a songbook. I asked them to write about things around them, such as butterflies, wind, trees, rain, rivers—in the format of a song, give it a tune, and just like that, a song was born. In this way, students wrote many songs. Here is a song composed by the students of class VII:

प्रदूषण न फैलाएँ, सबकी जान बचाएँ, आओ-आओ हम सबको ये बतलाएँ पेड़-पौधे लगाएँ, प्रदूषण को भगाएँ आओ-आओ हम पर्यावरण बचाएँ...

(Don't spread pollution, save everyone's life; Come, come, let us spread this message to all; To drive pollution away by planting trees, big and small Come, come, let us save the environment...)

Similarly, students of class III came together to create the following song:

दिर दा रा, दा रा रा क्लास में जब जाते हम, रस्ते में दिखती बिल्ली मौसी म्याऊँ-म्याऊँ भई म्याऊँ-म्याऊँ, दा दिर दा...सिर पक जाते सवालों से, पढ़ाई इतनी बोरिंग क्यों होती? कोई तो बताओ भई, कोई तो बताओ, दा दिर दा...

(Da dir da ra, da ra ra; When we go to class, On the way we see Aunt Cat; Meow meow, oh meow meow, da dir da... Heads burst with too many questions; why is studying so boring? Someone, ohh someone, please tell us, da dir da...)

All children take an interest in dancing. I try to teach the steps of different folk dances to every class and have set aside 15 minutes for this. It feels wonderful when all of us learn dance steps together. Students who struggle get help from those who have already learnt the steps. I have discovered that everyone wants to improve. Together we can improve each other's dancing without any sense of competition. I can sense their confidence and joy when they hug me and express their feelings. I have realised that children are incredibly creative; they just need a little inspiration and guidance.

In some classes, we also worked on making musical instruments. Students from classes III to VIII made some musical instruments. For example, small stones in bowls or guitar-shaped instruments. These make different kinds of sounds. The students even performed together during assembly, playing these handmade instruments in a *jugalbandi* (a duet).

Another experiment with the students involved folk songs. At first, students showed little interest in learning folk songs. They found it hard to get the words and rhythm. However, as I started playing Bangla, Gujarati, Rajasthani, Nepali, Chhattisgarhi, Pahadi, Singaporean, and Japanese songs continuously, they began enjoying it. Sometimes, I play the same song in different tunes and ask them which line sounds angry, sad, or happy to them. The students eagerly respond to it.

I faced many challenges when I started teaching music because, compared to other subjects, students showed less interest in it. In the very first year, I had to select some students for the music stall at the school children's fair. Although I chose a few students, they were reluctant to participate. When I asked why, they shared that the other students laughed at them for coming to the music class.

Through more conversations, I realised that while studying science, maths, or other academic subjects is considered a matter of pride, music is not taken seriously. Now things have changed. The situation is significantly different compared to earlier. Now, students come to the music class with confidence, sing wholeheartedly, and consider it at par with other subjects.

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Richa Goswami Vetter: Simran Luthra

Creative and fun TLMs for my classroom

Rashmi Mishra

From my experience of teaching within the classroom, I have found that when children are taught with the help of Teaching-Learning Materials (TLMs), learning becomes interesting and easier for them. This is even truer when it comes to learning in young children. However, the difficulty lies in the fact that it is not always possible to find suitable TLMs for all competencies and learning outcomes.

The National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage suggests, 'Most of the TLM required for the Foundational Stage can be made using locally available and low-cost materials. Teachers should develop capacities for creating simple TLMs from locally available materials.' (NCF for Foundational Stage, 5.4.1, p 150).

On reading this, I started thinking in this direction. I created two TLMs for teaching children at the *Anganwadi* based on my understanding. Let me take you into the world of my TLM, where I will share my experiences of making and using them.

Ande ka funda: A fun way to learn

This creative TLM was made to help *Anganwadi* and class I–II children learn basic literacy and numeracy skills. Through it, children playfully learn to identify, count, and arrange numbers in the correct order. It was also used for language teaching, where they learnt to recognise and pronounce letters, to begin with.

I noticed that without any teaching material, some children found it very difficult to learn counting from one to ten, number names, identifying, writing in order or recognising number symbols. Hence, I made this TLM.

How to make it

To make it, I took an empty cardboard egg tray and painted it red using poster colour. Then I took another cardboard piece, drew several egg shapes on it, cut them out and painted them white. I now had 10–15 cardboard egg shapes. On one side of each shape, I wrote numbers from 1 to 10. On the other side, I wrote some letters—*ka, ma, chha* (letters from the Hindi alphabet). Finally, I cut out a large hen shape from red chart paper and stuck it on the tray using ice cream sticks. And just like that, our TLM was ready. I named it '*Ande ka funda*'.

Using this TLM, I tried to work with children at the *Anganwadi* centre. The centre had children from both urban and rural backgrounds. We also worked on children's learning outcomes while using the TLM, such as:

- Counting the eggs
- Identifying the numbers written on them
- Reading the numbers aloud
- Picking the egg with the correct number when asked
- Arranging them in numerical order

This sparked interest and curiosity among the children. They really enjoyed themselves and gradually, they made fewer errors.

I thought of using it for developing skills such as letter recognition as well. But before that, I worked on some other language skills such as listening to poems and songs, reciting them with expressions and enjoying them, listening to and following simple instructions, speaking, identifying print, picture reading, colouring, and drawing slanting and standing lines—activities that help with fine-motor skill development.

Using the other side of the egg shapes on which I had written the Hindi letters, I worked with the children to familiarise them with the letters—identify, read, and pronounce them. First, I read all the letters, then called out the name of a letter and asked them to pick it up. They sometimes picked the correct one and sometimes not, but gradually they started learning with fun through helping each other while playing. Thus, I used one TLM for two subjects, which turned out to be a delightful and engaging experience.

Shark and fish: Understanding numbers through play

Figure 1. Teachers can create simple TLMs from locally available materials.

From my experience, I understand that TLM helps improve children's attention and focus. When they look at a game or a picture, or engage with an activity involving TLM, they learn more effectively and retain information better.

I read in the National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage that, 'Children in the Foundational Stage are more engaged in learning when they use multiple senses and actively use their hands. From simple toys for play to specific manipulatives for counting and numeracy, a variety of TLM is essential in this Stage.' (NCF for Foundational Stage, 5.4, p 150) So, I made another fun TLM for 3–6-year-olds to work on learning outcomes related to numbers from 1 to 10. Together with the children, we named it 'Shark and fish'.

I took a cardboard box and covered all sides with coloured paper. Then, I made a hole on the top and on one side of the box. Using paper, I cut out parts of a shark—eyes, teeth, mouth, fins, etc. and pasted them so that the box looked like a shark with its mouth open. Next, I cut out small fish shapes from different coloured hard sheets and wrote numbers from 1 to 10 on them.

Before showing them the TLM, I told them that a shark is a very large fish. Some children already knew about it. They said that it has very sharp teeth and is fast and swift. Then I showed them pictures and a video of a shark, and we had a discussion about sharks: Where does a shark live? What does it look like? What are its teeth like? What does it eat? and so on.

The children said, 'When it is hungry, it eats small fish.'

I showed them the TLM and asked, 'This shark is hungry now. What should we feed it?'

The children replied in unison, 'Small fish!'

Now I took out the small, colourful paper fish. Each had a number from 1 to 10 on it. One by one, I picked up the fish in order, and the children said the number names aloud. Then, they started counting the small fish one by one and placing them into the shark's mouth. They saw that all the fish were collected in the shark's belly. After that, they took out all the fish, counted them, and arranged them in order.

In this way, the children used the TLM with great fun and enthusiasm and learnt how to count from 1 to 10, recognise numbers, and understand their sequence—all while feeding colourful fish to the shark.

Before introducing numbers, I worked with the children on pre-number concepts. These included verbal concepts, like big-small-smaller / long-short / tall-short-shorter / more-less. I used materials such as wood, pebbles, leaves, flashcards, songs, stories, worksheets, and other household items to do this.

These two TLMs not only helped generate children's interest and excitement for learning, but also enhanced their attention, concentration, thinking abilities, and language and mathematical abilities.

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

Street plays transformed the Morning Assembly

Rajendra Sharma

One day, during the morning assembly, a student fainted shortly after the prayers began. It was a very hot day, so at first, we thought the heat was the reason. However, after speaking with him and his parents, we came to know that he would not eat food at home. He disliked simple homemade meals. Instead, he preferred *chaat pakodi*, *golgappe* and other snacks from street vendors. For several days, he had been eating only such food. They mentioned that he preferred snacks, such as chips, biscuits and *namkeen*. Whenever we talk to guardians, it is a common complaint that children do not like having meals at home but crave outside food. This clearly indicated that the children were missing out on essential nutrients.

Since I wanted to address everyone at once, I chose the Morning Assembly for this purpose. However, I felt it would be futile to merely give a lecture, so I decided that something innovative was needed.

After giving it ample thought, I prepared myself through some homework. This included discussions with teachers, parents and students while also taking into account the daily needs of children. Based on these inputs, I prepared a list of focus areas, which included diet, health, weaknesses, daily routines, sleeping habits, games and sports, and the adverse effects of television and mobile phones.

It dawned on me that we would need to work on health-related habits first. This required not just a few days, but several months. I desired the participation of students in all the tasks. Hence, I talked to every class teacher, created a team of aware students in each class and asked them to prepare a street play related to health. Everyone made posters on diet, nutrition, health and hygiene. We also wrote slogans. The team prepared a street play on the conditions of healthy and ill people and enacted it. A small set was designed for the play, including a hospital, doctors, patients, nurses, medicines, injections and other relevant elements. The process of preparation of food at home versus in marriages, parties or markets was demonstrated in the play, wherein the ill effects of not preparing safe food and not consuming good food were presented.

Figure 1. Morning assembly can be used effectively for developing awareness on issues such as health and wellbeing.

The play was staged in the morning assembly. The children watched with great interest and grasped the key message behind clean, safe and nutritious food. They were also asked to review the play. After this, they were presented with questions on the topics highlighted in the play, including nutrition, health, good food, clear and dirty water, cleanliness of hands, the summer season and the importance of food. For instance, 'For which disease did the doctor prescribe medicines?', 'Why was it required to visit the doctor?', 'Why was the outside food contaminated?', 'What arrangements were made for water storage at the wedding?', 'How was the spinach cleaned before preparing the spinach dish at the party?', 'If a mother were to prepare the food instead, what cleaning arrangements would she make?', 'How do we deal with leftover food at home, and what do you think happens to leftover food outside?', etc.

Through these conversations, a comprehensive understanding of diet and health was developed. The discussions continued for several days. In the successive morning assemblies, we started showing five-six-minute videos wherein food habits, mannerism of washing hands and its advantages, identification and harmful effects of stale vegetables, ill effects of food and oil available outside and adverse effects of long nails were explained in an engaging manner.

Gradually, the students began to develop awareness. Most of them began coming to school after having breakfast. We also talked to the guardians about changing the food and its taste at home. For example, they were suggested to use tomatoes or lemons in vegetables; they could also prepare *chhole-bhature, pav bhaji, bhelpuri, chutneys* or *golgappe* at home. They were also advised to cook food according to their children's preferences and the tastes of their children and to involve their children in food preparation so that they could understand the importance of the entire process.

A few days later, a health check-up camp was organised, where students were given engaging information on eyes, mouth, teeth, nails and blood. This information was disseminated to the students in an engaging way.

We also held discussions on why bananas, gram, Indian gooseberry (*amla*), lemons, curd, buttermilk, legumes, whole grains, and Indian blackberry (*jamun*) are healthy. It was also explained as to why and how a good diet is important for our bodies.

Improvements were observed in the food habits of students, as most of them had now become conscious about not coming to school on an empty stomach, reducing their consumption of outside food, recognising the importance of fruits and vegetables and going to bed on time. For children with low haemoglobin, we talked about foods that are beneficial for blood, such as carrots, spinach, pomegranate, roasted grams, jaggery and others. The importance of protein, carbohydrates, fats, dietary fibre and other nutrients in food was also discussed.

This was a crucial initiative during the morning assembly; the benefits soon became visible among the students. However, taking this initiative was no easy feat. Nonetheless, everyone began to notice the positive transformation these activities were bringing about in the school. We started observing children getting enthusiastically engaged in tasks. They have now begun to understand the importance of good food, cleanliness and hygiene in their lives.

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Rashmi Saurav Vetter: Bhumika Popli

With patience and understanding, inclusion is possible

Shephali Jain

Poona is a student of class II. Although she comes to school regularly, she does not come to class. She plays by herself in the school playground. She displayed the same behaviour last year when she was in class I. Owing to this, my colleagues considered her 'different' and somewhat neglected her, possibly because they did not even know how to deal with the situation.

Last year, when I started teaching class II, I initiated a conversation with the students to build a rapport with them. There were 25 children in the class. I asked the children their names and the names of their parents. All of them were able to tell me this. But Poona was sitting a bit aloof from the rest of the class. She was not at all focused in class, and my attention kept going towards her. By the time it was her turn, she walked out of the class and started building some structures with pieces of wood, rocks, and stones outside. I went up to her and asked her name. She gave me a strange look, as if I had interrupted her work. I waited for a while, but she did not even look at me again. I went back to class to do my work. She kept playing outside. She did not come back into the classroom even after I called her a couple of times. All her time was spent in the playground. Once school got over, she returned home along with the other children. I continued to think of her.

I met and spoke to her parents. I wanted to know all that she did at home. Her mother said that she spent most of her time playing outdoors. I asked her mother, 'Who does she play with?' She said, 'She always plays alone.' I asked, 'Why so? She has siblings at home. Why does she not play with them?' She said, 'She only plays on her own.'

The next day onwards, I started paying more attention to Poona.

When I reached school, she was playing in the playground. The other teachers and children were coming into the school. She looked at me, and I smiled at her. She averted her gaze. It was time for the morning assembly. All the children stood in a line, but she kept playing with rocks and stones. I asked the other teachers about her, and everyone said, 'Let her be. That's how she is.'

I started observing her. She would make shapes and figures out of stones and pieces of wood. I also joined her and made some figures with her for three to four days. She saw those and made a figure replicating one of mine. That she had an aptitude for learning, this much I was sure of. I spoke a lot to her during those three to four days. For instance, while arranging the stones, I asked her what to do next, what was the name of the structure, how she learnt to make it, what she had for breakfast, who combed her hair and so on. Although she did not respond to me even once, she was listening to me.

I began making her sit next to me in class. I assigned her the task of making figures and shapes with stones, rocks, and wood. She would work on her figures with a lot of interest and would look at me once it was done. I would nod at her encouragingly, and she would start making another one.

I started making the other children applaud the figures that Poona made. She had started to smile a bit now. Gradually, I began asking her questions: What is your name? She would reply 'Poona'. What did you eat today? '*Roti sabzi*'. Whatever I asked, she would reply in a word or two.

Now she understands some rules and regulations of the class and follows them. For instance, sitting in a queue, seeking permission when going out of the class, and eating only during lunchtime. I made her sit among the other children in the class. Now she does not go out of the class. She scratches and scribbles on the floor with chalk while sitting in class and shows me her work at short intervals.

One day, I was making students recite poems in class. Poona was also speaking something along with the others. She has also started participating in class activities, but she is still somewhat slow when it comes to learning. I kept assigning her activities according to her learning level. For instance, sorting wheat grains, black gram, and peas from a jar and making small heaps. Arranging and placing pieces of wood/branches/stones in order from the smallest to the largest; asking her to draw a picture of something that she likes; counting stones, etc.

As per the timetable, a children's meet was organised on a Saturday. Poona had been participating in it earlier as well. Children were asked who wanted to recite a poem. Among the raised hands, one of the hands was Poona's. I was glad to see her courage. I called her lovingly and said, 'You recite. Which one do you want to recite?' She whispered, '*Titli Udi*...' She was a little scared, yet she wanted to recite. She quickly recited the poem with all the actions and gestures. Everyone clapped to encourage her.

Poona is now trying to connect with books. She is now participating in all the class activities. While working with the counting beads, she came on her own and said, 'Ma'am, I will move the beads.' Now, she has started developing an understanding of counting from 1 to 10. She has started counting with the help of stones. Sometimes, she comes to me on her own to ask what I have eaten or to say that my *bindi* is looking nice. She feels happy when I answer her.

I have learnt a lot from Poona's journey. One should not form an opinion about any child in haste. Everyone comes from a different background. Nobody used to talk to her at home, so she started isolating herself. It was very important to befriend her. Although her actions seemed 'different' from the rest of the children in the beginning, she understood what was being said. I realised that she had not received love and adequate opportunities. Looking at her actions, she was labelled 'different' and left to her own devices. She took refuge in rocks and stones and started spending her time playing with them. When I made her sit next to me, talked to her regularly, assigned her activities of her interest and capability, she started mingling with other children also. She now comes to school regularly and tries to learn. Her pace of learning is a little slow, but if given regular and interesting opportunities, keeping in mind the level she is at, she will certainly be able to learn better.

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Translated from Hindi. *Translator: Manjari Singh* *Vetter: Simran Luthra*

Methods of language development beyond textbooks

Manohar Chamoli 'Manu'

We are all aware of the importance of conversations in the teaching-learning process. In order to inculcate the desire for reading and writing, and to learn to read with understanding, I decided to break away from conventional methods and try something new. With this in mind, I made up my mind to try a few activities with twelve students of class VI.

One method adopted for this was that of oral introductions. I started with myself – taking my name, I wrote it on the blackboard. After this, each student said their name aloud and wrote it on the blackboard. In this manner, listening attentively, speaking confidently, and a little bit of writing all happened simultaneously. I noticed that Sunayana and Avadhesh participated enthusiastically. However, their other classmates, Rohan, Raman, Supriya, and Namita, took more time. One could clearly see that they were hesitant and scared to participate in this activity. I remained patient and encouraged them.

Sometimes, during this activity, when a blank space was left on the board, I would ask everyone to call out aloud the name of their favourite colour, movie, or city and then write it on the board. Everyone would scurry to the blackboard, and the excitement and joy in the classroom reached new heights.

Figure 1. Students feel more at ease with stories outside their textbooks.

From here on began the journey of building oral and written language skills without the textbook. In a few

days, it got easier for the students to frame sentences from the words on the board and explain the concepts of nouns, pronouns, verbs, etc., orally. The students enjoyed framing new sentences. All of this gave me a sense of the learning levels of the students and their learning so far.

I conducted another activity. In this, I spoke aloud a word related to the students' lives. For example, 'rain'. Then, I asked the students to frame a sentence with this word and write it in their notebooks. Here is what they came up with:

'I got wet in the rain yesterday.'

'I do not like the rain.'

'It does not feel nice to come to school in the rain.'

'Humidity increases during rain.'

'I enjoy bathing in the rain.'

'During rain, stones break and fall from the mountains.'

'We make *pakoras* at home when it rains.'

'Many accidents occur on mountain roads when it rains.'

In order to maintain motivation and confidence, no attempt was made to check the students' writing or to find errors.

A similar activity was conducted with students of junior classes. Students were asked to share an original sentence. I kept writing on the board the sentences they shared. Soon, we had 10-12 different sentences on the board. Most sentences were related to their day-to-day lives.

'I have to walk far to school.'

'Today, a cat drank up the milk in my house.'

'In winter, my uniform takes time to dry, so I get late for school.'

'Madam, have you seen the *buransh* (rhododendron) flower? I find it very beautiful.'

'Yesterday, my friend fell while riding a bicycle. Her hand got hurt.'

This activity meets several goals at once. Students frame sentences by putting in some thought, speak those sentences, and understand different sentence structures and their meanings by listening to them. They frame new sentences by using new words.

When I mentioned the story *Saat Poonch Ka Chooha*' ('The Rat with Seven Tails'), Sunayana and Avadhesh shared that they had read the story in primary school, though they could not recall in which class. Supriya even explained the moral of the story, 'We should not blindly believe what others say. Listen to everyone but follow your own mind.' She said that she liked hearing the story from time to time. This made me think that we should do more with stories to build listening, speaking, reading, and comprehension skills.

I typed out the story *Saat Poonch Ka Chooha* and shared photocopies among the students of class VI. I left some space between every second line for them to write. Everyone got busy reading. Upon reading the story, Naresh and Ranjan recalled that they had it in their Hindi textbooks. They were all surprised to know that they had this story in class I. Everyone was reading this story once again after five years.

The next day, I told the students that it would be great if they shared something special or new about the story.

Sonam shared, 'This story ends even before 300 words.' Mukesh said, 'From seven, the tails keep reducing until there are none.' Radhika said, 'It is an easy way to teach counting.' Neema suggested, 'We should not blindly believe people who just find faults.' Mishti asked, 'How did the rat know that barbers have scissors?' Namita said, 'The story tells us that we should not react when someone teases us.' Kashish said the same thing in a different way: 'If someone reacts when teased, people tend to tease them more.' Ranjan asked, 'If a snake feels itchy, how will it scratch itself?' Naman wanted to know: 'There must be more words like *poonchh* (tail) and *moonchh* (moustache)!'

Students' quirky observations and questions took the discussion in a new direction. When they were asked to frame questions based on the story, even students who otherwise remained quiet in class spoke up. Some of the questions they framed were:

'What problems would animals without tails have?'

'What if humans had a tail?'

'Why were the scissors needed?'

'Why do only humans cut their hair, but animals don't?'

'What if the barber had not cut the rat's tail?'

'Why do rats gnaw?'

Children feel more at ease with stories outside their textbooks. They find them outside the purview of exams. If literature is continuously used to develop language skills, students can master listening, speaking, reading, and even writing, provided students are not forced to write. Then why should we remain dependent solely on textbooks to see a change in the students?

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Pragya Vetter: Simran Luthra

Experiences of teaching writing in primary classrooms

Diksha Suryawanshi

Like always, I entered the classroom and began a conversation with the students. One child started talking about sports, another about the delicious food prepared by their mother, and a few others shared their dreams for the future. Their words were full of life. But when I asked them to write the same things in their notebooks, they drew a blank.

On observing the students' language ability more closely, I realised that they were confident in expressing themselves orally but were unable to put the same thoughts and experiences into writing. Many children could read, but when asked to write, they hesitated. They could neither write proper sentences nor were they able to write their experiences in an organised manner. I could sense fear, reluctance, and a lack of confidence around writing. I decided to help them overcome this fear. A conducive environment and processes needed to be created, which would enable them to write their thoughts freely and creatively.

I first assessed the children's current writing abilities. It became clear to me that some could only recognise words, some were able to write two or three sentences, and only a few could manage writing short paragraphs. Most of them struggled with writing when they had to think on their own. Keeping this in mind, I designed a plan that was suited to the class and the children's needs. I did not want the children to copy any written text without understanding its meaning; such an exercise is futile. It only obstructs the process of thinking that writing requires. Thinking results in natural and creative writing.

For children in classes I and II, I initially provided regular opportunities for drawing and creating colourful pictures in various ways. Storytelling pictures or picture books became the basis of our conversations. We worked on word recognition and understanding their meanings, engaged the children in speaking and listening activities through stories and poems, and encouraged them to express their ideas.

Activities for children in classes III to V were selected based on the students' proficiency levels. Activities, such as reading stories and poems, making stories with the help of picture prompts, and expressing thoughts on specific events, contexts, or visuals, were included. On the classroom walls, I carefully displayed books, local stories, and poems, as well as the children's own writings and creative work. This helped in creating a language-rich environment. I spoke to the children on a variety of topics so that they would think about them, articulate their thoughts orally, and feel motivated to write about them.

Once the children started expressing their ideas with confidence orally, they were given short and simple writing tasks. They were asked to choose the topics or experiences they wished to write about. The children came up with topics, such as 'The calf born to our cow at home,' 'Things I am afraid of,' 'The time I got hurt falling off a bicycle,' 'Quarrel during a game,' 'Bathing in the rain,' 'Mother braided my hair,' 'I wore a new frock,' 'The dog in our neighbourhood gave birth to puppies' and 'The market and the fair,' and tried to write on these. Such writing activities were conducted every week. Children who had already begun writing showed enthusiasm in the process. Those still in the early stages of learning continued to engage in oral discussions based on pictures and contextual prompts. This also encouraged them to move towards writing.

Spelling and punctuation errors were not overly emphasised. Instead, common patterns of mistakes were identified, and correction activities were designed accordingly so that children did not feel discouraged from writing. For instance, they were asked to identify errors in passages written by other students, which made the learning process more engaging and less intimidating.

Every month, I reviewed the children's writing progress to understand the kind of support each one required. Their writing samples were collected and organised into individual portfolios with their names written on them. This made it easier to track each one's progress. It brought immense joy to the children when they saw, read, and discussed their work in these portfolios.

Here, I would like to share the progress of Khilendra of class III. In the beginning, forming sentences on his own was a challenge for him. He also struggled with spelling and punctuation. He had a limited vocabulary and could usually write only two or three sentences. Once, when I

asked the children to write on the topic 'Traffic signals,' he wrote, 'One should stop at the red light, and one should move at the green light.' He could not write beyond this. Although later I realised that one reason for this was that the topic was not closely connected to his experiences.

A few months later, we celebrated the birthday of a girl named Ojhal. Her parents invited everyone for a meal. Delicious dishes had been prepared. Using this shared experience, the children were encouraged to write on the topic 'What we did on Ojhal's birthday.' The piece that Khilendra wrote left a strong impression on me. It not only reflected his thoughts, imagination, and emotions but also demonstrated his improved grasp of spelling, vocabulary, and sentence structure. He wrote:

> *'Today we celebrated Ojhal's birthday. We ate a lot and ate samosas and had a lot of fun. Afterwards, we decorated the plates and then sat down to study. We ate and sat. We also had plenty of kheer (rice pudding) and puris (fried bread). We gave her a gift. After that, the birthday celebration was over. Later, we were also given return gifts. I ate samosas, jalebi, kheer, puri, and for the return gift, we got pencil and chocolates.'*

While writing, Khilendra represented the names of some items, such as a pencil, a samosa, and chocolates, with drawings instead of words.

This example clearly shows that by enriching children's oral language, building on their lived experiences, and creating excitement around writing, their written expression can improve greatly. It also highlighted that in the initial stages, choosing experience-based topics and providing a motivating environment are essential. This change was not just in words, sentences, or ideas; rather, it was about building the confidence to share one's experiences in writing.

Overall, I observed that most children in the class showed improvement in their writing. Some slowly began writing paragraphs, while others started turning their imagination into stories. However, the journey was full of challenges.

One common difficulty was that when some children left their writing tasks incomplete, continuing with the same task on the following day was hard for them. They would either forget the context or lose interest in the topic. For some, sentence formation was difficult, while for others, limited vocabulary was a barrier. To address these challenges, I created a print-rich environment in the classroom. I regularly engaged children in reading and writing activities in the library to strengthen their oral language and nurture an interest in expressing themselves through writing.

Writing builds the belief that what is thought and spoken can also be written down. Once they were encouraged, given opportunities to speak, and had their experiences patiently heard, children did not think of creative writing as a burden. Rather, it became a source of joy.

Now I see writing not just as a skill but also as the desire to share my thoughts with readers and as a critical means of communication. When a child translates their imagination, experiences, and emotions onto paper, they open up their inner world to others. Only then does writing become truly meaningful.

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Dawangara Umat Vetter: Shabnam Sengupta

Using TLMs to teach abstract concepts

Rajendra Kumar Kumawat

I was appointed as a teacher in Dala ka Khera village of Devgarh *tehsil* in the Rajsamand district of Rajasthan. On the first day, I enthusiastically started teaching 28 students of class VI and began working on developing their understanding of place value – ones, tens and hundreds. Initially, I taught without assessing the students' levels, but the feedback revealed that most of them did not understand the concepts at all. While teaching, I noticed that although the students could count and perform operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, etc.), most of them still lacked a strong grasp of these concepts. As a result, they faced difficulties in solving addition and subtraction problems.

Figure 1. Children learn by using TLMs.

They performed addition and subtraction like this:

76 + 67	29 + 38	7 – 3	135 – 78
1313	517	4	63

The students could easily solve subtraction problems without borrowing, but they faced difficulty with problems that required borrowing. In some problems requiring addition, they started from the tens place, while in others, they added the ones and tens separately.

First, I focused on activities related to operations. Then I felt I was rushing because until the students fully understood the concepts of number formation, moving on to operations would be meaningless. So, I decided we should work on ones, tens and hundreds. I also realised that the way I was teaching made it difficult for the students to understand.

Using teaching-learning materials

I realised I should use various types of teaching-learning materials (TLMs) to help students grasp abstract concepts. The materials had to be readily available and in sufficient quantities so that as many students as possible could use them individually in the classroom and at home for learning. My experience shows that when students learn mathematics through their own efforts with positive support from the teacher, the learning is much more effective. Therefore, I focused on the concepts of ones, tens and hundreds using matchsticks, dry twigs, flowers, lids and pebbles. I also purchased some aids, like dienes blocks (from Eklavya, Pitara[1]), to facilitate students' transition from the abstract to the concrete.

First, we worked on making sticks and bundles. This was required because students can count objects up to 50 or 100 and even more but moving from concrete to abstract or while writing numbers symbolically, the method of sticks and bundles proves effective. When counting and writing objects up to 1,000, it takes more space and time. Therefore, it seems essential to draw and understand sticks and bundles visually.

All students were given 40 to 50 sticks or dry twigs and were asked to pick them up one by one, counting aloud as they set each stick aside. Everyone picked up a stick and counted, saying 'one', then they picked up another, and said 'two'. In this way, they counted up to nine, gathering nine sticks. They were informed that these nine sticks made a total of nine, and each was separate; these would be called ones. Then they continued counting by adding one stick to the nine, saying 'ten'. After this, they made a bundle of these 10 sticks and referred to this bundle as a 'bundle of 10.' One student mentioned that there are 10 separate sticks in a bundle of ten.

The next day, I asked the students to bring an object from home or their surroundings that have ten 'ones'.

The following day, one student brought a sheet with 10 bindis and said, 'These are ten *bindis*!' Another student not only brought a strip of 10 pills but also asked everyone, 'My father takes one pill every day. How many strips of pills will he need in a month?' Such participation from the students reinforced my belief that when opportunities are created to connect maths with students' contexts, they think and engage more actively.

This exercise helped the students understand that counting from one to nine is easy, but as the numbers increase, counting becomes more challenging. Therefore, after understanding that forming tens from 10 ones and hundreds from 10 tens, counting and performing operations with very large numbers become easier. For tens, there is a need to understand that the numbers from one to nine are distinct, but as soon as one more item is added, it forms a group of 10. The number 48 can be represented in this way:

Tens	Ones
4 bundles 	8 items 

The number of bundles of 10 will be written in the tens place. In the number 48, there are 4 bundles of 10, hence, 4 is written in the *tens* place. The remaining sticks (which are less than 10, so cannot form a bundle) will be written in the *ones place*. Here, 8 is the remaining number of sticks, so 8 goes into the *ones place*.

4 × 10 + 8 = 48 (Number of bundles × Objects in one bundle) + Objects in the *ones place*.

As the students began to develop the concepts of ones and tens, they started working on the concept of hundreds. Continuing this activity, when the students had made bundles of 10 sticks (i.e., 10 bundles of 10), they were asked to combine these to form a larger bundle of hundreds. After this, there was a detailed discussion among the students about the relationships between ones, tens and hundreds.

I presented the number 148 to the students. They began to explain the number accurately up to 48, stating that the number 4 actually represents 40. This means there are four bundles of 10 and eight ones. The discussion paused when it came to the digit one. At that moment, one student thoughtfully asked, 'Is this a hundred, meaning 100?' The second student wondered how 1 could equal 100. Then another student said, 'Yes, 10 bundles of 10 combined make 1 bundle of 100.'

Hundreds	Tens	Ones
1 	4 	8 

As bundles of ten are formed from the tens place, a group of ten bundles (the number 100) is moved to the hundreds place. One such bundle=100, two such bundles=200 and so on, are referred to as bundles of hundreds.

To reinforce the understanding of the concepts of ones, tens and hundreds, we worked with additional numbers. The students explained the number 242 using sticks and then represented it visually in their notebooks and on the board as follows:

(pictorial representation of sticks)

2 × 100 + 4 × 10 + 2 = 200 + 40 + 2 = 242

Number of hundreds bundles × items in one bundle + number of tens bundles × items in one bundle + ones items.

The students understood these concepts, as they began to read and comprehend 264 as two hundreds (200), six tens (60) and four units. With this understanding, the concepts of addition and subtraction also became easier. Their skills improved and became better. The students were learning to read, understand and perform operations with numbers up to thousands.

It has been observed that the use of TLMs helps make difficult concepts easier and more interesting for children. When concepts become clearer to students, their fear of mathematics gradually fades away.

[1] Eklavya Pitara - https://eklavyapitara.in/

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Translated from Hindi. Translator: Bhumika Popli Vetter: Sonam Kumari

We've got mail!

Make science teaching interesting and enjoyable

Amrita Masih's *Nurturing Children's Curiosity in Science*, published in the 23rd issue of *Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar* explores various strategies that are essential for encouraging scientific inquiry and nurturing students' natural curiosity. Enriched with practical classroom examples, this article emphasises the importance of igniting scientific interest through hands-on activities, creative learning environments, and real-life experiments. It talks about promoting a culture of asking questions without any fear. This article holds great significance for encouraging science teachers, teacher trainers, and parents who want to make science interesting and enjoyable for students.

Harsha Kulkarni, Assistant School Leader, Liaison Friendship School, Singngat, Manipur

Special Issue on understanding inclusive education

The special issue of *Pathshala* on Inclusive Education focuses on a very important subject. The articles create pathways for us to think about education in relation to ground realities. Many of the contributions provide substantial reflections on how inclusion can be implemented meaningfully. For example, Madhu Kushwaha's *Inclusion at Enrolment Level is not Enough* and Vishnu Gopal's *Everyone has an Equal Right to Learn* broaden our perspective on inclusive education.

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I will try to implement these ideas in my classroom

In the article *Classroom Conversations are Important for Learning* published in the 24th issue of *Pathshala*, author Arvind Kumar Singh's point is worth noting that children feel connected to us only when we have meaningful conversations with them, and this is how we learn about their problems. At the same time, stories and poems help children feel comfortable with the teacher. We should listen to children, appreciate them, and keep encouraging them. I will share the suggestions from this article with my school teachers and also try to implement them in my own classroom.

Rajni, Teacher, Primary School, Tajpur, Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh

Working together to create a better school

After reading Mohammad Tasleem's conversation with teacher Mamta Jain published in *In the Spotlight* column of issue 24, it became clear how important a role a head teacher can play in creating a positive school environment. The morning assembly organised by the teacher was particularly interesting, where children were given opportunities for creative expression. She worked systematically on initiatives, like Reading Corners and a print-rich environment in the school. Additionally, she organises various games and physical activities, which have led to a significant rise in children's attendance and enrolment in the school. These practices are inspiring examples for other teachers. The teacher seeks community support to solve challenges. And together they all realise the vision of 'working together to create a better school'.

Pradeep Kumar, Block Kasrawad, District Khargone

Both the article and the webinar helped deepen my understanding

I work on curriculum and teacher training related to mathematics in my organisation. Gulshan Yadav, in his article Understanding Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, explained very important points of FLN in detail. The webinar on this topic, with its examples, further clarified what is included in FLN. It was explained in a very simple manner. I conduct training with government teachers from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Belagavi in Karnataka. Many things also became clearer through the conversations held on the Azim Premji Foundation's YouTube channel.

Ashish K. Kelshikar, Maharashtra

A positive, encouraging, and supportive environment motivates learning

I really liked the column *In the Spotlight* of the June issue, where Mohammad Taslim's conversation with teacher Mamta Jain titled *Collaborative Efforts Create a Better School* was published. It explains how a positive, encouraging, and supportive environment motivates students to learn. In the teaching-learning processes at the school, our efforts are not limited to just books, but we connect students to learning through TLMs, games, the library, and other experience-based methods. The teacher emphasised the importance of the morning assembly. Print-rich environment and Reading Corners are also essential. This conversation gave me a perspective on what we can do in our own schools.

Krishnadev Rai +2 High School, Balihar, Simri, Buxar, Bihar

School transformation through creative processes and community participation

M. Valli and K. Gandhimathy presented their experiences in the article, *Transformation of a School.* The transformation of the government primary school in Pudukuppam is a great example of how an institution can be revitalised through passion, creativity, and community participation. A school that was on the verge of closure has now emerged as a stronger academic centre. The article reassures us that everything is possible if efforts are made. Connecting the school with the community is essential, and perseverance is the key. For effective work, the dedication of the persons involved is very necessary.

Babita Kumari, Middle School, Badka Rajpur, Buxar, Bihar

The teacher's work is a model for other Anganwadis

The simplicity and plain language of Rekha Chauhan's article *A Day at an Anganwadi*, along with the work and activities described, have been very inspiring for me. When Munilakshmamma asked children to clap imitating the rainfall, and then asked, 'What time is it now?' the children shouted, 'Story time, story time!' This shows that activities in this *Anganwadi* centre are conducted according to a set schedule aligned with children's developmental needs. The teacher systematically plans activities for pre-literacy, numeracy, social-emotional and expressive development, as well as rest time for children. Munilakshmamma's work at the *Anganwadi* has been very commendable. This work can serve as an example for other *Anganwadis*.

Bhanu Pratap, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand

We ordered the storybook Raja Ki Moonchein (The King's Moustache) for our school

In the 24th issue of Pathshala, in the column *In the Company of Books*, the book *Raja Ki Moonchein* (The King's Moustache) written by Asha Nehemia was reviewed. Its Hindi translation has been done by Mahendra Yadav. After reading Shankar Chaubey's review, I understood that it features a king who is very proud of his moustache. His moustache is so unique and large that he wants everyone in the kingdom to praise it. The king's arrogance and his strange thinking about his moustache become a problem for the entire kingdom. The story wonderfully combines humour and satire, making it very special. Even the title of the story sparks curiosity not just among children but also among adults. When I read this review aloud to the children, they enjoyed it a lot, though it was incomplete. Therefore, we ordered *Raja Ki Moonchein* along with some other books for our school.

Bhavana Bunkar, Government Primary School, Jhotwara, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Sandeep Dubey Vetter: Sonam Kumari

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Anuvada Sampada

अनुवाद सम्पदा

अज़ीम प्रेमजी यूनिवर्सिटी की अनुवाद रिपॉजेटरी

विद्यार्थियों और शिक्षकों के लिए भारतीय भाषाओं में उच्च गुणवत्ता वाले शैक्षणिक संसाधनों का भण्डार।

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