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- Names have been changed to protect children's identities.
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Editorial

Early childhood is the foundation of lifelong learning and development, and this stage is a major determinant of the quality of adult life. This is the most crucial time for a child to learn. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explains this in depth and underlines that children learn best when the learning process is centred around various hands-on activities; when they are respected and valued; and when they are fully included in the learning process.

For this, it is essential that children get a safe and familiar environment during early childhood. This is possible only when everyone associated with early childhood education – preschool teachers, supervisors, *Anganwadi* workers, and helpers – has a clear understanding of the objectives of the *Anganwadi* programme and their specific role within it. They must clearly know what kind of games, what type of communication, and what kind of activities are meaningful for the children. The engagement of the community with the *Anganwadi* centre is also an important link, so that the thread of learning and understanding that children pick up at the centre is not lost when they go home. This is why the December issue of *Pathshala Bheetar Aur Bahar* is devoted to ‘Early Childhood Care and Education’.

In this issue, you will read why it is important for *Anganwadi* centres to be a joyful space, and how the environment impacts children’s learning. You will also read about how to identify the challenges of children with disabilities and how to design learning for them. An article in the issue explains how dialogue and empathy are essential elements for learning. You will certainly find the article that introduces the concept and experiences of *Bal Mela* (children’s fairs) useful. Strengthening the support system for *Anganwadi* workers is crucial, and articles based on their experiences are also included in this issue. In addition, as always, the regular columns bring to you the story of an ‘inspiring teacher’, entries from ‘teachers’ diaries’, information about useful books for pre-primary education, along with some activities.

From your responses that we have been continuously receiving, we have learnt that you have been able to use the 25th issue of *Pathshala* on ‘Inclusive Education’ quite effectively in your classrooms. It is truly heartening to know this. We hope that this issue, focused on early childhood care and education, will also prove useful to you.

As always, keep reading and stay connected!

With best wishes,

Pratibha Katiyar
Chief Editor

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Education in Early Years | A Conceptual Exploration

Kinnari Pandya

The starting point and end goal of early childhood education is the *'developing child'* and *not* the content or subject matter. The preparation for later school subject areas and literacy-numeracy proficiency lies on this foundation that is built by helping children develop optimally with the right environment and scaffolds.



Figure 1: Playful environments can facilitate significant learning in the early years.

Research on human development has shown that the early years, particularly up to the age of 8 years, are the most influential period of one's lifetime. The kind of experiences that a child has in the early years – positive or negative – have a direct correlation to their later life experiences and outcomes. This could be in the form of overall health and growth indicators, the capacity of the brain to develop optimally, preparedness for engaging with the world outside the home socially and emotionally, being literate and acquiring other knowledge and awareness to help understand the world better, or the ability to complete schooling and engage in productive work.

Over the years, the views on the matter of what kind of education or engagement young children in the age group of 3-6 years should receive have been varied,

sometimes vague. The question of what should be the 'teaching-learning' for this age-group has moved through a spectrum – from being at home in an informal, self-driven play environment to a rush to teach them the 3 Rs (**R**eading, **wR**iting and **aR**ithmetic).

Unfortunately, none of these ideas account for what quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) should be. Let us understand what 'education' in the early years entails.

“ **The type of experiences that a child has in the early years have a direct correlation to their later life experiences and outcomes.** ”

The Developing Child

A 3-year-old is learning to speak simple, short sentences, express her needs, and repeat sentences and phrases.

The child at this age mostly prefers to be or to play by themselves. Gradually, over a period of the next three years, the child will move to interact/play with other children in the neighbourhood, and then with other adults in the surroundings, and with play group teachers.

From this age onwards, as the language flourishes, the child articulates many questions, seeking answers to the question 'Why': Why does the moon change shape? Why does the moon move with us when we are on a bus? Why do leaves have different colours? Why doesn't the clock stop working? Why does the ball always fall? And so on. The child is looking for meaning and explanations.

Apart from this, the child is learning to do things for themselves – learning to wear clothes, eat all types of food neatly, take care of belongings, express emotions and needs, control/regulate emotions and so on. They express their needs, likes and dislikes; begin to talk about their own selves – 'I am like this!'; take initiative and actively engage with things in their environment.

Between 3-6 years of age, from being a child who seeks answers to almost everything around them, and is dependent on the adults around for most daily activities, the child becomes relatively more independent, can manage most daily chores on their own, has a vocabulary of about 5000 plus words, can express and narrate an incident or story with elaborate expressions, and so on. From not being able to put a button on the shirt, the child is ready to do more complex, coordinated work, such as sewing with a big needle or tying a shoelace. From needing help to jump from a height, the 5-year-old can jump comfortably without support or climb trees.

What do we see in the above example?

The child in this three-year period is rapidly developing. It is not just physical growth but a *qualitative* change, that is, several domains – cognitive, socio-emotional, language, physical and motor abilities, and creative expressions – developing in parallel.

The domains are also interdependent. For example, a child who is able to control and regulate emotions, does not throw temper tantrums or cries too often, is social, and plays more with other children, gets attention from adults around, is therefore, more likely to get more opportunities to speak and express, developing the child's oral language capacities.

Two-way interactions with people, material, places, processes and support available to the child influence the quality of this development, both positive and negative (regressive), in the growing child.

With this understanding, it is pertinent, as educators, to ask ourselves: *What is the most meaningful engagement for the development of children in this period? What might the 'education' for this age group consist of?*

Focus of early education

It is important to remember that the starting point and end goal of ECE is the '*developing child*' and *not* the content or subject matter. The preparation for later school

subject areas and literacy-numeracy proficiency lies on this foundation that is built by helping children develop optimally with the right environment and scaffolds. Education in the early years (3-6 years) is aimed at three aspects:

1. To help children 'develop' well, that is, the already rapidly developing child gets support for their ongoing learning and development, such that they achieve their potential for development.
2. To help children 'learn how to learn'.
3. To situate the content in children's immediate, existing surroundings and based on their *interests*.

Let us understand the three aims of ECE that the early childhood curriculum ought to achieve.

Early childhood curriculum

The section below articulates three aims that ECE curricula ought to achieve. These aims of ECE also guide the pedagogy to be used and the content that makes learning meaningful and relevant for children.

Optimal development of the developing child

Children are developing rapidly across the various domains of development as discussed above. Some illustrative aspects for all domains of development to help identify

which aspects of development need support from adults, particularly ECE teachers, are as follows:

Bigger (gross) muscle development

A child who can jump with support needs opportunities for learning to jump independently. A child learning to throw a ball and play *catch*, needs supportive experience so she can 'aim' the ball at the target. Development of big-muscle, balance, coordination, strength and endurance are the key goals of gross-motor development during this period.

Finer (smaller) muscle development

The development of smaller muscles – fingers and toes – in strength and coordination with the eyes is a critical aspect of this developing phase. Opportunities to thread beads, lace up shoes, pick up tiny grains/seeds/stones, and sort these mixed in a bowl, as well as pick up small straws, leaves, and stones, and arrange them over a pattern, help develop these small muscles. Eye-hand coordination in doing these tasks, which involve separating/sorting/differentiating between objects, becomes critical. It helps in building the strength required later for holding a pencil and writing for long hours. Differentiating between objects or drawings helps in the identification of letters when children get exposure to language scripts.

Sensory-perceptual development

Development of the five senses – sight, touch, smell, sound and taste – through the ability to observe or mix colours and differentiate or find errors in a drawing; sort based on size and shape and identify textures – hot/cold, smooth/rough and other tactile experiences; identify different odours – pleasant and unpleasant and recognise the source of odours – flowers, food; and the experience of tasting a variety of food, and associating names with each taste.

Perceptual development also demands continuous cognitive (thinking) experience in all the sensorial explorations, as well as in gauging distance, time, weight, etc. For example, how far is something, how near, how heavy or light, and so on. Sensory perceptual experience is deeply intertwined with cognitive abilities and language and vocabulary development.

Cognitive development

Thinking and problem-solving abilities are an aspect of development that, along with other abilities, help young children make 'meaning of the world' around them. These are abilities to differentiate, seriate, sort, sequence, problem solve by figuring patterns, or reason cause and effect. For example, why do things fall when thrown, why does water change colour with a drop of ink, and why does it rain are examples of the kinds of questions

children may have. Thinking through these, with support from adults (in not how to remember the 'right' answer, but in how to do systematic reasoning), is critical for enhancing cognitive abilities in young children. Many of these experiences help children learn concepts, especially early mathematical concepts of space, time and objects, and build a base for counting and arithmetic. Informed, caring adults who appreciate children's questions and engage with them in the process of inquiry help children develop advanced thinking skills.

Language and literacy development

The sheer increase in vocabulary through constant engagement with adults on different aspects in everyday life, the opportunity to express, listen, and comprehend, and create songs, stories, rhymes, weaving everyday experiences into different forms of expression, entails language development.

Literacy is distinct and builds on oral language development. Oral language development (listening and speaking) helps in literacy development, that is, learning to read and write. All children begin to read (infer visual cues) when they identify and differentiate between things around them. For example, in a picture of a tree and a ball, being able to identify and tell their associated names. Introduction of sounds and associated scripts has to be formally taught and requires systematic planning and engagement.

Socio-emotional learning

Children begin to develop a sense of self from a very young age. Their idea of who I am, what I like and dislike, how I associate with others, along with recognition of various emotions and feelings, giving words/ labels to these, knowing how to conduct oneself in different situations – with peers, adults, outside home, in formal settings – are aspects of socio-emotional development that young children need support with. Regulating emotions, understanding care for others, what is right and wrong, and the implications of one's actions are other aspects adults need to guide children with.

While these domain-specific developments may seem 'separate' and 'distinct' from each other, there are significant overlaps and interdependence in the way these unfold in daily life and situations.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) 2022 have given clear guidelines and direction to early childhood education for the foundational years, which include preschool/*Anganwadi* students (3-6 years) and early primary grades I and II students (7-8 years).



Figure 2: All children should get the opportunity to participate in activities.

Learning to learn

Education for young children is also about helping them engage with the world and enabling them to make meaning of it on their own, as a continuous process. For this, education needs to help children develop the skills of *learning to learn*. Giving them or expecting them to know the right answers is not the aim. The aim is to help them slowly develop the capacity to find answers and support them with the necessary language and reasoning skills.

Careful observation

Focusing on what is going on is an important skill for young children. It is hard for children and requires practice to cultivate it. Encouraging children to observe insects and minute things in their surroundings, talking about these observations, and accepting their observations is a critical pedagogic practice.

Imitation and repetition

Children learn by doing. Repetition is done for joy and for mastering something new. Imitating adult behaviour, for example, the manner of talking, walking, eating, action songs, balancing and tip-toe walking – children repeat for joy and to become comfortable with any new and interesting activity. Habit formation of daily routines also needs repetition and practice. Dispositions of care and sensitivity are also what children observe and imitate from adult behaviour. Careful modelling by adults is necessary for children to imitate and learn from adult behaviour.

Trial and error

Children learn by doing. However, their muscle strength and coordination are still developing gradually. The opportunities to repeat, make mistakes, and try out difficult tasks, even when they fail, are important to help children engage with difficult and challenging tasks and gain confidence in performing simple tasks. For example, pouring water from one glass to another, holding a lemon in a spoon and walking, climbing with effort and support,

all these varied experiences, and opportunities to make mistakes and keep trying, help them 'learn' to do things independently.

Asking questions, inquiring

Children are curious. Exploring their surroundings is an active, ongoing process. With the development of language, their inquisitiveness takes the form of questions. As responsible and caring adults in a child's environment, engaging children in meaningful dialogues, asking reciprocal questions (when a child asks questions, the adult engages and asks further questions to break down the information and help children think further), breaking down their inquiry points patiently and using vocabulary that the child understands, is a critical learning process.

Representing

Expressing and sharing what we have observed, learnt, and done, is a uniquely human trait. Opportunities to help children develop this by talking about their experiences at home and school, through songs or stories, written or visual expressions through scribbles and drawings (that later develop as script and writing), making objects using clay, paper, and other resources are important learning tools. Opportunity to express themselves in their own language is a critical pedagogic practice while working with young children.

Content from children's surroundings and of their interest

Children's learning ought to rest in their immediate environment. Their curiosities and interests lie in what is around them. The effort of the ECE curriculum is to help children fulfil these curiosities and interests. This is a key guiding principle of organising content for the early years' curriculum offered in preschools/ *Anganwadis/Balwadis*. This is also the principle that NCF-FS 2022 and other national curricula have followed in their guidelines.

The principles of building on concepts and phenomena that are in the surroundings of the child help fulfil their curiosities and make meaning of their immediate environments and experiences. It offers a certain continuity to their overall home and school experiences. Focusing on their home and family environments – me and myself, food we eat, animals and plants we see around us, vehicles, seasons and so on are useful curricular topics. The *thematic* organisation of content comes from this idea of engaging children in what is relevant and contextual to them as they experience these in their environments, in a comprehensive manner.

Repeated, gradual and graded opportunities for children to explore the same concepts are useful. For example, the discussion on vehicles for a 3-year-old will be different from that with a 5-year-old. With younger children, sounds of vehicles seen in the immediate vicinity and naming them would be important, whereas for 5-year-olds, some other complex aspects, such as shapes of vehicles, different modes of transport, will be fascinating. The idea is not to make them perfect with every detail of how vehicles work, but to create excitement in them to think through minute details on a range of different things and phenomena around them.

How to achieve these aims of ECE

The core premise of education for young children is situating it in what children already do and engage in. Children in this age group engage in many forms of play. Achieving all of the above aims of ECE is possible through play-based learning and pedagogic planning. The national curricular guidelines and NCF-FS 2022 recommend

Play-Way as a singular approach to Foundational Stage pedagogy, especially for children in the age group of 3-6 years.

Finally, as early childhood educators, it is important to recognise that:

- Early childhood education is not the same as 'school' and subject-based education.
- Literacy and numeracy are a subset and one of the learning goals of early years, not the only learning goal.
- Structured, fearful and stressful classroom environments are detrimental to children's overall growth and learning. It is imperative to break free from such notions of teaching-learning.
- Play has significant potential, and playful environments can facilitate significant learning in the early years. We, as educators, need to recognise this potential and work towards making inclusive learning environments.

Acknowledgement: I would like to express my gratitude to several ongoing conversations, specifically with Jigisha Shastri, Ira Joshi, and my students and colleagues working in ECCE, which have led to the writing of this article.



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Environment of Anganwadi Centres Must Be Joyful

Sunil Kumar Sah

An *Anganwadi* centre can become a truly effective learning space for children only when it offers a warm, pleasant and child-friendly environment. Children should be engaged in playful activities, where learning is embedded in fun. For this to happen, *Anganwadi* workers themselves need to enjoy teaching and conducting activities, and they must clearly understand the deeper purpose behind each of these activities.

Since independence, several efforts have been made towards the education, health and nutrition of children, both at governmental and non-governmental levels. However, an organised effort on a larger scale began with the establishment of *Anganwadis* in 1975. Both health and education are basic needs without which a developed India could not be imagined. Before *Anganwadi* centres were established nearly 50 years ago, access to health and education was limited. Not everyone had access to basic health facilities and schools. The literacy rate was very low. The mortality rate among children and mothers was alarmingly high due to malnutrition. But as these services expanded, their impact became evident. Among these

efforts, *Anganwadi* centres and their workers played a significant role.

Caring for the health of women and children, ensuring proper nutrition, reducing maternal and child mortality and ensuring basic education for all is in itself a complex and challenging responsibility. The most important aspect of this programme is its accessibility to the people. An *Anganwadi* should be a place located close to people's homes, just like the courtyard of a house, where everyone can reach easily. Today, there are 13-14 lakh *Anganwadis* across the country, making them one of the most significant institutions to reach the very last person in every village



Figure 1: Children should be engaged in playful activities, where learning is embedded in fun.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 underlined the importance of pre-primary education. For this reason, along with health and nutrition, education has been recognised as a crucial dimension of the work at *Anganwadi* centres. Research has clearly shown that 80 percent of a child's mental development takes place within the first 1,000 days of their growth. In light of this, pre-primary education becomes an essential component of the work at the *Anganwadis*.

Often, knowingly or unknowingly, we suggest methods for the functioning of *Anganwadis* that are far from reality and beyond the understanding of *Anganwadi* workers. The conceptual aspects, such as learning theories, knowledge and language acquisition become dominant in the approaches that are suggested. As a result, the element of joy disappears. Such approaches, instead of helping in creating a welcoming and organic work environment for *Anganwadi* workers, often make them anxious and discouraged and lower their enthusiasm to learn.

We must work together to ensure that every *Anganwadi* worker is able to do something for two to three hours at her centre every day that every child can thoroughly enjoy and, at the same time, learn something in this enjoyable atmosphere. For *Anganwadi* children's age group, the more we can engage them in short stories, poems and a variety of playful activities and give them as many opportunities for these, the stronger their attachment to the centre will become and the better their participation will be. It will also make it easier for the *Anganwadi* worker to conduct these activities.

This raises an important question: *How can this be achieved?*

We¹ have been working in this field for more than two years. In these two years, we have learned that what is important for both the children in this age group and the *Anganwadi* workers is how much we can simplify the things that we explain to them. Simplifying explanations is the first condition for effective work. The second condition is to create activities by drawing upon things from our immediate surroundings. Many times, activities are designed abstractly. *Anganwadi* workers can neither fully understand them nor make them a part of their work.

An *Anganwadi* centre cannot be operated like a traditional classroom where children sit in rows and receive instructions. The concept of the *Anganwadi* centre is completely different. It is meant to be a space where children enjoy themselves, where they have the freedom to express and do things as they wish. The atmosphere should not be burdensome. The *Anganwadi* worker

should ensure that every child gets an equal opportunity to participate, and most activities are conducted with children sitting in a circle to encourage interaction. Along with this, all children should have the freedom to work on various aspects, like engaging in some guided and some independent activities, touching and feeling objects, and creating something. More important than conducting an activity is how much the worker is able to involve all children and allow them freedom within the activity.

Let us try to understand this with a few examples. At one centre, the *Anganwadi* worker decided to work with children on the understanding of colours. Children were given a set of colours and a piece of paper. Each child was given a different fruit and the corresponding colours. They were asked to first look at the fruit, then draw it and then fill it with colours. Many children were not yet able to draw fruit or fill in the appropriate colours in the drawing. Some worked as instructed, but most of them started playing with the colours. The *Anganwadi* worker felt that they were not doing things as instructed. So, she herself drew pictures of some fruits and asked some children to fill in the colours. Some children who were not able to do even this were left free to draw any shape. Gradually, everyone drew something. The worker then encouraged them to use all the colours one by one so that they could develop some understanding of colours. Later, she discussed all the fruits and the colours they had used. The point here was not that all children draw pictures of fruits. The objective was to help them identify different colours, play with colours, hold the crayons, and leave some kind of drawing on paper. The exercise was meant to give them an opportunity to experience joy and motivate them to participate more enthusiastically in future activities. This approach develops a kind of emotional connection that proves helpful in children's mental development. There is a need to expand such activities further and work towards developing a series of such activities.

The experience of another *Anganwadi* centre was completely different. Flash cards related to some animals were given to the children. Since the pictures were two-dimensional, the children could not see all the body parts of the animals. The *Anganwadi* worker began by showing the pictures to the children, introducing each animal and asking questions such as, 'How many legs does it have?' The children responded based on what they could actually see in the picture, not as the worker expected. She repeated, 'No, how many legs does it have?' but the children could not understand what was expected, and the confusion was evident on their faces. Here, a careful selection of pictures could have made her task easier.



Figure 2: It is important for Anganwadi workers to clearly understand the deeper purpose behind each activity.

“ We observed that children were noticeably happier at those *Anganwadi* centres where workers spent more time telling stories and reciting poems. ”

We can understand a few more things from the experience at a third centre. Here, the worker used a balanced mix of both abstract and concrete elements in her activity. Children observed and recognised many objects in their surroundings. For example, tamarind and gram seeds, or various types of pluses, which they use both for playing and as food. There can be many more such things. The worker filled the seeds in balloons of different colours and gave them to the children to identify the seeds by touching the balloons. At first, they did not understand, but gradually, when a few children started giving answers, everyone joined in enthusiastically. The children felt happy as they were able to identify the pulses by guessing.

Apart from this, we observed that children were noticeably happier at those *Anganwadi* centres where workers spent more time telling stories and reciting poems. Children sat together in a circle, were fully engaged and found ways to entertain themselves through these activities. At many centres, when the worker asks children what they want to do, children often insist on listening to stories.

Overall, the key message is that learning can be made simple and enjoyable through simplifying teaching methods. In other words, activities need not necessarily be designed only to ‘teach’; they should be enjoyable. If there is fun, learning follows.

While working in Chhattisgarh, we have prioritised the practice that if each *Anganwadi* centre can focus on a given set of points, it can become a better learning space. An *Anganwadi* centre should:

- Open and close on time
- Become an attractive centre for learning
- Hold ECE-related activities for about one to two hours daily
- Make every effort to create an inclusive and welcoming space for all children

To increase people’s interest in *Anganwadi* centres, it is necessary to continuously share the centre’s activities and achievements with the community. This can be done by organising fairs and gatherings where children and women come together, ensuring everyone participates and contributes. It is also important to recognise small successes and share them with the community. Such efforts encourage and motivate both the workers and the community to continue this work. At present, the community largely perceives an *Anganwadi* as a place that provides meals to children. However, the centres now need to move beyond their limited identity and establish themselves as spaces that not only focus on nutrition and health but also nurture joy, learning and early development.

Reference

¹Azim Premji Foundation in the state of Chhattisgarh.

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Frequently Asked Questions by Early Childhood Teachers

Jigisha Shastri

Over the years, I have met a lot of teachers and discussed various topics related to Early Childhood Education (ECE) with them. It is wonderful to engage with teachers who have questions, who want to understand and give their best to the young children they work with. I am sharing a few of the most frequently asked ones here. These questions are common to all ECE teachers, whether they are from *Anganwadis* or highly resourced schools.

Question: Everyone insists that we let children play. Whether it is ECE specialists or the National Education Policy (NEP 2022), play is emphasised. At the same time, we have learning outcomes/objectives (LOs) for children that we have to fulfil, and weekly plans that we have to follow. If we let them play, when will we complete what we are supposed to 'teach' the children?

Answer: Play is a natural (in many Indian languages it can be translated as *naisargik*, *kudrati* or *prakrutik*) activity for children. A child in the cradle will play with the hanging cot mobile, a child in the classroom will play with the threads of the durrie/carpet, touch objects, roll them, throw them, touch and smell them. They play alone, they play with their peers and siblings and also with adults. While playing, children's holistic development takes place. They think, they use their body movements, interact with others, and talk to each other; this is how the cognitive, physical motor, social, and language development-related processes happen. While playing, they make decisions, they decide rules, and they imagine and wonder. So, keeping the learning outcomes and lesson plans in mind, we have to plan the experiences and activities where they can move their bodies, think, talk, and interact with each other. In this way, the activity/experience we have planned will become play for children. Of course, we also need to give them time to play freely on their own outside the classroom and inside the classroom with materials. While playing, many of the LOs will be fulfilled. We, as teachers, do not need to be in charge of the children's learning all the time. They will play and learn on their own. Of course, we have to keep in mind their safety, keep an eye on them so they do not hurt themselves.

Question: What is the Play-Way method?

Answer: The Play-Way method or approach is one in which experiences for children are designed so that they are totally involved in the activity, they can work using

“ **While playing, children's holistic development takes place. They think, they use their body movements, interact with others, and talk to each other; this is how the cognitive, physical motor, social, and language development-related processes happen.** ”

their five senses, they can interact with each other and have conversations. In this method, children are engaged both physically and mentally. For example, one way of exploring the theme of *animals* would be to ask children the names of animals, make them learn these by heart and look at pictures on a chart. However, a practising play-way teacher can introduce animals through songs. While they are singing, they can act like each animal that comes in the song and make the sound that animal makes. In the play-way approach, the teacher uses methods where children get the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity and make choices on their own. Letting children use different materials and learn from them, for example, matching picture cards, putting together a puzzle, asking each other questions and learning from each other, narrating stories or role play of different characters – all of this is part of play-way.

Question: What exactly are Learning Corners? How do we set up Learning Corners in our classrooms?

Answer: Young children in the age group of 3 to 8 years learn by interacting with materials. We may call them toys, play materials or learning materials. These include puzzles, blocks, other manipulatives, like blocks of various types, shape sorters, seriation boxes, counting kits, matching cards, sequence cards, textures (cloth pieces of various textures), sound boxes and even simple games, like snakes and ladders, etc. Depending on the LOs of the

week, the teacher can select which material will be left in the environment for children to explore. For example, if the LO for the week is identifying basic shapes, then two cards each of basic shapes, like square, triangle and circle, can be placed in a small box. Children can pick these up and try to place the same shape cards together. The teacher keeps an eye on the children and guides them where necessary, provides encouragement, clues and suggestions. The teacher can play with them.

Regarding how to organise this material in the classroom, depending on the purpose of the materials and their use, we need to first classify/group the material – all blocks of different kinds together. Similarly, for books, flash cards, picture cards, etc. Once the material has been sorted, place them in different corners or spaces of the classroom.

If the room is small, the material can be kept in boxes. If the classroom area is spacious, arrange the materials so that all materials are on display in different corners. Use open shelves and keep the materials in boxes or baskets (*tokris*) where children can see and pick them up.

Schools can also use corridors to give space to children to play with the materials. In this case, as soon as the time for free play is over, the teacher, with the help of children, can immediately pick up all the material and put it back in the designated place.

Different corners can be created. The most common ones are: block corner, manipulative corner, language or book corner, doll or dramatic play corner. Additional corners can be an art corner, a science corner, or a music corner.

The same materials in different corners should be left for the entire week for children to use them. We can be sure that almost all children will be able to explore the material, and if some children want to use it multiple times, they too will get a chance. Every week, you can add some new material and remove the ones you think have been used for a long time. This kind of rotation brings variety.

Once again, I would like to reinforce that the purpose is that systematically, materials are displayed in the classroom, and children engage with these materials by themselves (alone, in pairs or in groups). The teacher is there to guide them.

Question: How do I encourage children to engage with material? What if children keep using the same material? What if children move from one corner to another and do not concentrate on using the material?

Answer: When we display materials and keep them so that children can easily pick them up, the fact that it is accessible will itself encourage children to use them. Remember, children are curious, they love to play with



Figure 1: When materials are systematically displayed in the learning corners, children engage with them on their own.



Figure 2: If materials are accessible, children will be encouraged to use them.

toys and materials, and they like to use their senses and experiment. As teachers, we can pick up new material and introduce it to children during large group or circle time. For example, if it is a matching kit of things that go together, show them the objects and then ask them to guess what goes with what. Pick up a small lock that is in the basket and ask them what they will need to open it with. When one of the children says, 'key'. Ask them to look for it and put both objects together. Similarly, you can introduce a few more pairs that you have put in the basket, for example, the pictures of a shoe and socks, a small toy cup and saucer, etc.

Children will have their favourites. Some children may like 'reading' books, turning pages, and looking at pictures. Others may prefer to build structures with blocks. Children will prefer to play with their favourite materials again and again. This is good. By repeatedly doing something, they will become 'experts' in it. At the same time, if you feel that they are only engaging with one material for more than a month, suggest to them to explore other materials. You can encourage the child who likes looking at pictures to construct a building or a vehicle from the book by using blocks. You can also put name cards of children or pictures of young children near the corners where you want them to go on that day. Ensure that you give them a chance to explore each corner during the week. Think of other creative ways of doing this; for example, children can be

asked to pick up chits that have the names of the corners written on them. Each child goes to the corner which is named on their chit.

Very young children, and also a few older children, may not like to be in one corner for the assigned 20 or 30 minutes. Allow them a few days to move around the classroom. Most children of 3 years of age will not spend all of 20 or 30 minutes with one material. They may play with it for 10 minutes and pick up another material. This is also because young children have shorter attention spans. As children move from age 3 to 6 years, they should spend more time engaging with one set of materials.

“ Children will have their favourites. Some children may like 'reading' books, turning pages, and looking at pictures. Others may prefer to build structures with blocks. Children will prefer to play with their favourite materials again and again. This is good. ”

Question: How do I manage time with the multiple roles that I have to play?

Answer: A teacher of an early childhood classroom always has multiple roles to play. She is juggling administrative

duties, keeping records, interacting with parents, supervising meals and of course trying to provide a high-quality ECE programme for children. In the case of *Anganwadi* workers, there are other added duties with food distribution to mothers, community/home visits and many other tasks. Together, all this becomes overwhelming. In juggling to balance all these tasks, the one activity that gets neglected/compromised is the ECE programme. We end up leaving children to do what they want, with no goals to be achieved.

This situation requires careful planning.

1. Prioritise your tasks. Decide which tasks are to be done daily, weekly, or monthly.
2. Create a timetable for yourself. This will help in better planning.
3. In your day's timetable, first block the ECE programme time, for example, 9 AM to 12 PM.
4. Now start planning your other tasks. Unplanned interactions with parents take place in the beginning and end of the school day. Leave 15 minutes of your time at the end of the school day for answering parents' immediate queries. Keep a 2-hour slot every

Saturday where parents can walk in and talk to you without an appointment.

5. Home and community visits can be done in the afternoon while children are taking a nap, after school hours or on a Saturday. (I am assuming that preschool-age children do not have school on Saturdays.)
6. For an *Anganwadi* worker – Take a break of 15 minutes between 9 AM and 12 PM. Take support from the helper to mind the children. Do your immediate tasks (such as sending important reports and data to the department) during those 15 minutes. The rest of the tasks, like regular record keeping, can be done after the children leave or while they are taking a nap.

Play is a natural way in which children interact with the physical and social world around them. It is essential that we, as important adults in their lives, encourage play. We see children engrossed in play for hours together. Play material or learning material also plays a critical role in helping children explore, experiment and learn independently. It, therefore, becomes beneficial if we are able to bring play as well as well-selected material into the classrooms of young children.



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Early Education and the Role of Drama

Parul Batra Duggal

Drama can help children attending the *Anganwadi* overcome their shyness and hesitation. It provides them with an environment of fun and playfulness, where they can freely explore new activities. Amidst all this, their learning continues. This article focuses on one particular *Anganwadi* where the *Anganwadi* worker effectively used drama to engage with the children, creating a space for both enjoyment and learning.

Damkheda is a settlement on the bank of the Kaliyasot River in the Kolar area of Bhopal. Damkheda Primary School is located here, and within its premises is the Damkheda *Anganwadi* Centre. Meena Kanaujia has been working here since 2006. She is a graduate and has been associated with this centre from the very beginning of her career.

Meena ji has always actively participated in all the programmes and campaigns run by the Women and Child Development Department. She has consistently tried to create awareness among parents about the education, nutrition, health, and hygiene of children. She talks to the mothers who come to *Anganwadi*, guiding them about what they can teach their children at home. She also

encourages the mothers to repeat the stories and poems that children learn at the *Anganwadi* with their children at home, so that the learning continues. She has also done considerable work in creating teaching-learning materials (TLMs) that can last for a long time. Using the grain sacks that come to the *Anganwadi*, she has made pocket boards for keeping books and puppets. She regularly organises *Bal Mela* (children's fairs) and *Bal Chaupal* (children's meet), serves as a resource person in sector meetings and shares her experiences of pre-school education with her colleagues. Meena ji has worked on more than ten plays based on the pre-school curriculum with approximately 30 children between the ages of 3-6 years. Today, every child in her *Anganwadi* is able to participate in plays.



Figure 1: It is important to make communication and enjoyment a medium of learning.



Figure 2: Children engaged in a seed-sowing activity and a drama.

Work done at the Anganwadi

Initially, the children used to come to the *Anganwadi* without bathing, so her initial focus was on their cleanliness. They were asked to bathe before coming to school and maintain personal cleanliness. Many residents of the settlement had questions about what happens in an *Anganwadi* and if anything could be taught to such young children. She started talking to the parents and convinced them to send their children to the *Anganwadi* daily. She also invited them to the *Anganwadi* to witness the activities taking place there.

Once during a *Bal Chaupal*, the children performed a play before their parents. The parents were astonished to see their children playing different characters on stage. This completely changed their perception of the learning and activities that take place in the *Anganwadi*.

Meena ji then began work on pre-school education, and the children soon learned poetry and stories and began singing and repeating them with great enjoyment. They also began recognising letters on the posters of poems and learning the rules of *kabaddi* and other games that they played at the centre.

With all this going well, Meena ji wanted to take up something more challenging both for herself and the children. This is when she decided to work with the children on a play and started looking for stories that could be adapted into drama/plays.

Drama preparation

When asked about how she started working on plays with children, Meena ji says, 'Earlier, I used to work

only on reciting and listening to poems and stories with the children. When I felt that the children were able to understand these well, I decided to work on dramatisation. Although I, too, had doubts about whether 4-year-olds would be able to act, I told myself that I would work on it first and decide later. I did some preparation before teaching the children how to act. I selected stories from the teaching guide for preschool education that could be dramatised. Some of these stories included, *Chida-Chidiya* (a pair of birds) from the theme, My Family; *Avni Aur Matar Ka Dana* (Avni and the pea), and *Aloo* (potato), *Maloo*, *Kaloo*, both from the theme: Vegetables; *Neela Phal* (the blue fruit) for the theme, Fruits and; *Aasmaan Gira* (the sky fell), from the theme, Seasons and Time.'

'For the initial preparation, I kept telling these stories to the children over and over again until they became familiar with these. I also listened to the children narrating the stories. We discussed the story and its characters as well. For example, in the story *Chida-Chidiya*, how does the bird sound? Where have you seen birds? Why does the bird come early in the morning? And so on. The children shared many things. I then asked them to wake up early in the morning to watch birds. This made them come to the *Anganwadi* early in the morning. Since the story also mentioned *khichdi* (lentils and rice dish), we discussed questions like how *khichdi* is made; which grains the

“ Through drama, what a child can accomplish in a group setting today, they may be able to do on their own tomorrow. ”

bird brought to make *khichdi*; and if they had seen a goatherd. Through this conversation, children were able to understand the story and its sequence better; they could also make sense of the role each character played and the order in which events followed.

'I gave them the freedom to choose the characters they wanted to play because when I chose the characters for them, they would fight among themselves. The children were divided into groups, and all the groups prepared the same play so that everyone would get a chance and the performance would not be affected in case some children did not turn up. All of them participated in the play enthusiastically. In this way, a play based on the same story was prepared and presented by four or five groups in the class.'

Nuances of drama

Stage and preparation

Meena ji has installed a curtain made of an old saree in one corner of the classroom. She says, 'The children pull down the curtain before the play begins and then take turns coming out from behind it. I made and gave them wings and beaks for the play *Chida-Chidiya*. They wear these and deliver the dialogues while hopping like birds. Similarly, for the other plays too, I make masks according to the characters with the help of children.'

Narration and self-dialogue acting

During our conversation, the obvious question was how such small children learned the dialogues of the play. Meena ji explained, 'Children enjoy and have different preferences for different stories. For example, in the story *Aasman Gira*, they do not want to act with narration after the opening scene. They say, "Ma'am, please stop now! We will tell the lion, 'Rajaji, the sky fell, the sky fell.'" Children also modulate their voices according to the characters. For example, speaking in a roaring voice like a lion, speaking softly in a rabbit's voice and so on. In the story *Neela Phal*, they like to act through self-made dialogues, because it is very short. But in *Chida-Chidiya*, they prefer to act with narrations, because this story is long and has several characters. In this process, they improvise by adding or dropping lines and enjoy it a lot.'

She further shared, 'It has also been observed that through acting, the hesitation of children has reduced and their confidence has increased. Now they can perform fearlessly even before strangers. Their parents also feel extremely happy watching them act. The enrolment at our *Anganwadi* has also improved, and many more children have started coming.'



If you observe children, you will find that they are imaginative and know how to lie, make excuses and act even in their daily lives. They behave differently in different situations because this is a natural part of the brain's developmental process.



Pre-school education and drama

Meena ji also shared that while working on a play, *Anganwadi* workers often fear that the classroom will be noisy, children will run from one place to another, and that such young children will not be able to follow instructions and so on. However, *Anganwadi* workers who are able to do it understand that working on a play is a multidimensional experience. It is generally believed that engaging in drama leads to linguistic development, but it also leads to cognitive, social and emotional development. While performing drama, all skills (such as facial expressions, voice modulation, body movements and being able to feel sensations, speaking before a large audience, imagination, correct timing and understanding cause and effect and so on) seem to be better utilised. Therefore, incorporating drama into the education process has far-reaching consequences. Through drama, what a child can accomplish in a group setting today, they may be able to do on their own tomorrow. In putting up plays in the classroom, they are able to understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

Meena ji says, 'If you observe children, you will find that they are imaginative and know how to lie, make excuses and act even in their daily lives. They behave differently in different situations because this is a natural part of the brain's developmental process. Children can be seen doing role plays by themselves or playing different roles with their peers even before going to school. In this, they are sometimes imitating their parents, and sometimes another family member. I have tried to hone this ability of theirs further.'

Art education in policy documents

If we look at the work being done by the teacher and its context in the light of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, then this policy recommends the inclusion of drawing, painting, other visual arts, handicrafts, drama, puppetry, music, dance and physical activities in pre-school education. According to the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) 2022, arts

“ In art, it is not just the final product or performance that matters, but rather it is the process that matters the most. What truly counts is what the children learned and achieved along the way . ”

and crafts provide children with an additional medium to express their thoughts and feelings.

The learning outcomes related to art in pre-school education broadly include the following:

- Children learn how to hold and use different art materials.
- They are able to explore rhythm and tempo through their bodies.
- They use music and drama to express ideas and emotions.
- They are able to identify different expressions, thoughts and feelings through art, etc.

The main objective of art education in pre-school education is to develop the five senses of a child. Hence,

the curriculum of this education should be designed in such a way that it offers a wide range of art-related experiences that can lead to their holistic development. Such development is possible only when children are given opportunities to feel connected with various media of art, such as drama, song-music, dance and painting. Pre-school education is the perfect space to initiate a connection with these.

Conclusion

As it is said, in art, it is not just the final product or performance that matters, but rather it is the process that matters the most. What truly counts is what the children learned and achieved along the way. In the context of plays conducted by Meena ji, children were given complete freedom to decide for themselves what they want to do and how they want to do it. The children heard the stories and understood them. They decided when they needed narration in the play and when they could speak the dialogue themselves. All of this became possible because of her trust in the children and the encouragement she offered. It is this faith that has enabled 4-5-year-olds in this *Anganwadi* to accomplish what even older children, and sometimes their teachers, find challenging.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Simran Luthra Vetter: Bhumika Popli



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Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Spaces | A Teacher's Guide to Identification, Intervention, and Action

Bhuvaneshwari B

All children develop along a continuum, but not all at the same pace. Knowing developmental milestones will help teachers look for patterns that may indicate a concern. However, we need to remember that milestones are not deadlines.



Figure 1: It is important to understand the needs of children with different abilities and design activities accordingly.

Amogh is a 4-year-old boy who started attending the *Anganwadi* two weeks ago. Amogh did not like to play with anyone, and the *Anganwadi* worker was concerned. Then, one fine day, during playtime, to her surprise, Amogh joined a small group and started playing. From then on, there was no looking back. Amogh was happy, playful and enthusiastic.

The *Anganwadi* worker has also been working with Anisha for the past four months. Anisha consistently avoids playing with her peers, becomes upset when someone approaches her to play, and does not engage in pretend play at all. She avoids looking at anyone when they talk to her; small noises startle her, and she begins to cry. The

Anganwadi worker is wondering whether she will settle down like Amogh or if she should now seek expert help.

These are some scenarios that bring uncertainty to teachers' minds. Early years' educators/ teachers are one of the first responders in a child's developmental journey. They might be the first ones to notice these and other such subtle signs that some children display. These signs may include a slight delay in speech development, difficulty in performing some fine motor activities, different or heightened responses to some specific forms of stimuli, like noise or bright lights, or difficulty in interacting/ playing with peers.

Sometimes, parents may not be able to understand these signs, and even if they do, they hope that the school will

take care of them. While parents' hopes are natural, delays that go unnoticed or unreported can significantly impact long-term developmental outcomes in children.

Persistent developmental delays can progress into developmental disabilities. The common disabilities seen in children in the early years include communication/speech and language disabilities; intellectual, hearing, visual or physical disabilities; autism spectrum disorders, etc. Some disabilities are visible, while others may not be easy to perceive.

Why are teachers better placed to identify delays and disabilities?

Teachers spend many hours every day observing and working with children. They get to observe them during class, during free play, and at mealtimes. This gives them a unique lens to see children's patterns that others might miss.

What do teachers need to equip themselves with?

1. Know the developmental milestones: Teachers should know what is typically expected for that age range. For example, a 3-year-old child should be able to speak in sentences. Even at 4 years, if a child speaks in short phrases or has a very limited vocabulary, the child needs to be referred for evaluation.
2. Learn how to observe objectively: Teachers need to observe children without judging too quickly. For example, when commenting on a child's work, instead of writing 'He is very careless when it comes to math work', the teacher can write, 'He did not complete three math problems even when extra time was given and has interchanged + and - signs in two other problems.'
3. Understand when to use screening tools: Teachers cannot diagnose, but can use simple screening tools or checklists¹ to understand if the child is not meeting expectations for their age and then refer for evaluation.
4. Document observations with examples: Teachers need to find patterns in the behaviour of children by noting down the frequency and the context of the behaviour. They can make use of children's drawings, worksheets and writing samples to describe the child. Documentation can serve as evidence while talking to parents as well as other professionals regarding their concerns about a child.

What should teachers remember?

All children develop along a continuum, but not all at the same pace. Knowing developmental milestones will help teachers look for patterns that may indicate



Figure 2: A child who is quiet in group settings may be talkative when alone with the teacher.

a concern. However, we need to remember that milestones are not deadlines. One 18-month-old child may speak 10–15 words, while another at the same age might have started combining words to speak in a sentence. Both are in the expected development range. Differences do not always mean delays. A child who is quiet in group settings may be very talkative when alone with the teacher or at home when interacting in their home language.

When should teachers refer a child for evaluation?

When we notice that the child:

- Does not have 50 meaningful words in the vocabulary by 2 years
- Is not able to speak in sentences by 3 years
- Is unable to walk independently by 2 years
- Avoids eye contact, does not engage in pretend play
- Overreacts to everyday sounds, refuses to touch certain textures
- Shows angry outbursts or is very withdrawn

Teachers need to exercise caution while making observations. We need to watch without interfering and observe what the child does naturally. Documenting the observations without bias is very important. We need to look out for patterns in behaviour and observe if the same pattern is being noticed in all settings, like the classroom, playground, etc. We should try to gauge if the behaviour is impacting the everyday functioning of the child and if the skill deficit is interfering with learning.

How to talk to parents who are in denial?

As a first step, it is important to share specific observations and not our opinions. We should be empathetic while speaking with parents. Focus must be on the support that can be provided rather than on labelling the child. For example, we do not say, 'I think

Following a traffic light chart for keeping track of the children in your class is very useful.



Figure 3: A useful method to track each child's behavioural pattern.

your child might be having Autism, I am not sure, can you get him assessed?' Instead, we say, 'I have been noticing that your child always wants to play alone, and he avoids looking at me when I speak. I see that he gets very upset with the outside noise. It will be better to visit a paediatrician and get an opinion, so we'll know how to support him better.' Emphasis should be on the fact that it is good to start supporting the child early to prevent further complications.

To whom should teachers refer children?

Whenever there is a suspicion that there is a delay or disability, we need to talk to the family and refer the child for evaluation to either a developmental paediatrician, child/clinical psychologist, audiologist, speech language therapist, occupational therapist or a rehabilitation psychologist.

How can teachers make early education spaces more inclusive?

Early intervention can start as soon as teachers notice that a child may need extra help. While we wait for a specialist to provide recommendations, we can make simple everyday changes that will make a big difference to the child. If a child is not able to focus, we may consider creating a quiet corner in the classroom. The child can sit quietly in the designated space and complete their work. This type of a corner will help a child calm down and focus

more on their work. If a child finds it difficult to transition from one activity to another and depends a lot on routine, it is good to use a visual schedule, as given in the picture below. A visual schedule will help the child understand the routine and what to expect next.

Giving extra time for children to respond, by giving them small, clear steps, will go a long way in making them feel included and accepted. Teachers should encourage peers to socialise with children who struggle to make friends. It is always good to try and focus on what the child can do and start from the child's level. For example, if a 5-year-old child is unable to hold small objects, but loves painting, the teacher may consider giving the child a big paintbrush and a large size paper or a chart and slowly introduce smaller tools. This will help the child learn, without compromising their self-esteem.



Figure 4: A visual schedule can help some children understand the routine better.

In conclusion, teachers' observations, responsive teaching, and sensitive engagement with families can help in creating a better developmental path for all children, especially those who are vulnerable. Prompt action, even when the parent is in denial, will give a head start to many children who

otherwise may fall behind. We should realise that teachers may be the first adults outside of the family to observe the child keenly and notice certain patterns which may be of concern. When teachers respond compassionately, they open a window of opportunity for these children.

Reference

¹ There are tools, such as a Disability Screening Schedule, like PRASHAST; WHO Disability Assessment Schedule and WHO Ten Question Screen



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Scaffolding the Anganwadi Worker Effectively | A Practice-Based Approach for Supervisors

Shrestha Mishra and Rajat Sharma

Supervisors play an important role in *Anganwadi* centres. Generally, a supervisor manages 20-25 *Anganwadi* centres spread across 8-12 villages. Their task is to provide regular support to *Anganwadi* workers to work effectively with children. In this article, the authors describe some practices that have made significant changes in the ways *Anganwadis* work in the state of Chhattisgarh.



Figure 1: Supervisors provide continuous support to Anganwadi workers.

During a visit to an *Anganwadi* Centre, the Supervisor observed that the *Anganwadi* worker was finding it difficult to manage the children. They had very few toys, and most were broken. Children were bored, and engaging all of them at the same time seemed challenging. The Supervisor suggested that the worker start using a running blackboard. The Supervisor gave a demo – she took some chalk, broke it into small pieces, and gave each child a small piece. She marked spaces for each child on the running blackboard, showed each one their portion and encouraged them to scribble and draw what they wanted, saw, or heard. Some children sat on the floor, while some

stood in front of their assigned space and began to draw, scribble and scrawl.

Through this activity, all the children were engaged and were happily expressing themselves, telling the worker and the supervisor what they had drawn. The worker shared this experience with other workers over the sector *WhatsApp* group. Some other workers began to follow this strategy.

Anganwadi supervisors are agents of change. One good practice that they help start in one *Anganwadi* is easily replicated in many others. Generally, a supervisor manages 20-25 *Anganwadi* centres spread across 8-12 villages.

Their task is to provide regular support to Anganwadi workers to work effectively with children. This support includes supervising centre operations, providing training, monitoring nutrition and early childhood activities, and building rapport with the communities.

The sector supervisors are supported by the Azim Premji Foundation through a multi-pronged approach, which has worked particularly well. Some of the practices that we think have made significant changes in the ways *Anganwadis* work are described here. This model has significantly improved coordination between supervisors and workers, shifting the relationship from monitoring to supportive supervision.

Regular Anganwadi centre visits

An *Anganwadi* worker has to engage the children of her *Anganwadi* in a variety of activities, and many times they face challenges in doing this. The supervisor, when they visit an *Anganwadi* centre regularly, helps the worker with these. For example, if an *Anganwadi* worker needs support in managing all the children in a group activity, the supervisor shows them some shorter-duration activities so that they can manage their classroom better.

Anganwadi workers are also supported in drafting weekly lesson plans and executing these. In one instance, an *Anganwadi* worker, who had 21 children in her *Anganwadi*, with the help of the supervisor, developed and implemented a lesson plan for a period of 10 days. Each day, she would document the activities along with the children's age-wise performance in the form of videos and pictures and share these in the sector *WhatsApp* group. She would also highlight one or two features, such as 'children were happy throughout the process', 'children shared their feelings after doing the activity', 'children were helping each other during the process', and also things like how she was managing to give children the opportunity to speak and share and how she was listening and responding to each child. This motivated other workers in the group to pick one or two activities every day to replicate in their centres.

Recently, a few supervisors and workers have started working more deeply on the children's development aspects, like scribbling and colouring. In line with the learning outcomes mentioned in the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS), and their age groups, children are engaged in theme-based learning. Together they have designed worksheets, such as those with dotted lines for joining and colouring. Children are also encouraged to draw and scribble on the running blackboard. Through these regular visits, supervisors provide support in the following ways:

Demonstrations of activities to help workers strengthen their theme-based teaching

For example, for the theme *Janwaron ki Duniya* (the world of animals), rhymes and stories are demonstrated as an effective way to engage children. Storytelling using finger or stick puppets and voice modulation is demonstrated, which helps the worker to understand how storytelling is more effective when puppets and expressions are used.

In one *Anganwadi* centre, a worker was struggling with a storytelling activity. She shared that whenever she narrates a story to children, the children lose interest, and she is unable to complete the story or retain their attention throughout the story. The supervisor first asked the worker to demonstrate her storytelling. Then, the supervisor gave a demo of the same story using picture cards and voice modulation. She imitated the voice of some animals. The children not only enjoyed the story but also listened to it eagerly. After the story, the supervisor asked some questions related to the story, and the children were very excited while answering them.

Immediate support to workers facing implementation challenges

For example, during a physical activity or rhyme, if a worker is finding it difficult to accommodate all the children in a circle due to space constraints, the supervisor can suggest ways in which she can do this, like making the children sit or stand in two circles, based on their age group – one inner circle for the 3-4 years age group and an outer circle for the 4-6 years age group.

Monthly sector workshops and meetings

Sector meetings and workshops provide a platform for workers to share good practices, clarify doubts, and plan common activities (often theme-based).

In the monthly sector workshops, theme-based activities are demonstrated by sector supervisors or a few *Anganwadi* workers. These activities are then performed by all the participating workers as practice before they can replicate these at their centres. Later, these *Anganwadi* workers again share how the activities are being conducted at their centres with photos and videos, and reflections on what they understood in the workshops and how they implemented it. A few workers have started sharing the progress of their children as well, like how three months ago, a child who was attempting colouring by scribbling was now able to colour within a circle, etc.

In the sector meetings, the supervisors follow up and review how the activities are being conducted at the centres, what challenges are being faced and how they are being mitigated. They also regularly provide



Figure 2: Anganwadi workers participating in sector workshops.

constructive feedback in the *WhatsApp* group as well as during the sector meetings, emphasising the importance of preparation for these activities.

ECCE Day celebrations

The supervisors discuss with the workers the importance of engaging the community and motivating parents to participate in the learning and development of their children. ECCE Day is a monthly community event organised to showcase children’s learning to increase parental involvement and recognise the work of the *Anganwadi* worker.

For example, one worker and helper at a centre started creating a print-rich environment from used and discarded materials, such as cartons and wrappers, which they asked the children and their parents to bring from their homes. They prepared theme-based charts, weather charts, a birthday board, a calendar, rhyme charts, etc. They invited community members to visit the centre during the ECCE Day celebration. Parents who visited appreciated their efforts, and the worker explained to them how these materials would help their children learn.

Standard practices checklist

To optimise the functional aspect of the *Anganwadis*, we drafted a checklist with seven standard practices (*maanaks* in Hindi). These are simple but essential requirements that every centre should meet, and all workers should work on. These cover the centre and its environment; children and their development; and workers’ practices.

These seven standard practices are reviewed by sector supervisors and workers themselves. In the stakeholders’ regular meetings, progress on these seven standards is updated, and this provides a foundation to build on.

1. Does the *Anganwadi* run according to the specified hours (9:30 am – 3:30 pm)?
2. Is the environment of the *Anganwadi* clean and safe?
3. Are appropriate play and print materials, including a blackboard and a Learning Corner, being used in the *Anganwadi*?
4. Do 80 percent of the enrolled children attend the *Anganwadi* regularly?
5. Do 80 percent of the children who attend regularly actively participate in the activities conducted at the *Anganwadi*?
6. Is the worker sensitive towards children, providing opportunities for sharing, cooperation, and self-expression, while also keeping children engaged and motivated?
7. Besides free play every day, are one-hour structured activities organised for the children?

This, in practice, has helped several *Anganwadis* function better, and many workers have picked up better practices, ensuring children’s development in many centres. The supervisors provide continuous support to *Anganwadi* workers, recognising and discussing their challenges, and sharing better play-based practices at the workshops.



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Those Magical Sixty Seconds

Kalpana Panwar

The implications of the word 'care', associated with early childhood, are extensive. This care has a direct and strong relationship with children's learning. It is crucial to understand the minds of children and give them opportunities to express themselves without any fear or hesitation. While doing so, the close bond that forms with children becomes an essential component of their readiness to learn. This article is based on such experiences.

The moment children see me entering the classroom in the morning, I hear their sweet chorus of 'Good morning, Ma'am!' I enthusiastically respond with 'Good morning' and return their smiles and excitement with my own smile. These first, just about 60 seconds, of class not only reflect the children's moods, emotional and cognitive states, but also lay the foundation for their learning with a positive beginning to their day.

I often begin by talking to children. Children are keen to share their thoughts. They say things like, 'Today I have brought biscuits for everyone'; 'My mother bought a new bag for me yesterday'; 'Ma'am look at what I have made!'; and so on. Some children are content to just hear their name along with a good morning; some feel happy when

their belongings are appreciated; and some feel happy when they hear, 'Wow, it is good. All right, we will share and eat it during break time.'

Some children stand quietly at a distance during these interactions and watch everything. Looking at their expressions, I begin a dialogue with them. For example, 'Hello Aarav *beta*! Did something happen to make you sad?' 'Ma'am, I did not have breakfast today.' 'Oh! But why did you not have breakfast today?' 'Ma'am, my mother was getting late, so she only gave me tea and told me to eat at school.' 'All right, milk and egg will arrive soon, and I will give them to you first. And I will call your parents to ask why they could not prepare breakfast today.'



Figure 1: Teachers should always use words that encourage children.

“ In pre-school classes, a teacher’s role is not only to teach reading and writing skills, but also to understand the child’s perspective and experiences and give time to them. ”

Then, there are complaints, such as Aleena comes and tells me that Manuj hit Shyam with a ball. I talk to the children and try to understand the situation. I ask Manuj, ‘Did you hit him with the ball?’ He replies, ‘No, Ma’am, it hit him by mistake! I said sorry.’ I ask Shyam, ‘You are not hurt, are you? Are you all right now?’ After listening to both, I explain that it happened by mistake and that Manuj had also apologised. When both feel satisfied after hearing this, the atmosphere becomes normal again.

There are also those children who remain seated quietly because of hesitation, shyness, or lack of confidence. Some become silent after wishing ‘Good morning’, while others keep looking at me without saying a word. It is very important for the teacher to understand every child’s nature and connect with them in different ways – sometimes by smiling and saying, ‘Good morning’, sometimes by asking about their favourite game or toy, sometimes by calling them lovingly by their nickname, or sometimes by discussing something about the day. Through these small exchanges and expressions, they experience warmth and safety. In this way, this entire process of about ten to fifteen minutes not only makes the classroom environment comfortable but also lays the foundation for a positive start to the day. The interaction with each child may last only one or two minutes, but it ensures that their curiosities, thoughts, and emotions are heard, and many developmental aspects also receive positive encouragement.

In pre-school classes, a teacher’s role is not only to teach reading and writing skills, but also to understand a child’s perspective and experiences and give time to them. The responsibility of a teacher becomes very significant because listening to all the children in the class and responding according to the situation at hand becomes a challenging task.

Every morning, children come to school with different emotions and experiences. Some come without having eaten breakfast, some after being scolded at home, some feeling sad due to a family problem or incident, and some arrive in a happy and cheerful mood. This is clearly visible on their faces, in their behaviour and energy. At such times, it is necessary to understand and respond to each child’s emotions with love and warmth

in those fleeting moments of the morning. These are those precious moments when children simply want someone to listen to them attentively and understand their emotions. Thus, the teacher gives a smile to a sad child, reassures an anxious child, shares the happiness of a happy child, and through this, creates a comfortable, sensitive, creative and learning-friendly environment in the classroom.

Through connecting with children in this way, I have understood the following aspects about the importance of teacher dialogue.

The art of listening

When Sohan hits someone with a ball, or Supriya does not share her things, it is their way of expressing their emotions. It is necessary for the teacher to listen carefully and understand each child. If the teacher does not win the trust of a child, the child will hesitate to share their emotions and will never share about the mistakes, doubts, or difficulties they face in their learning. This listening and understanding is the first step towards building trust and a strong relationship between the teacher and the child.

The responsibility of understanding

Often, incidents are not as they appear at first glance. As in the case of the child being hit by the ball unintentionally. As a teacher, if I had assumed that this was intentional, without understanding the entire situation, it would also have harmed Manuj’s self-confidence. This experience taught me that every situation with children must be understood with patience and sensitivity. As teachers, we need to look at incidents not only at the surface level but also consider the larger picture and all aspects of an incident/situation. This also serves as an example for children, so they too do not take things at face value but try to go deeper. Through this process, children learn to analyse situations based on reasoning and factual thinking rather than accepting social viewpoints or superficial assumptions.

Being free from bias

Every child has a different nature – some complain, some quietly endure things, and some appear stubborn. We often quickly assume things like ‘This child has always been naughty.’ Such preconceived notions are not always true. Once Mandeep spilt some water. Some children immediately said, ‘You have made a mistake, you will be punished!’ Their voices carried harshness and fear; no one thought that this could be resolved or that it could simply be a mistake.

I immediately gave them a new thought, 'This is only a mistake; it is also an opportunity to correct it. Making a mistake does not mean that you should be punished. All of you make mistakes sometimes.' Smiling, I asked Mandeep, 'Tell me, what can we do now?' He immediately said, 'I can wipe the water.' The other children liked this idea. I added one more idea: 'Should we help Mandeep in wiping the water?' My intention was that children should not consider his wiping the water as a punishment. Some children said, 'Yes, we can help.' But some others said, 'The one who made the mistake should wipe it.' I said, 'All right, I will help Mandeep.' Then two children came forward, and then a few more. Now, wiping the spilt water became an activity in which positive learning found its place.

Breaking stereotypes

One day, we decided to clean the classroom. When I asked one child to bring the dustbin, he immediately refused, saying, 'It's dirty!' I smiled and brought the dustbin myself. Children's voices echoed, 'Eww, dirty!' At that moment, I realised that this bias, that cleaning is the work of a particular group or is less important, had perhaps come from society. I explained, 'Cleaning is no less important than any other work; it is our responsibility. Just as we clean our homes, cleaning our school and surroundings is also our responsibility.' The children listened, understood,

noded in agreement, and happily began to clean the classroom. This experience showed that the teacher's dialogue, example, and guidance help break prejudices and discrimination and add new dimensions to children's thinking.

The power of words

A teacher's small positive comments, such as 'You have made a very beautiful picture'; 'You can do this'; or 'Shall I help you?' can give wings to a child's self-confidence. At the same time, a negative comment such as, 'You cannot even do this much!'; 'You do not know how to do this'; or 'You will not be able to do it' can break their morale. I realised this through an incident. Bharti was trying to tie her shoelaces. After a few moments, I asked, 'Bharti, are you done?' She said, 'I am doing it.' She kept repeating, 'I know how to do this.' After two or three such responses, I felt something was not right. I went to her and observed. I found that the lace had a knot. Then I gently used positive words and asked, 'Bharti, shall I help you?' She agreed, 'Yes, although I know how to do it.' I untied the knot and gave her the time to tie her shoelaces. Perhaps she feared that I might consider her incapable. This experience taught me that we should always choose words that encourage children to increase their confidence.

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



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Learning Through Attendance Charts

Swapnali Chavhan

At Anandi Balbhavan Foundation in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, various activities for children between the ages of 3-12 years are organised. Keeping play as the foundation, new activities are continuously added to develop children's gross and fine motor skills, nature observation, and to foster language development.



Figure 1: A child's emotional development takes place when they have the freedom to express themselves in their own ways.

'What is A for?... B for?' asks Anay's mother. Anay has turned one and a half years old and has recently started speaking. 'Sanu, you should write 'अ' this way...' Swanandi's mother holds her hand and teaches her to trace the shape of the letter. We can see another child's mother shouting at him for writing letters in reverse (mirror-image). This child has just entered nursery. We witness such incidents around us regularly. As soon as a child starts going to school, parents are in a hurry to teach them to read and write. In this entire process, whether the child can understand the meaning of what they are learning or not becomes secondary. The child gradually forgets how to express themselves independently as parents try to fit them into a mould.

If a child is drawing random lines, creating meaningless shapes (meaningless to parents, but for the child, they

have a meaning and perhaps names), or sketching crooked or odd pictures, parents should understand that these are their ways of expressing themselves. A child's emotional development happens when they express themselves in their own ways, and when we give them the freedom to do so. This has been proven by many studies in child psychology. It has also been established that emotional intelligence/quotient (EQ) is more important than intelligence quotient (IQ).

At Anandi Balbhavan Foundation, in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, we conduct various activities for children between the ages of 3-12 years. Keeping play as the foundation, we are constantly including new activities to develop children's gross and fine motor skills, nature observation, and foster language development. Through these activities, our focus remains on encouraging

children to speak and to express themselves. For language development, we regularly add new activities.

Last year, while thinking about what more could be done for language development, we came across a book named '*Mazi Anganwadi*' from the *Palavee* project of **QUEST**, an organisation that works on the constructivist approach to education.¹ We decided to try out this innovative activity to improve children's attendance and study its impact on the development of their emergent writing skills.

Preparing the attendance chart

First, on a large poster, we created a weekly attendance chart with seven columns for seven days, one column for children's names, with a serial number. The days and dates were written with red sketch pens because we learnt that children remember text written in the colour red more easily. Even if they do not understand the meaning, their brain quickly stores the shapes of the letters. Each of the children's names was written in a different colour. Next to each child's name, a rectangular space was given under each day of the week. It was decided that each child would write their name in that box under the respective day, each day.

Implementing the activity

Next, it was time to get the chart filled in by the children. Each child was called, and their name was read aloud two to three times, placing a finger on each letter of their name. In the same way, the day and date were also read out. After that, the child was allowed to write their name in the space provided under the day column.

Children above the age of 5 years already knew how to write their names, so they wrote quickly. Some children in the 4 to 5 age group tried to copy their names by looking at the ones on the chart. Some simply drew circles, lines, pictures or designs.

Every week, we began by writing the children's names in the same colour and the same serial number. As a result, the children began to remember the colour and position of their names. Even though they did not recognise the letters yet, they started trying to identify their names based on the colour and serial number. Each day, we began by reading out the day and date without fail, pointing these to them with our fingers. We then asked the children to repeat the day and date after us. We would ask them, 'Can you find where your name is?' and they began identifying their names from the colour cues. Children continued to write their names in their own way each day.

Vedashree initially drew pictures of ice cream and chocolates for her name. Piyush tried to replicate the shape of his name and created a design. Vedant drew some shapes, like lines and circles. Vishwesh tried to write some letters from his name and added a few strokes along with those. Ovi tried to write her name almost correctly, only skipping some letters. We wrote the names in Marathi, but Adinath consistently wrote his name in English. Arnav recognised his name quickly and continued to sincerely try writing it by looking at it. While all the children would sit and try writing their names, Arnav would lie down on the chart to write his name slowly. If he made a mistake, he would erase it and try to write it down again, correctly. Piyush was also consistently putting in this kind of effort. Vihaan, too, was carefully writing his name by looking at it. Some children, however, were in a hurry to go and play, so they would quickly scribble their names and run off. We started this activity on July 1 and continued in the same manner until October.

How the children progressed

After three months, we changed the colours and order of the children's names on the chart. As usual, we asked children to find their names. Some children got confused. Since the letter 'व' (sound v/w) was common in the names, such as Vedant and Vedashree, both of them started identifying each other's names as their own. Arnav, Piyush, and Vihaan were able to recognise their names. Ovi, Adinath, and Vishwesh got a little confused. Kirti, who earlier could not recognise her name at all, now began identifying it correctly. Vedashree soon left her drawings behind and began trying to observe and write the letters in her name. All these children were in the age group of 4 to 6 years. We kept reminding Adinath to try writing his name by looking at it, but he insisted that he could write his name in English. Piyush, Arnav, Vishwesh, and Ovi had made significant progress and had started writing names that could now be identified. Some children still found it difficult to locate their names in the list, and we continued helping them with that.

Some children were still happy just with lines and circles. They were so eager about this attendance chart that before going home, they would remind us, 'Mavshi, I have to write my name on the attendance chart.' They did this process joyfully. Later on, small arguments started erupting about who would write their name first. We, along with the children, were happily experiencing all these moments. Every week, we prepared the chart and learned little things, for example, that we could use the back side of the sheet as well.

हजेरा तक्ता						
सुलापी नावे	बोमबार् 23 जुलै	मजकूरवार 3 ऑक्टोबर	सुखवार 2 ऑक्टोबर	सुखवार 2 ऑक्टोबर	सुखवार 2 ऑक्टोबर	सुखवार 2 ऑक्टोबर 2 ऑक्टोबर 2 ऑक्टोबर
1. निषाद	निषाद		निषाद	निषाद	निषाद	AD
2. मानस	मानस		मानस	मानस	मानस	
3. सुयरा	सुयरा		सुयरा	सुयरा	सुयरा	
4. मजशी	मजशी		मजशी	मजशी	मजशी	
5. आशा	आशा		आशा	आशा	आशा	
6. दिव्यजिघ	दिव्यजिघ		दिव्यजिघ	दिव्यजिघ	दिव्यजिघ	
7. माही	माही		माही	माही	माही	
8. भार्गव	भार्गव		भार्गव	भार्गव	भार्गव	
9. विवान	विवान		विवान	विवान	विवान	
10. म्हुशेद	म्हुशेद		म्हुशेद	म्हुशेद	म्हुशेद	
11. प्रीजल	प्रीजल		प्रीजल	प्रीजल	प्रीजल	
12. सम्यक	सम्यक		सम्यक	सम्यक	सम्यक	
13. अधिराज	अधिराज		अधिराज	अधिराज	अधिराज	
14. अदिका	अदिका		अदिका	अदिका	अदिका	
15. राणी	राणी		राणी	राणी	राणी	
16. इरा	इरा		इरा	इरा	इरा	
17. अनुमी	अनुमी		अनुमी	अनुमी	अनुमी	
18. अदिका	अदिका		अदिका	अदिका	अदिका	
19. आख्या	आख्या		आख्या	आख्या	आख्या	
20. राणी	राणी		राणी	राणी	राणी	

Figure 2: The Attendance Sheet on which the children have registered their presence themselves.

How we increased the complexity

In December, we presented a new challenge to the children. This time, we wrote all the names in the same colour. Yet, many of the children were able to recognise their names. Some still needed a little help. Adinath had now started writing his name in Marathi. Four-year-old Arnav suddenly began writing the English initials of his name, and within a month, he was back on track. Since Arnav's name includes the letter र (ra), he started telling us, 'There is a 'ra' in my name.' This was a matter of delight for us as it meant that the children were beginning to identify sounds within words.

The next month, we tried another experiment. We made paper strips with children's names on them. We scattered the strips and asked the children to find their names. Many children were able to find their names. To increase

Reference

¹ The constructivist approach in education is a theory suggesting that learners actively build their own understanding and knowledge, rather than passively receiving information.

Translated from Marathi by Anuja Sansare.



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Pacing in Early Childhood Learning

Bhavna Nayak

One of the most important elements in creating a positive and enriching classroom environment in Early Childhood Education is pacing. A well-paced environment helps children to explore, learn, and grow at their own speed, making the experience enjoyable and effective.



Figure 1: Learning at their own pace keeps children motivated and involved during class.

Sustaining the interest of young children presents considerable challenges during instruction, because their attention span is short. What initially captures their fascination quickly fades, sometimes halfway through instruction, and activities tend to advance too quickly for them to grasp these fully. This is frustrating for both children and the teacher.

When teachers match their teaching approaches with children's attention spans, they build a dynamic and interactive learning environment that makes learning enjoyable. Effective instructional strategies require both adequate time allocations for each learning activity and seamless transitions between different parts of the school day.

My experiments with pacing

Pacing in Early Childhood Education (ECE) is about balancing students' need for stimulation, rest, and

exploration, while nurturing their developmental growth with the help of activities, lessons, and smooth transitions to keep children engaged and focused. It is like finding a rhythm that makes them feel they are learning at their own pace, keeping them motivated and involved during the class.

I am explaining the process with the use of an example from my class.

The theme for the day was 'Air'. The day began with a lively circle time where I started the discussion with a rhyme:

*The wind brushes past my skin so cool,
a gentle touch, a swirling pool.
It dances free, I feel its might,
A fleeting breeze from day to night.*

One of the children, Rishabh, then began to talk about feeling the wind on his face while he came to school on a bike with his father. Next, I read them a story from a

picture book called *Jack's Kite*. In this story, a boy named Jack tries to fly a kite unsuccessfully until his father comes by to show him how to fly it against the wind. The interaction through storytelling set the tone for exploration and curiosity.

After this, when I said, 'Now it's time for an outdoor activity,' the children, who were until then, quietly listening to the story, showed a burst of energy and excitement. Rohan ran ahead, arms outstretched, and shouting, 'The wind feels amazing!' Ananya pointed and said, 'Look, the leaves of the mango tree are moving!' This type of experience not only deepens children's understanding but also keeps them energised and engaged.

We walked around outdoors, feeling the breeze and talking about it.

Once back in the classroom, it was time for a creative art activity. I said, 'Now, can you create something that comes to your mind when you feel the wind?' This sparked another round of creativity. Yeshika crafted a vibrant balloon by tearing and pasting colourful bits of paper inside a balloon shape. Rohan painted leaves as he imagined them lying in the wind. The helper and I helped the children to cut and paste the coloured paper as they imagined.

The transition from active exploration to creative expression keeps the pace just right—exciting yet calming. By smoothly transitioning between activities, teachers can create an engaging and balanced learning experience.

Transition from one activity to another

Young children often struggle to switch from one activity to another, as they are not familiar with the instructions, which can lead to feelings of stress or confusion. To make



Figure 2: The flight of children's creativity and imagination.

these transitions smoother, we consistently use calming cues, like a familiar rhyme, for example, to signal that it is time to clean up or put the toys away. To keep the children motivated for new activities, we use phrases like 'Get ready to do something new!' or 'Let's do something exciting.' We also sing rhymes, for example, when we transition from, say, storytelling to drawing. One of the cues we use is:

*Hey! Little kids hey! Little kids
Story is done, colours are fun
Take out your crayons,
Let's start one by one.*

Similarly, when transitioning from indoor to outdoor play, I gather the children to discuss the planned fun activities by using cues such as 'Ready for some fun?' This helps in preparing them mentally for what is coming next. This practice not only reduces disruption but also creates opportunities to reinforce social skills, like asking questions and sharing ideas about upcoming activities.

Positive outcomes of pacing

- The children are excited and active throughout the class. This helps them complete their tasks on time. They enjoy small activities and show their participation. Like Bhavika asked, 'Can I make more balloons with different colours?' This enthusiasm kept the class lively and engaging.
- Children become familiar with changing activities, thereby making the transitions smoother. Now in my class, they move from storytelling to drawing activity with just a simple rhyme cue. They also show less confusion.
- It helps me in my lesson planning and helps me to fulfil my day-to-day objectives.
- It helps me to complete the 15-minute thematic discussion followed by an activity.
- I can cover all learning domains without feeling overwhelmed, like the 5-minute air observation followed by 5-minute quick painting kept the children engaged and boosted their motor skills.

Strategies that worked in my classroom

To establish a balance that works for every child, teachers can consider the following techniques:

- **Observe and adjust:** Teachers have to take time to observe how children respond to various activities. Are they actively participating or are they restless?



Figure 3: A variety of activities creates a mix of experiences for various learning needs.

Use these observations to adjust the pacing for future lessons, as flexibility is key; be prepared to make adjustments.

- **Use transitions wisely:** For young children, transitions between activities can be challenging. Plan smooth transitions that incorporate calming routines to set the stage for the next activity. A song or a short movement break can help children reset their focus.

- **Various types of activities:** Mix different types of activities—hands-on projects, storytelling, group discussions, and quiet reflection. This variety creates a mix of experiences that cater to various learning styles and needs.
- **Balance active engagement and rest:** Integrate periods of active engagement with moments of quiet reflection or rest. For instance, after a spirited group activity, allow for a few minutes of guided breathing, a short story, or independent play. This balance helps maintain energy levels and focus.
- **Manage time wisely:** Ensuring that activities are neither too long nor too short will help sustain children’s interest and maximise learning opportunities. Utilising visual timers can also aid in establishing a clear sense of time for children.

By implementing these strategies, educators can refine the pacing of their classroom activities, ensuring a more effective and enjoyable learning experience for all students.

Conclusion

I have seen transformations in my classroom -- a shy child blooming during a paced art session or a restless one focusing during a timed math game. I believe pacing can shape how we approach education overall and infuse the love of lifelong learning by syncing with each child’s unique rhythm.



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Bal Mela: How a Community Event Transformed Perceptions

J Vimala

Bal Mela is an opportunity to showcase to parents and the community that dedicated *Anganwadi* workers and a joyful, play-based curriculum can help children develop socially, emotionally, and mentally.

As a supervisor, visiting *Anganwadis* is the most rewarding aspect of my role. It brings me immense joy to spend time with the children, listening to their voices and observing their interactions.

One morning, I entered an *Anganwadi* and found that the *Anganwadi* worker was looking worried. Very few children were present, and this seemed to be the reason for her worry. Some of the children were quietly drawing, and one was humming. Everything appeared organised, but the absence of many children highlighted a larger issue—sickness, family dynamics, and seasonal migration were all contributing factors. This scenario is common. *Anganwadi* workers are ready to teach, but many children

are not present to learn. Irregular attendance disrupts their learning and development.

Many parents underestimate the importance of daily attendance, believing formal education starts in primary school. When we discussed attendance with parents, they often responded that young children are still small or pointed out that older students also miss classes. Some parents send their children to the *Anganwadi* only for a brief period to habituate them to daily routines, such as sitting, following instructions, and basic hygiene practices, and later moving them to private schools. This misunderstanding of Early Childhood Education (ECE) creates barriers to parental involvement and consistent attendance.



Figure 1: Children's engagement with play activities makes their learning fun.

A simple, powerful solution: *Bal Mela*

To address these challenges, we implemented a straightforward yet impactful solution: *Bal Mela*. This event serves as an excellent platform to create awareness in the community. For too long, *Anganwadi* centres have been viewed merely as places where very small children can be left for safe care while their parents go to work. The *Bal Mela* changes this perception by inviting parents and the community to witness our activities firsthand.

By observing their children's performances, parents can genuinely appreciate the learning environment that may have previously gone unrecognised. The informal atmosphere of the *Bal Mela* encourages open dialogue, allowing us to explain the purpose of each activity and how it contributes to a child's development. This personalised communication is far more effective than formal meetings.

More than an event: A strategic initiative

We organised a *Bal Mela* in Thogarapalli village, Sangareddy district, Telangana, involving four *Anganwadis* in collaboration with the Azim Premji Foundation team. The event was a joyful initiative aimed at enhancing understanding of ECE among parents and highlighting

the role of the *Anganwadi* in child development. Initially hesitant due to the children's inexperience and concerns about parental attendance during peak agricultural season, the *Anganwadi* workers were eventually motivated through discussions about the positive impact of the event. They worked diligently to prepare for it.

Bringing everyone together

The true power of the *Bal Mela* lies in its ability to unite the entire community. This sense of togetherness began well before the event itself, during the planning and preparation stages. Under our guidance, four *Anganwadi* workers and helpers meticulously organised every detail. We communicated with parents, community members, and local leaders by making home visits and announcements.

Initially, many parents showed little interest due to their work commitments. However, the *Anganwadi* workers successfully conveyed the importance of their presence to their children. They employed various strategies, such as sending messages via village *WhatsApp* groups, distributing personal invitations, and most importantly, encouraging the children to invite their parents. The *Anganwadi* workers also reached out to community members and public representatives for support and resources, including venue arrangements, speakers, and materials. This was a conscious effort to foster a sense of ownership within the community, emphasising the message, 'This is our *Anganwadi*, and these are our children.' This approach proved successful, as community members responded positively and actively supported the event.

Bal Mela: A day of joy

On the day of the *Bal Mela*, parents and community members joined in and participated in the activities. The children showed a lot of enthusiasm. Even shy kids joined in with their friends. The highlight of the event was a story dramatisation by the children. Their dialogue delivery and ability to lead the story on their own impressed the parents. The *Anganwadi* workers had prepared the children for many activities, such as storytelling, conceptual activities, and object counting, to demonstrate that they were learning more than just songs and games. After each activity, the *Anganwadi* workers explained how these helped the children's growth and development.

It was uplifting to see parents playing games with their children, a sight rarely seen in everyday life. This shared engagement reinforced the idea of a cooperative learning environment. A special section focused on the importance of a balanced diet and hygiene, with



Figure 2: Parents participating in games with their children during the *Bal Mela*.

simple demonstrations on how the *Anganwadi* cares for children's nutrition and health.

We noticed a few mothers who were hesitant at first and standing away, but after seeing their child's confidence, they seemed to realise the importance of our work. At the end, one mother said, 'I didn't know my child had so much confidence. This is great for them.' Another commented, 'We never realised that our *Anganwadi* was so much more than just a place to leave our child. Today, we saw how much they are learning and enjoying.'

The feedback clearly showed that the event was successful in changing perceptions and building trust. Village heads, public representatives, the Mandal Education Officer (MEO), and primary school teachers also attended and got involved. The MEO saw the low- to no-cost teaching materials that the *Anganwadi* workers used. He noted that children from the *Anganwadi* perform better in primary school than other children and urged all eligible kids in the area to attend the *Anganwadi* regularly.

The lasting impact

The positive effects of the *Bal Mela* lasted beyond just one day; the event strengthened the four participating *Anganwadis* in many ways. We saw clear results during our follow-up visits. There was a stronger bond of trust between parents and *Anganwadi* workers, and attendance increased in the weeks that followed.

The *Bal Mela* benefitted not just the children, parents, and community, but also the *Anganwadi* workers. We noticed more teamwork among them as they shared ideas and supported each other. This helped reduce differences between the *Anganwadis* and created a unified approach to activities, record-keeping, and meetings. When we

Table 1. A detailed schedule prepared by *Anganwadi* workers and helpers before the *Bal Mela* (supported by Azim Premji Foundation’s ECE Sangareddy team).

Time	Activity	Responsibility
9:00-9:30	Bringing children to the venue	Anganwadi Helpers
9:30-9:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inviting parents and preparing children for the event Face paintings for children 	Anganwadi Worker and Resource Persons
9:45-10:00	Free drawing with children	Anganwadi Worker
10:00 - 10:10	Opening remarks: Introduction to <i>Bal Mela</i> , purpose of the event and sharing programme schedule	Anganwadi Worker/Supervisor
10:10 -10:40	Songs – related to language development (Children will perform one of the songs from their curriculum)	Anganwadi Worker
10:40 –11:00	Conversation – related to language development (<i>Anganwadi</i> worker will lead the conversation by using picture books)	Anganwadi Worker
11:00-11:15	Explaining the importance of early years and brain development	Anganwadi Worker/Supervisor
11:15 – 12:00	Activities related to cognitive development: Parents and children 1. Matching shapes 2. Sensory activity (blindfold and touch and identify objects)	Anganwadi Worker/Resource Person
12:00-12:30	Activities for parents related to physical motor development: 1. Threading beads 2. Lacing board 3. Colouring/drawing activity	Anganwadi Worker/Resource Person
12.15	During the parents’ activity, children will go for lunch	Anganwadi Helpers
12:30-12:50	Explaining: 1. Role of parents in sending children to Anganwadi centre 2. Involvement of the community in activities of the centre	Anganwadi Worker/Supervisor
12:50-1:05	1. Parents voice on centre/their children’s development 2. Government school teacher sharing experiences	Parents and Primary School Teacher
1:05-1:15	Closing remarks	Anganwadi Worker

talked to the *Anganwadi* workers about the effects of the *Bal Mela*, they highlighted several key points:

- Total enrolment in the four *Anganwadis* rose from 31 to 45, and children attended more regularly and stayed longer.
- The children were more excited to come to the centre. Parents now send their children with essentials, like handkerchiefs and water bottles, and ensure they arrive on time.
- Parents attend monthly parent meetings (ECCE Day) and share their experiences.
- Some parents now ask their children daily about what they did at the *Anganwadi* and spend time listening to them.
- Parents help prepare materials and organise special events.
- Community members have responded positively and started helping with the needs of the centre.

Parents’ response

Parents who attended the *Bal Mela* shared that they understood the importance of sending their children

to *Anganwadi* for their early development. Among the participants of the *Bal Mela*, was a mother who responded that many people suggested that she send her child to a private school, but after seeing all the engaging activities conducted by the *Anganwadi* workers during the *mela*, she was very happy that she had made the right choice.

The other significant achievement was that fathers who usually do not attend such events, as they believe it is the domain of women, not only came to the *mela*, but also took an interest in the activities. A father shared that he thought that the *Anganwadi* was just a safe place where they could leave their child. But the *Bal Mela* 'opened his eyes to the fact that the *Anganwadi* offers a high-quality education right there within their community. He was also

surprised to see his usually quiet and shy child actively and confidently participating in the activities.

Conclusion

The *Bal Mela* was an eye-opening experience. It showed everyone how the *Anganwadi* system is a complete approach to help children develop well. The event proved that starting life well is not about high fees; it is about dedicated teachers and a joyful, play-based curriculum that helps children develop socially, emotionally, and mentally. The event has changed the *Anganwadi* from a simple care centre into an important educational place that is building a bright future for our children.

Acknowledgement: I would like to express my gratitude to Sujatha Raavi of Azim Premji Foundation for their help and guidance in writing this article.



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Learning from Children

Tarannum Nisha

This article is about my experience of working with young children between the ages of 3-6 years. While preparing to work with children, I was inspired by the philosophies of Gijubhai and Totto-Chan. I selected a variety of age-appropriate games from books and *YouTube* resources.

On the scheduled day, when I reached the *Anganwadi* centre, I saw that the room was messy and the *Anganwadi* worker was doing her work. The children were sitting on a mat, playing with toys, whereas the helper sat in one corner, keeping an eye on them so that none of the children could go out without her permission. Upon seeing me, the *Anganwadi* worker offered me a chair, but I felt it would be better to sit with the children on the mat, so I sat down among them.

The *Anganwadi* worker began her classroom routine. First, she made all the children sit in rows, and then she asked each one their name. Some children responded, while others sat silently. I tried speaking to the children, but no one responded. Even the ones who had been speaking earlier fell quiet when I asked them something. So, I simply sat and observed the activities they were engaged in.

The *Anganwadi* worker's way of speaking was gentle and affectionate. It was clear that she knew the children well by how she wove details about their families and homes in her conversation. The children were responding to her. Watching this helped me understand how one can initiate a conversation with young children. The *Anganwadi*

worker guided the children through letters and counting. She spoke first, and the children repeated after her. After a little while, it was time for the children to eat, and meals were served to them. Before eating, their hands were washed, they were seated in lines, and a prayer was recited. After all this, some of the children began playing with toys, while others started asking to go home.

The *Anganwadi* worker was still busy. I wanted to talk to her about the classroom process. When I asked, she agreed to give me a little time. She explained that she has to get the children to come from their homes, and that most of them had only recently started attending regularly. She also told me that she teaches different topics every day. Listening to her made me realise that there was a lack of activities suited to the children's age and developmental domains, and that her understanding of pre-primary or informal education was still not very developed. During this conversation, I shared my next day's plan with her.

As I left the *Anganwadi*, my mind was full of thoughts. Nothing went the way I had imagined. The children didn't talk to me, nor did they pay attention to anything I said. This work had seemed quite easy in the books I had read, but after actually visiting the *Anganwadi*, the real challenges became clear.

The next day, when I reached the centre, the first thing I did was change the classroom setup a little. I had enough floor mats spread out for all the children, and I moved the *Anganwadi* worker's table and chair to another room so that there would be ample space for activities with the children. I sat down with them and began to interact. Three-year-old Saumya seemed a little talkative, so I started with her.

I asked, 'What is your name?'

She said, 'My name is Saumya.' Then she immediately asked me, 'Why are you asking?'

I replied, 'Because I have come to play with all of you.'



Figure 1: Adequate opportunities and a loving attitude ensure children's learning.



Figure 2: Children connect everything to their own experiences.

Soon, the other children also started telling me their names. Those who were hesitant were gently encouraged by the *Anganwadi* worker, and they also shared their names.

I had a casual conversation with the children about the games they liked, their families, the animals they knew about, and so on. While talking, I showed them pictures of a few vehicles, like an auto-rickshaw, a bicycle, and a bus. All the children could identify them by name. In this manner, I continued conducting activities according to my plan. I observed that all of them were participating in the activities. I visited the centre every day and carried out the activities suggested in the *Anganwadi* worker's guide. After about 15 days of these activities, the children became familiar with my way of conducting conversations and engaging them. Gradually, all the children started coming to the centre regularly.

Children's learning

We often think that young children forget things quickly or do not pay attention. But when I worked with them, I realised that children actually learn at a fast pace. When they listen to something with interest or participate in an activity, they understand its context and then express their own thoughts by connecting them to that context. Here, I am sharing a few experiences I had with the children, which highlight several important aspects of their learning process.

Children observe accurately

I was talking to the children on the theme of 'Vehicles'. While showing them pictures of different vehicles, I asked: Where do these vehicles move? Seeing the bicycle, the children said it moves on the road. The bus moves on the road. An aeroplane flies in the sky. When



Figure 3: It is essential to engage children in activities that are appropriate for their age.

I showed them a boat, they paused and thought for a moment. I gave them a hint by asking: What things move in a pond? Since there is a pond near the centre, and the children pass by it every day on their way, I was quite sure they would give the correct answer. But their response surprised me. There were about fifteen children in the centre. All of them said that a JCB machine moves in the pond, and a tractor moves in the pond. Saumya, very confidently, added that some people even drive their vehicles in the pond. The children were sharing what they had seen and experienced themselves. Since the work of cleaning the pond had been going on for a long time, they had never actually seen a boat there. So, they described what they had observed accurately.

While working on this theme, I conducted an activity using cut-outs of different shapes, arranged to form vehicles. Each child was given one rectangular piece, some circular pieces, and some triangular pieces. The expectation was that each of them would create a shape of their own. All of them tried to arrange cut-outs in their own way, but two children combined their cut-outs to make one big shape. The *Anganwadi* worker praised their creation, and after a little while, all the children put their cut-outs together and created a train.

Children draw from their experiences

When I showed the picture of a ship, all the children immediately said that this was a ship. Once again, I was surprised. How could they recognise something they had likely never seen in real life? I continued the conversation and asked if they had seen it moving. The children began describing, with gestures, how a ship moves in water. Their sentences included words like waves and sea. Each

child described a ship in their own way. When I asked where they had seen a ship, all of them said, 'On TV!' The children recognised the ship instantly, yet they were unable to identify the boat that moved in the pond. Although in both situations, they were drawing directly from their experiences. I realised that even 3-year-olds observe things carefully, connect conversation with context, and that is where their learning begins. Perhaps this is why one question can prompt many different answers.

Their imagination is unbound

The children often talked and thought about the world around them, but many times, they would also imagine things. For example, one child narrated a story: 'A ghost lives in a jungle. One day, he came to my house. He was asking me for my vehicle. He flew onto my roof. I hit him with a stick and chased him away.'

I asked him, 'Where have you seen a ghost?'

He replied, 'My grandmother tells me that there is a very big ghost.'

This led to an entire discussion about ghosts - what do they look like, what do they eat, who lives in their house, and so on. All the children were enjoying this conversation. They were eagerly answering every question that was asked.

Children need trust to open up

Siya has just started coming to the centre. Her mother would push her into the room and go away. Siya would cry for a while and then quietly sit in a corner. This continued for three to four days. During this time, the *Anganwadi* worker and I tried talking to her, tried different ways of engaging her, but she never responded. Still, we continued our efforts. On the fifth day, when she arrived, the *Anganwadi* worker was busy with some work and could not talk to her immediately. That was when Siya herself went up to the *Anganwadi* worker and began speaking, 'Today I ate a samosa before coming. Last night Papa hit Mama, and I started crying.' The *Anganwadi* worker gently spoke to her and shifted her attention toward other things.

It became clear that it is very important for children to trust you. I realised that the *Anganwadi* worker's gentle way of speaking to Siya, smiling at her, talking to her patiently, even when she never replied, had created a sense of trust in Siya's mind. Because of that trust, she finally opened up on her own. Now she participates in all activities, and she does not even want to go home. Here, the *Anganwadi* worker's patience is truly important. The way she patiently connected Siya to the classroom was essential and deeply meaningful.

“ It seemed difficult to imagine how they could ever play a game together! But when I played group games with them every day, the children slowly began to understand the rules of playing together. They started waiting for their turn. If someone missed their turn or came ahead of it, others would tell them. Children who struggled with certain activities were helped by others. ”

Children can be taught to play together

When I first started visiting the centre, I noticed that all the children played separately, each by themselves. Any toy – ball, rope, or mask – that they had, they would keep to themselves. If someone tried to take it back, they would start crying. During activities, like throwing the ball into the bucket, if the ball did not go inside the bucket, they would cry or run away with it.

Gradually, I began joining their play and creating opportunities for them to play in groups. It seemed difficult to imagine how they could ever play a game together! But when I played group games with them every day, the children slowly began to understand the rules of playing together. They started waiting for their turn. If someone missed their turn or came ahead of it, others would tell them. Children who struggled with certain activities were helped by others. For example, if the 3-year-olds had difficulty rolling the wheels, the 5-6-year-olds helped them complete the activity. If an activity was completed, the children would repeat it multiple times. And if ever the *Anganwadi* worker forgot to conduct a group game, the children would name a group game and ask her, 'Didi, please make us play that game!'

In the end

It is very important for us to understand that when we speak to children with love, they listen and understand us. The best way to begin learning is through conversations — conversations that connect with their family, environment, and everyday experiences; conversations in which they can respond comfortably.

I worked continuously with the children for 24 days. During this time, I got to understand how they learn. And when they learn something new, their curiosity grows. They

imagine and when they get the freedom to speak, they express their imagination without hesitation. It is essential to engage children in activities that are appropriate for their age. Adequate opportunities and a loving attitude

ensure their learning. Every child learns according to their own abilities and level. Each builds their own imagination and begins to see a bigger world.

References

¹ Gijubhai Badheka was an Indian educationist, who championed child-centric learning. He helped to introduce Montessori education methods to India.

² Totto-chan, The Little Girl at the Window is an autobiographical memoir written by Tetsuko Kuroyanagi. It brings into focus innovative, child-centred education.

Translated from Hindi Translator: Dawangara Vetter: Sonam



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Nurturing curiosity through play in my Anganwadi

Munni Dahariya



The innocent laughter of children, their conversations full of curiosity, and little figures made by their tiny hands are the greatest treasures of my life. When I began working at the *Anganwadi* where I work, the walls were bare and empty; the children were disinterested and would start quarrelling as soon as they arrived; they were easily bored and had no excitement about coming to the *Anganwadi*.

I realised that I needed to change my approach to engage the children and make learning enjoyable for them. I chose to begin with colouring. One day, I gave them colourful crayons and chart paper and said, 'Draw whatever comes to your mind.' Babli drew a sun, Tosiya drew a tree, Madan drew a flower, and Mankaran drew a butterfly. Appreciating everyone's drawings, I said, 'Oh Babli, your sun is shining so brightly! Mankaran, your colourful butterfly will now flutter over Madan's beautiful flower!' All the children smiled happily. Slowly, the blank walls became vibrant with the children's imagination. Their drawings began to reflect their emotions. Now, their eyes would light up as soon as they entered the centre.

I noticed a little girl, Pragati, who was full of curiosity. Initially, she too was a bit hesitant, but soon her interest in things made her stand out. She loved drawing. Whatever she learnt at the *Anganwadi*, she would repeat at home with her parents. One day, she folded pieces of newspaper and made a chart of English letters and gifted it to me. Her creativity filled me with joy. I hung that chart on the wall so that it was visible to all the children.

However, not every day at the *Anganwadi* was easy. There were challenges during activities. When the children were asked to fill in colours in shapes, they would colour outside the lines or leave their work incomplete. This is expected of young children. They would get frustrated while solving puzzles. Many would say, even before trying, 'Ma'am, we cannot do it!' This was my biggest challenge. I was afraid that the children might develop a habit of giving up.

So, I decided to change my approach. We turned every difficult task into a game. I would say, 'Let us see who colours in which way!' or 'Everyone will clap for the one who completes the puzzle.' Gradually, they began to understand that an activity is not a burden but fun. They would fall and get up, fail and try again, and continue to laugh. This perseverance became their greatest strength.

Pragati too went through these challenges. In the beginning, she would get impatient while colouring. If her picture did not turn out well, she would feel sad. But each time, I encouraged her, saying, 'If you try, you will be able to do it.' Slowly, her efforts began to show results. Her colouring improved, and her confidence grew.

A sense of cooperation also began to emerge among the children. Earlier, they used to fight for toys, but now they have started sharing them. If someone's crayon got over, another would offer them their own. This change was very special for me. The *Anganwadi* was no longer just a place of learning; it had become a classroom of friendship and cooperation.

Even on holidays, some children would visit me at home. For a while, we would turn the house into an *Anganwadi*. They would take out toys, make drawings and narrate stories. I would keep asking them questions about what they did – why they liked the building blocks, why they drew a bird in their picture, or how they felt when the baby bird fell from its nest in the story. They would think and give interesting answers. In those moments, it felt like this was real education, where the desire to learn arises through play, and children truly learn.

Over time, many children from the *Anganwadi* joined schools. Their new teachers praised them. Pragati was one of them. She had now started studying confidently in school. Her notebooks were neat. Her drawings were beautiful for a child her age. She answered questions with confidence. Her progress was not only evident in marks but also in her thinking and self-assurance.

Looking back, I realise that bringing change in children does not require great resources. Small activities can teach big lessons. I feel that there should be no lack of genuine appreciation and encouragement. Pragati's story is the best example of this. I appreciated her every effort, and perhaps that is why she developed a deep interest in art and learning. When her parents say that this change came from the *Anganwadi*, my heart fills with pride.

Today, our *Anganwadi* is no longer the same. Now the walls display the children's artistic expressions, and the room echoes with their laughter. Learning is no longer limited to books; it is hidden in every game, every song and every activity. The children are no longer afraid of challenges; they accept them as if in play.

This story is not only about Pragati but about all those children who have filled the small world of the *Anganwadi* with colour, joy and learning. Here, every challenge is a game, every learning a celebration, and every child's childhood is blossoming beautifully.

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

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My experiences as an Anganwadi Worker

Rekha B



As children arrive at the *Anganwadi* in the morning, I greet them warmly, help them settle in, pay attention to their cleanliness, and prepare myself to conduct the day's activities. We begin our day with prayer. After this, I give them milk and *ragi laddoos* for breakfast.

After breakfast, I engage the children in a creative game to help them get mentally ready for the day ahead. This game serves as a cheerful warm-up before we begin with the curricular activities. Next, I involve children in learning activities that cover 48 themes spread throughout the year. I teach one theme per week.

Let me take the example of the lessons on leafy greens and vegetables to illustrate how I engage my *Anganwadi* group.

I began the conversation by asking them about the breakfast they had at home. Then, I drew their attention to the leafy greens and vegetables they had seen or eaten. The children named vegetables commonly cooked at home, such as spinach, fenugreek, potato, and cauliflower, and they shared the names of their favourite dishes and their taste. Some said they liked *aloo-palak* (potato-spinach), while others said they preferred *bhindi* (ladies' finger) or *aloo-gobi* (potato-cauliflower). During this time, I used flashcards of different vegetables to take the conversation forward. Since they already had some familiarity with leafy greens and vegetables, they were mentally prepared to learn more about them. In the next step, I engaged all the children in singing and dancing to the action song '*Sabzi le lo sabzi*' ('buy vegetables').

Action songs play a crucial role in the physical and intellectual development of children. These songs interweave freedom, fun, and learning. Through this, I also introduced the children to the form, colour, shape and benefits of different vegetables. The children took part enthusiastically in the song, dance, and learning.

After the action song, I used a story that weaves in ideas about leafy greens and vegetables – the story of the onion. While selecting a story, I make sure that it is simple, fun, and closely related to the children's everyday experiences. This helps develop children's language, expands their vocabulary, and gives wings to their imagination. I also feel that listening to

and discussing stories helps children indirectly understand social and human values. I have observed that all the children show great interest and enjoy themselves while listening to stories in class.

After the story, I conduct interesting activities to support the development of children's motor skills. These include joining cut-outs of pictures together, drawing from their imagination, colouring pictures, and making shapes with sticks and stones. The children make toys such as paper aeroplanes, boats, and balls using newspaper, and they also teach each other. These activities help improve their hand-eye coordination and strengthen their muscles.

After the creative activities, it is time for early literacy activities. First, I say a few familiar words to the children. Then, I break and repeat the words into sounds/syllables, to give them time to pronounce the words along with me. After that, I use a song that includes those same words and letters to maintain continuity in the learning experience. This gives the children a new kind of experience beyond just listening. In the next step, I ask them to read aloud the words written on word cards – words that are from their everyday lives. In this way, they learn to listen carefully to words, recognise the sounds of letters and words, and practise pronunciation. Thus, language practice continues in the form of words, sentences, and paragraphs, helping the children move gradually from familiar contexts to unfamiliar ones. In this manner, learning happens playfully and naturally, without creating any pressure on them. From my experience, I have found that language can indeed be taught this way.

In the same way, I also conduct activities for mathematics. I connect these with the morning breakfast. I ask each child how many *idlis* or *chapatis* they ate for breakfast. When a child replies with a number, I help them associate the number with the number name. For greater clarity, I have them count concrete objects, such as leaves, flowers, pebbles, seeds and pencils by placing their fingers on them. With my help, they match the objects with numbers and count aloud. They also try on their own to count things in the room, like doors, windows, fans, charts, and posters. Similarly, at our *Anganwadi* centre, I involve them in counting activities, such as the total number of children present, the number of children in each group when divided, or counting and adding while distributing *ragi laddoos*. The children really enjoy counting and comparing things around them – more or less, few or many. I ask them to find and identify objects around them that are small or big, thick or thin, light or heavy, near or far. The children take part in this mathematics game with great enthusiasm.

In my view, experience- and activity-based teaching is most effective for young children. It supports their overall development, increases their interest in learning new things, and inspires them to show curiosity and eagerness to learn something new every day.

Translated from Kannada. Translator: Asha Maheshwar Reviewer: Kiran Manjunath

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

Rekha B, Anganwadi Worker, Anganwadi Centre, Darga Colony, Dommasandra Circle, Anekal Taluk, Bengaluru, Karnataka.

Creating a nurturing Anganwadi

Sandhyawali Gupta



I work as an *Anganwadi* worker, and I believe this is not just a job, but a responsibility to build our society. For an *Anganwadi* worker, it is important to understand why it is necessary to create a supportive and affectionate environment for children; equally important is to understand how such a learning-friendly environment can be created, keeping in mind children's needs. To create such an environment, it is essential to ask ourselves some questions: For example, what do children enjoy? What resources are available around them? Children bring many experiences with them. How can these experiences be included and given space in the centres? Are the surroundings and the activities facilitated at the *Anganwadi* centre easy and child-friendly? Do they help children stay engaged in the learning process? Etc.

A positive learning environment begins the moment a child steps into the centre. At the entrance, I have placed a 'Welcome Chart' that has different symbols to greet, like *namaste*, a hug, a handshake, an elbow touch or a high-five. Each child chooses their preferred greeting, and I welcome them accordingly. This playful beginning creates an instant bond between the children and me.

Children learn through play and by interacting with their surroundings. I have made many learning materials, such as name charts, rule charts, wrapper charts, fruit and vegetable charts, animal and bird charts, traffic and weather charts, and calendars that children can see, touch and talk about. The children look at these charts, repeat the things they recognise, and ask me about the ones they do not recognise, and then they share their learning with one another.

Every month, I plan activities around a selected theme. I plan stories, songs, poems, drawings, and games, all based on the theme of the particular month. For example, I speak to the children in their mother tongue and ask, 'Tell me, what season is it now?'

Children: It is the rainy season.

I: Let us sing a nursery rhyme related to 'rain' together. Watch my actions while I sing and do the same.

After the nursery rhyme, I talk with children about rain. I ask them, 'What things do we use during the rainy season?'

Children: Raincoat, umbrella, plastic shoes, paper boats, plastic sheets, etc.

I write all their answers on a chart and display it in the centre as a 'Weather Chart'.

Children observe the usage of many things every day. They have a lot to talk about and share their experiences related to these. For example, they observe that different types of toothpastes are used for brushing teeth, money is needed to purchase things, vegetables and spices are used in cooking, many type of food is sold in the market, etc. They know many more such things. To encourage such conversations, I collected wrappers of related items and prepared a 'Wrapper Chart' which I displayed in the *Anganwadi*. Children look at these and talk about them, and the conversation goes further. They have conversations like: I brush daily, I bathe daily too, today I ate ..., etc. Such charts also help them to get familiar with written words. Such opportunities of expression make the children feel comfortable, safe and happy.

Most of the children I work with come from homes with limited resources and learning environments. So, I feel it is important that they do not face a lack of materials in the *Anganwadi* and that they remain interested in learning. To help children learn better and create a motivating learning space, I have collected low-cost materials from easily available local items and have created many learning aids. This not only keeps children interested in learning but also improves their learning levels. When parents visit the centre and see their children actively engaged in learning and talking about different things, their trust in the *Anganwadi* grows. Their participation also leads to children's regular attendance.

It is important to mention that regular sector-level meetings and workshops have been very helpful in creating this kind of nurturing environment. These sessions have shown me how learning can be made enjoyable and play-based. They also give us a chance to share our challenges and successes, which keeps us motivated and encouraged.

Translated from Hindi Translator: Pragya Vetter: Bhumika Popli

Sandhyawali Gupta, Aanganwadi Bhagora-1, Hamirpur Sector, Tamnar Project, Raigarh, Chhattisgarh



The Story of Transformation of my Anganwadi Centre – Sunita Singh

Nivedita Tiwari

Damkheda Sector 1, with its narrow lanes, unpaved, *kaccha* roads, and clusters of shacks, is a world apart from the modern image of the capital, Bhopal, where it is situated. In 2006, an *Anganwadi* centre was established within the premises of a government primary school there. Sunita Singh, the *Anganwadi* teacher, transformed it through her hard work and dedication, creating a space where children could joyfully learn and play. This story is about the journey of this *Anganwadi* centre, a beacon of hope for the community.

A school without a roof

Although the *Anganwadi* centre was announced, and a worker and her assistant were appointed, there was no room available for the centre. Thus, the children were taught sometimes on the temple platform and sometimes under the open sky. Heat, rain, and cold, every season had new challenges. And yet a bigger challenge was the community's hesitation and mistrust regarding the *Anganwadi*. The *Anganwadi* worker, Sunita and her assistant Parvati went door to door and spoke with mothers, explaining why being in an *Anganwadi* was important for 3–6-year-old children. Gradually, mothers started sending their little ones to the centre.

As the number of children increased, one classroom in the school was finally allotted to the *Anganwadi* in 2015. This came after nine long years of consistent effort.

Although the room existed earlier but it was not ready for children. The room was located in a corner of the school compound, next to a large drain. Garbage would pile up nearby, and the foul smell made it difficult for anyone to sit there without covering their nose. Besides, antisocial elements would throw trash in front of the *Anganwadi* room at night. The work of pre-school education became even more difficult in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In November 2022, a training was held for pre-school education workers. The training gave the *Anganwadi* worker and her assistant new energy and inspiration. They not only began regular conversations with the community but also reimagined the *Anganwadi*. They sewed white sacks into mats for the children to sit on and decorated the walls with colourful charts of different kinds, which included poetry, stories, alphabets, numbers, fruit and vegetables. Every corner of the centre was made ready to welcome children.

Play and creativity found wings

However, children still came to the centre only for the meal. Gradually, as people observed the *Anganwadi's* new form, they understood that it was not merely a nutrition centre but a platform for children's holistic development. The *Anganwadi* worker, Sunita Singh, introduced some pre-school activities at the *Anganwadi*, such as:

- Playing games with balls, ropes, and blocks
- Making handprints
- Writing name and age



Figure 1 : Children engaged in activities.



Figure 2: Learning while playing.

- Drawing and colouring
- Listening and telling stories and poems

Sunita ji also established a systematic timetable at the centre. Slowly, the children began to come more regularly, and instead of just having food and leaving, they started showing interest in the activities as well.

Envisioning joyful learning

A young child's first educational experience should be joyful, creative and inspiring. To materialise this idea, Sunita ji set up 'learning corners' in the *Anganwadi*. The learning corners and some of the materials kept in them were:

- Reading Corner: Colourful books, picture stories, and story cards
- Play Corner: Puzzles, counting toys, and colourful blocks
- Creativity Corner: Drawing sheets, crayons, clay, and other art materials
- Drama and Performance Corner: Costumes, puppets and a makeshift stage
- Cognitive Skills Corner: Pattern-matching, colour recognition and shape-learning materials

Through the activities in these specially designed learning corners, children began to learn colour recognition, counting, drawing and storytelling while playing. This has strengthened their language development, reasoning, social participation and self-confidence.

Participation of the community

Sunita ji started regular dialogue with parents. She invited them to share their work and experiences in



Figure 3: Conversation on the theme of 'Vegetables'.

the *Anganwadi*. For example, she requested a parent who works as a vegetable seller to put his cart near the *Anganwadi* for a day. This gave the children an opportunity to identify vegetables and understand the functioning of a market and the process of buying and selling. From time to time, Sunita ji organises such activities by involving parents. She also asked some mothers to come to the *Anganwadi* and take part in songs, poems and storytelling with the children. Many mothers showed interest and participated in listening to and telling poems and stories to the children.

Sunita ji contacted local youth and organised activities with them from time to time so that the community remained active and engaged. Together, they made clay models, used coconut shells as planters to increase environmental sensitivity. This involvement gave the youth a sense of responsibility and made the area around the centre clean, green and positive. Similarly, she began to take the help of older children from the community to organise events, such as tree-planting day, Children's Day and Independence Day.

To strengthen the bond between the community and the children, the teacher started '*Bal Chaupal*' – a platform for children to showcase their confidence and learning by reciting poems, participating in short plays, songs and stories. When parents saw their children on stage and speaking with confidence, they realised the real power of the *Anganwadi*.

Sunita ji also created a *WhatsApp* group with all the parents and began to regularly share photographs, videos of activities and updates on the children's progress. When parents saw their children laughing and playing, reciting poems and learning new things, their trust deepened. Parents began to ask, 'What new thing did my child



Figure 4: Sunita ji engaging the children in an activity using masks.

learn today?’ This led to better attendance, continuity in learning, and sustained interest among children.

A shared responsibility

The work at an *Anganwadi* is carried out by both the *Anganwadi* worker and helper. Sunita ji ensured that the helper learn all the activities that she conducted with the children. They have also divided responsibilities between them.

The assistant plays an important role in strengthening the functioning of the *Anganwadi*. Thus includes:

- Creating domain-based corners — a library bag and learning corners for various activities
- Preparing attractive teaching materials from used items or items found in the surroundings, such as pebbles, leaves, neem fruits, bottle caps and coloured bottles
- Changing charts and posters from time to time to keep the centre looking vibrant and interesting for children
- Bringing soil for making clay toys, sieving it, kneading it like dough and storing it safely
- Collecting pebbles and stones for counting, addition and subtraction, stacking and classification activities; painting and keeping these ready for use by the children

Art activities for children’s creative development

Among the activities Sunita ji organises for the children for their creative development are dyeing threads and using them to make pictures and making designs by hand, and vegetable prints.

She uses materials innovatively so that there were no constraints in providing children with opportunities to learn. Notable among these are:

- Reusing take-home ration sacks by writing poems and pictures on them
- Writing poems on the blank side of old calendars
- Using white sacks for posters

To make up for the lack of a blackboard, Sunita ji uses flex posters that had been put up during election campaigns. By painting their reverse side black, she has created folding blackboards. These can be hung on the wall and removed when not needed. She makes picture cards for children from illustrations in old magazines and writes stories on old flex banners. Children underline the words they are asked to identify and then erase them to reuse the material.

Glass bottles that people throw near the *Anganwadi* are used by her to grow plants like the money plant. Along with the helper, she decides in advance which activities will be held the next day and which teaching-learning materials (TLMs) will be needed. In this way, they have developed a system for sourcing and organising TLMs so that the *Anganwadi* centre remains well-equipped and organised. This vibrant environment not only attracts children but also increases community participation.

Sensitive assessment

Sunita ji believes that a child’s progress cannot be measured only by report-card figures. She observes children every day and records their learning in detail. For example: Which child recognises which colour? Who can tell a story without help? Who is joining pictures to create something new?

She preserves all these notes and observations and maintains documents that detail each child’s learning journey.

Support and guidance

Sunita ji does not restrict herself to her *Anganwadi* centre; she is a source of inspiration and guidance for workers at other *Anganwadi* centres as well. She advises them to work as a team, share experiences, and make the centre not merely the ‘first school of children’ but also a ‘home’ for children. Many other *Anganwadi* workers have started coming to her for suggestions, and she, from time to time, goes to their centres to support them.

Attention changed the atmosphere

Anganwadi worker Sunita ji's most outstanding quality is that she pays attention to each child's individual needs. Harsh, who earlier could not speak and kept away from activities, has now become confident with the teacher's guidance. Now, he tells stories, counts and participates in games with enthusiasm. This is

not just one child's change but, transformation of the entire environment.

Through her dedication, innovation and sensitivity, Sunita ji has truly become an *Anganwadi* worker who inspires hope. Her story proves that with the right vision and intent, remarkable change can be brought about even with limited resources.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Shabnam Sengupta Vetter: Sonam Kumari



Nivedita Tiwari has been working in the field of education for the past 15 years. Alongside education, she has written poetry and stories and has engaged in ideological and creative writing. For the past four years, she has been a Resource Person with the Azim Premji Foundation in Bhopal.

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Satya, Watch Out!

Reviewer: Garima Gupta

S*atya, Watch Out!* is a vibrant storybook that brings life to reading through the boundless energy of its protagonist, Satya. Satya, just like many other children of his age, just cannot stay still. He hops, sprints, crawls, slithers, leaps, and swings to explore the world around him. Told in simple sentences, the story brings a joyful and playful narrative to readers.

The rich imagery and illustrations of the story easily catch one's attention, balancing it with a push to develop an eye for detail. The illustrations not only do a great job in supporting the young reader's vocabulary development but also provide ample inspiration to immerse oneself in the world of creativity and imagination. Beyond presenting an episode from the life of a 5-year-old, it deftly weaves in a common concept that children learn during their intentional engagement in classrooms – animals and their movements. Furthermore, the author's writing style and word choice make the book a valuable resource for primary classrooms, especially in teaching verbs and similes.

This story depicts how Satya learns through physical play and curiosity, qualities that are commonly observed in children in the early years. It honours the importance of kinaesthetic learning and reminds the adults that children's need to move around and experiment with their movements and bodies is natural and fundamental to their development. It reminds adults that the movement and exploration that children have during these years should be cherished and encouraged, not suppressed.

The story holds gravity for children by inviting them to see themselves – their energy, urges, impulses, imaginations – in Satya's character. The resonance comes with the validation that the story gives to the children's own yearning for freedom, adventure, and sensory experiences. With sentences and illustrations like 'He swings like a spider and leaps like a langur,' the story inspires children with a sense of wonder about the natural world and a sense of curiosity towards the endless possibilities offered by their own bodies.

At the same time, the story also talks to the adults in the lives of children, recognising their reactions to children's actions. The adults – Appa, Akka, Thaatha, Teacher, and Amma in the life of Satya react differently to his exuberance. The story prompts adults to rethink their reactions and the hidden expectations they have of children by asking Satya to sit quietly or not break anything. Further, it urges them to demonstrate acceptance and supportive engagement in place of constant correction. It opens a window into children's lives, explaining to adults the delight that children have in movement and the frustration that follows from being restricted and misunderstood. Thus, making a case for creating an environment where grown-ups recognise and respect the perspectives, desires, and yearnings of children, motivating them to respond with compassion, support, and patience instead of restraint. The story goes beyond to guide the grown-up with prompts encouraging healthy risk-taking in children by citing loving, care-filled responses of the mother (Amma), such as, 'Use the strong branches, my little monkey', 'The mud is squishy. Be careful!'

This book encourages us to see meaning in chaotic ways of children's engagement with the world. The story fosters empathy for adults tasked with balancing safety and freedom, and affirms the importance of laughter, storytelling, and shared moments as anchors for connection.



Author: Yamini Vijayan

Illustrator: Vishnu M Nair

Age: 4 to 8 years

Print length: 21 pages

Language: English and 48 other languages

Publisher: Pratham Books

Teachers can bring this story to engage children in different movements like Satya does – exploring and developing their physical abilities while teaching them about movements of different animals using appropriate vocabulary in a playful manner. Hence, the story can be used to foster holistic development in children by supporting their physical, emotional, language, and cognitive development.

Garima Gupta is faculty at the School of Education, Azim Premji University. Her interests lie in areas of teacher professional development, inclusive education and early childhood education.

My First Railway Journey

Reviewer: Kamlesh Chandra Joshi

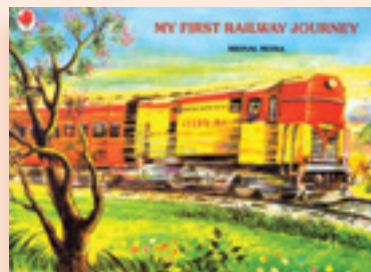
We remember all the journeys we make. Some memories fade away, while others remain fresh. Where we went, how we travelled, who came with us, what we saw, whom we met, and all the special moments – these experiences stay with us. And whenever we get a chance, we want to share these experiences with others. While working with young children, we need to create opportunities for them to share such experiences. This helps children to express themselves, and this, in turn, facilitates the development of their linguistic skills. Short-length picture books provide ample such opportunities to children. What is required is to identify simple, interactive books that children can connect with easily and which enrich their experiences.

An important expectation from *Anganwadis* is that the children attending these develop oral language skills. For this, they need to be given opportunities to talk and express themselves by sharing their experiences. Picture books are ideal for this. There is a wide variety of picture books – some carry short stories and poems, some are packed with information about the children’s surroundings, and some that tell stories through pictures. Picture books facilitate open-ended thinking and provide opportunities for children to connect these with their own experiences. They can even create stories based on their own experiences.

Published by the National Book Trust and illustrated by Mrinal Mitra, this picture-only book is very useful for engaging children in a conversation. When fully spread from cover to cover, this book opens as one long picture, which gives the reader an impression of a moving train. The book depicts the train journey of a child with his parents. All children have experiences of going out with their parents for various everyday activities. It does not matter whether they take the train or the bus. I am reminded of the poem *Rail Chali, Bhai Rail Chali* by Prayag Shukla, which can be recited to the children while discussing this book.

The picture story begins with a child and his parents at the railway station. This picture can be used to start a conversation with the children. The subsequent pictures capture the child’s emotions as he sits by the window and looks outside. Most of us have experienced how, during journeys, children insist on sitting by the window; it is their natural sense of curiosity. An elderly couple is also shown sitting in the seats in front of the child. Later, the book shows other passengers and then the train is shown passing through a tunnel, where everything becomes dark. All these pictures can be used as excellent conversation points with children, and they can also be encouraged to relate these with their own experiences. The following are some questions that can be asked during the discussion:

- Where do you think this train is going?
- Have you ever travelled by train?
- What different places have you visited?



Author: Mrinal Mitra

Reading age: 4 - 6 years

Print length: 16

Languages: English, Hindi

Publisher: National Book Trust, New Delhi

- With whom did you travel?
- Whose story do you think this book tells?
- What could be the name of the child sitting by the window?
- What would you have done if you were in the child's place?
- What picture do you think you will see on the next page?

This conversation will elicit different responses, which reflect children's individual thought processes. The unique thing about this book is that it does not provide a ready-made story. Children can create their own stories based on their experiences.

We are always in need of good books for use with children in Anganwadis. This is an excellent book that provides ample opportunities for children to talk and connects them with their own experiences of travelling. The colourful and vibrant pictures in the book speak to the children. The scenes of the platform and compartments, the lively expressions of different people, are all fascinating. It is up to the skills of a teacher as to how they present this book to the children in ways that make them connect with it.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Hemant Gehlot Vetter: Simran Luthra

Kamlesh Chandra Joshi has been associated with primary education for the last 30 years. He has worked extensively with teachers at the primary level on language teaching, school libraries and teacher training. He currently works at Azim Premji Foundation, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand.

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Let's do some activities!

Let's make patterns

Objective: This activity helps children aged 3-6 years who come to the *Anganwadi* centre to increase their memory and their ability to think and reason in an organised way.

Materials needed: Four pebbles, four leaves, four matchsticks, and four beads

Age group: 3-6 years

Step 1

Ask all the children to sit in a circle and sit with them.

Tell the children, 'Today, we will arrange a few things in sequence. First, I will show you how to do it. Watch carefully. Then, each one of you will continue the same pattern one by one.'

Step 2

Demonstrate the pattern to the children by first placing a stone, followed by a leaf, then a stick, and a bead in a straight line. Then ask the children to repeat the same order with the materials one by one. Keep reminding all the children to watch carefully.

Step 3

Collect all the materials and put them back in the centre of the circle. Now, show a new pattern, for example, a stick, a stone, a leaf, and a bead. After this, give each child a turn and ask them to choose the right object from the pile and place it in the same order to continue the pattern.

In this way, each child adds one object at a time, completing the sequence.

Tip: If a child is unable to make the correct pattern, ask the other children to help. This will encourage teamwork and co-learning.

For a larger group

Since each pattern uses only four of each item, if there are many children, collect the items from the first pattern and use them to make new patterns so more children can take turns.

Suggestion: You can make the activity easier or harder by increasing or decreasing the number of items according to the children's age group. You can also use other materials based on availability.

This activity was developed by Vipin Chauhan, a member of the Field Research Team of Azim Premji Foundation, Dehradun.



Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

A visit to the market

Objective: Through this activity, children learn to recognise the value of things and how currency notes are used to buy items. Repeating this game can help children develop their understanding of purchasing things.

Materials needed: Pictures of different items, play currency notes of various denominations, a chart paper

Age group: 4-6 years

Preparation before the activity

Before starting, prepare a chart with picture cards of familiar objects, such as an apple, a toy car, a chocolate, pencils, a mobile, etc. These picture cards can be placed on the poster. Under each picture, paste a price label in the form of a (play) currency note. For example, a ₹20 note could be pasted under the picture of an apple, indicating its price.

Use only those notes which are commonly used today. For example, ₹10, ₹20, ₹50, ₹100, and ₹500. Keep several notes of these denominations ready for children to use during the activity.

How to begin

Ask all the children to sit in a manner so that they can easily and clearly see and hear the instructions and participate in the activity.

Tell the children: 'Today we will go for a market visit and buy things that we like.' Ask the children to repeat this, and if they are unable to repeat, you can repeat it once again.

Next, show them the poster in such a way that the children can easily see both the items and their prices. Explain to them, this is an item, and just below it is the note showing its price. If you want to buy an item, you have to pick the note of the same value from the notes kept in front of you and give it to me, so that I can give you that item.

Explain this process with an example: 'If you want to buy a toy car and the price written below it is ₹20, then you will pick the ₹20 note from the notes kept in front of you and give it to me. Then, I will give the toy car to you.' In this way, all the children can buy the items they like.

Now, call each child one by one and ask them which item they want to buy. For the selected item, point to the note below and tell its price. Ask the child to find the note of the same value from the notes placed in front of them. When the child hands over the correct note, give the child the item they chose.

Repeat this process with every child. If any child finds it difficult, repeat the activity with that child. This activity can also be done in another way for the children who find it difficult. The child can first pick a note from the notes placed in front of them. Then, looking at the chart, the child can try finding the item whose price matches the note that they have picked. If the child identifies the correct item, they will get that item.



Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

When all the children start doing the activity comfortably, you can increase the level of the game by changing the prices of the items and repeating the activity.

Suggestions

- Keep only those notes in front of the children that match the prices (notes) shown on the chart.
- It is better to start the activity using notes of lesser denomination, such as ₹10, ₹20, ₹50, and ₹100.
- If the children do not understand any instruction or step, explain it again patiently.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Pragya Vetter-Simran Luthra

This activity was created by Shekhar Bindhani, who currently works with the mathematics team of the Azim Premji Foundation in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh.



Developed an understanding of making monthly assessments fun

The experiences of Vaishali Gedam, in the *Pages from Teachers' Diaries* who has written 'Exams too can be fun!' published in the 25th issue of *Pathshala: Bheetar aur Bahar* echoed my own classroom experiences. After reading the diary entry, I realised how multi-grade/multi-level children can learn together meaningfully. The Jharkhand SCERT conducts monthly assessments in every school in the state to understand children's learning levels. Thanks to this diary, I learned how our school's monthly assessment can be turned into an enjoyable learning experience.

Krishna Singh, Assistant Teacher, Rajkiya Utkramit Madhya Vidyalaya Bishunpur, Chainpur Gumla, Jharkhand

Include articles that interest children and spark conversations around them

25th issue of *Pathshala* was full of wonderful teacher experiences in the 'Pages from Teachers' Dairies' column. Among these, Dharampal Gangwar's 'Riddles: A fun way for children to learn' was very impressive. A very interesting and systematic method of learning English can be seen in K James Kumar's diary entry, 'My 'wow' moment in teaching and how it transformed my classroom!' The way he taught children the English language through pictures and songs is commendable. All the articles are written in simple and familiar language and in a well-organised and accessible style, making them easy to understand. In upcoming issues, I hope to see articles on books that children enjoy, as well as books that encourage conversations with children.

Deepa Tiwari, Assistant Teacher, Government Primary School Shaktifarm No. 3, Sitarganj, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand

Teachers' diaries help overcome ground-level challenges

The teacher diary entries in Issue 25 help bridge the gap between theory and practice for teachers. The content from other columns gives us the perspective to face challenges with commitment and helps us overcome them at the ground level. While working as a library facilitator, it is extremely interesting to engage with children and work on riddles with them. Instead of using traditional riddles, creating new ones encourages children to be creative. It broadens their thinking, reasoning, understanding, and meaning making and gives them immense joy.

Sangeeta Gupta, Retired Head Teacher, Government Primary School Pandari, Sitarganj, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand

Abandon traditional beliefs, adopt new teaching methods

Gautam Pandey's article in the 25th issue, 'Education and Teachers: The Need to Understand Ground Realities,' is an excellent document for people working in the field of education. I found his suggestion especially important, where he emphasises the need to deeply understand education and its various aspects at the ground level. He also hints that we need to move beyond traditional beliefs, adopt new perspectives, and change our approach.

Sonalika Garai, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Jharkhand

Conversation became my way of teaching

In the 24th Issue of *Pathshala*, I found Arvind Kumar Singh's article 'Classroom Conversations are Important for Learning' closely connected to my own classroom experiences. For me, conversation has always been a powerful tool in simplifying any content, whether it is abstract mathematical concepts, interesting stories and poems in Hindi, or learning a new language, like English. Conversation has helped me assess students' imagination and creative skills, and work on these through storytelling. Many times, stories have also helped me find ways to have conversations with children about violence and mischief.

Alisha Islam, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Khargone, Madhya Pradesh

It is crucial to discuss works like ‘Mera Naam Gulab Hai’ with students

While reading Dhruv Desai’s review of the book *Mera Naam Gulab Hai* in the 24th issue, one understands that the deep-rooted social structure of our country, which is built on discrimination, continues to surface everywhere today, albeit in altered forms. The reviewer also clarifies that the author does not offer any magical or ideal solution. Instead, through the situations of the protagonist Gulab and her father, he highlights that even today there are many people in our society who turn a blind eye to acts of discrimination, which violate the constitutional rights and are deplorable from a human perspective. I hope that a work like *Mera Naam Gulab Hai* will jolt people of our society into thinking in this direction, and that in the future we will move toward finding meaningful solutions.

Praveen Kumar Madhu, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Segaon, Khargone, Madhya Pradesh

Teach children with love, never with fear and violence

Kishan Lal Salvi’s article, ‘Fear Hinders Learning,’ in the 24th issue of *Pathshala* shows that when children are frightened, neither classroom work nor relationships yield good results. Reading the article refreshed memories of my early days with children. When I joined the school (as a teacher), the children here were quite fearful. They would sit completely silent, neither asking nor sharing anything. Gradually, I started conversing with them, sitting down with them and initiating games and activities. I started reading stories from children’s literature books. Gradually, their fear faded away. To be honest, what can be taught to children with love can never be taught through fear and punishment.

Antima Vaskale, Primary Teacher, Integrated Girls School, Gogawan, Khargone, Madhya Pradesh

Continuous learning from each other is a better model of learning for teachers

Anurag Behar’s article ‘Valuing Teachers Means Supporting their Growth’ in the 25th issue of *Pathshala* fully aligns with the working approach of our Srijan Group in Udham Singh Nagar. Group members read, share their teaching processes, participate in weekly discussions, learn from one another, offer constructive feedback, and volunteer for collaborative professional development. In the article, the author advocates the sharing of teaching processes in small groups of teachers and enhancing teaching competencies through continuous discussion and mutual support. This is possible because the Srijan Group teachers learn from their colleagues, provide academic support to one another, and engage in consistent reflection to strengthen their teaching skills. The author’s belief that in-service teacher training conducted by the Education Department is insufficient for teachers’ professional development and for them to become reflective teachers is absolutely correct. As a teacher, I know that teachers neither take it seriously nor teach using the prescribed methods. Therefore, a model based on continuous learning and teaching together after entering teaching services is far more meaningful.

Dharampal Gangwar, Head Teacher, Government Primary School Haldi Pachpeda, Khatima, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand

This article is a lifeline for teachers

In his article ‘Valuing Teachers Means Supporting Their Growth’, Anurag Behar says that teachers’ capabilities must be continuously strengthened. Just as an ember covered in ash is rekindled by blowing on it so that it may once again give off warmth, similarly, teacher training must be organised with great preparation and care so that teachers’ abilities can be refined, their capacities enhanced, and their knowledge and wisdom can benefit students. This article can truly work as a lifeline for teachers and can show a new direction to the world of education.

Rajendra Kumar Kumawat, Senior Teacher, Government Boys Higher Secondary School Amet, Rajsamand, Rajasthan

Supporting teachers’ development is the truest form of respect

I really liked one particular line from Anurag Behar’s article ‘Valuing Teachers Means Supporting their Growth’: *A teacher’s sense of pride...comes from... when a teacher sees a struggling student finally understand a concept.* Honestly speaking, such moments are the most comforting ones in a teacher’s life. When a child says, ‘Now I understand,’ it feels like all the hard work has borne fruit. When a teacher feels that children in their classroom are learning with interest, it is this moment that keeps them engaged in their profession. I found this to be deeply human and absolutely true. To build a sensitive, curious, and thoughtful society, we have to ensure that our teachers also get continuous opportunities to learn and grow. Only then will they feel satisfaction and dignity in their work.

Prakash Mineria, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Rajsamand, Rajasthan

Children gain the skill to express themselves with lucidity through stories

The processes suggested in S Kavitha's diary entry 'How I Used Storytelling to Foster Emotional Intelligence' help children develop not only practicality and imagination, but also the ability to understand others' emotions and express their own thoughts clearly. I also feel that stories are a great medium for children to learn because they promote language development, creativity, and moral values. Through stories, children learn new vocabulary, empathy, and how to differentiate between right and wrong; they also develop their imagination. Regarding the ideas expressed in the diary entry, I have one suggestion: if, along with storytelling, children are asked to express their thoughts in writing, their creative writing and language development could improve further.

Pooja Jain, Primary School Siddan Baba Tola, Patera, Madhya Pradesh

An article that solves the problem of converting word problems into mathematical operations

Sandhya Singh's diary entry, 'Mathematical conversation in the classroom,' in the 25th issue helps make mathematics more engaging. Most children face the problem of not being able to convert word problems into mathematical operations. This diary entry addresses exactly this issue. The teacher explains that to dispel children's fear, she gave them the freedom to speak without hesitation. She had different children solve the same problem so that they could learn multiple methods. The class then engaged in logical discussions about agreements and disagreements regarding the answers. This diary entry will prove helpful for all teachers who do not give adequate importance to conversations with children in the classroom.

Satyaprakash Pradhan, Teacher, Government Middle School Koliyari, Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh

Teach children to respect differences at school and at home

The article 'The Teaching of Maitri,' authored by Amman Madan, beautifully explains how the small prejudices we form about people around us have a deep impact on us. In the early years of childhood, the impressions we form about others, which can be based on food, habits, religion, gender, and caste, become deeply rooted in our minds. As a result, they reflect in our behaviour and become a part of our personality. Therefore, to prevent the formation of such prejudices, children must be taught to respect these differences both at school and at home.

Antara Gupta, Associate Resource Person, Kurud, Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh

I will find new ways to make my classroom print-rich

In her article 'My print-rich classroom,' author Seema Arora discusses the 'print-rich classroom' as a unique teaching method. The display of charts, new words, and stories in her classroom greatly helped students learn. They learned to read and write very quickly and experienced joy in the process of learning. So much so that they even began to take an interest in reading and writing on their own. This also matches my own classroom experience. The diary entry helped me understand how to build students' confidence and how to create a beautiful print-rich classroom. I will try to find some new ways to make my classroom print rich as well.

Shatabdi Sekia, Associate Resource Person Kurud, Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh

Pathshala has become a valuable resource

Gurbachan Singh's article 'The Journey of 25 Issues of Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar' highlights the magazine's seven-year journey. It explains how the magazine has undergone major transformations with respect to the content and form of its articles for the benefit of education, teachers, and learners, leading to its present enriched format. Pathshala has played an important role in making teaching interesting and effective, and in supporting teachers' professional development, thereby becoming a valuable resource in the field of education.

Devendra Singh, Assistant Teacher, Upper Primary School Sabdalpur, Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Sandeep Dubey Vetter: Simran Luthra

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अनुवाद सम्पदा

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