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pathshala

Bheetar aur Bahar

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

Editorial

There is no harm in looking at education as a process and an outcome, but when we look at achievement in education, it cannot be measured by marks or grades alone. It includes children learning according to their abilities and interests; learning in which social and human values are embedded, the methods used are the best, and the content being taught is of high quality. Teachers, parents and society also need to understand what it means to be successful in education. And this is determined by those objectives of education which are aligned with our constitutional values.

Intentionally or unintentionally, the sensitive and creative process of assessment is being overshadowed by a culture of examinations, results, fear, and competition, raising serious concerns. Typically, annual exams begin in March, so this is the right time to reflect on assessment since teachers, students, and parents all find themselves entangled in the labyrinth of exams and results.

The objective of assessment is to evaluate the extent of children's learning and understanding over the year in relation to their proficiency level and learning outcomes, as well as to identify any gaps that remain. Ideally, it should be a celebration of what has been learnt while addressing what remains. This is happening in many schools due to the voluntary efforts of teachers.

Driven by self-motivation and a sense of responsibility towards children, many teachers continuously engage in innovative practices. They make a mental note of the students' economic, social, and emotional states and update their progress daily. This understanding forms the basis for designing their teaching methods. In many states, the education departments are also acknowledging the teachers' zeal and commitment and have started supporting their efforts. These efforts and understanding need to be extended to the societal level so that learning is not constrained by the fear of rigid assessment, and the joy of learning and creativity continues unhampered.

This issue of *Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar* includes some of these important deliberations and approaches. As you are aware, *Pathshala* is focused on school education and publishes articles rooted in practical experience. It features teachers' firsthand accounts and effective teaching strategies. Apart from these, it also includes regular columns, such as '*Pages from Teachers' Diaries', 'In the Company of Books', 'Teachers Inspiring Hope', 'In the Spotlight'* and '*Let's do Some Activities',* which have been introduced in the last issue. Last but not least, there is the special column for your letters called '*We've got mail!*'.

Thank you for your warm reception of issue 22, 'Inclusive Education Special' and for appreciating its contents. We hope that the articles and columns in the magazine have been helpful in supporting and enhancing your classroom teaching, school processes and understanding of education. Your letters and feedback have been a great source of encouragement for us. We value your continued support in our effort to make

useful content accessible and enriching the magazine by sharing your experiences. We continue to rely on your invaluable support.

This 23rd issue has also been carefully curated, keeping in mind the needs of schools during March, April, and May. This issue offers articles that clarify the purpose of assessment and provide insights on integrating it into teaching practices. You will also find guidance on organising engaging summer camps that promote enjoyable learning. Additionally, you will find experiential articles focused on strategies and approaches to assist learners who have struggled to achieve expected learning outcomes in the annual exams.

Apart from this, the issue also includes articles on classroom-tested strategies in mathematics, Hindi, science and Early Childhood Education (ECE). In *In the Spotlight* section, you will read about the experiences of a teacher from Karnataka, Vishwanath Gundigere, whose innovative practices make learning easier for children. The column '*Pages from Teachers' Diaries,'* which has classroom-based experiences shared by teachers from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand, will be relevant and useful for you. '*In the Company of Books'* features titles, *It Takes a Village* and *Learning Through Art*. While *It Takes a Village* is a storybook, *Learning Through Art* offers activities that can be integrated into teaching. The *Let's do Some Activities* section presents activities intended to facilitate effective and enjoyable learning within the classroom. We are very grateful to you for the love that the column '*We've got mail!'* is receiving through your letters.

As you know, the new *Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar* is now also being translated and published in English and Kannada. We will now be able to reach non-Hindi-speaking readers, thereby expanding the canvas for sharing teachers' experiences.

As a magazine committed to preserving and sharing experienced educator insights, we request that you share articles based on your classroom experiences, along with your feedback and suggestions on this issue.

Keep reading and stay connected!

With best compliments,

Pratibha Katiyar
Chief Editor

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

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- Opinions expressed in the publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Azim Premji Foundation.
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- Names have been changed to protect children's identities.

Assessment as a Tool to Aid Learning

Kailash Chandra Kandpal

It is commonly understood that assessment does not obstruct the learning process but supports it by keeping a regular and continuous track of the learning progress made by students over time. In the current context, it is important to understand the entire assessment process along with the challenges faced by teachers in classrooms so that the implementation of assessment supports the teaching-learning process and leads to improvement in learning outcomes.

In the context of school education, assessment is an integral part of the curriculum. The objective of assessment is to understand how effectively classroom processes align with the intended learning outcomes and the impact of this. In reality, the purpose of assessment extends far beyond merely passing or failing students. It aims to evaluate whether the curriculum and pedagogical approaches have successfully achieved the intended learning goals or not. It involves identifying how many students reached those goals and how many fell short of reaching them and understanding the reasons behind their inability to achieve the desired outcomes. The goal is to analyse these reasons and modify the pedagogy accordingly. Understanding the creative and positive potential embedded in the assessment process is crucial.

Given that there is talk of retracting the 'no-detention policy' for classes V to VIII, assessment should not be looked at as a liberty to fail students. In fact, the objective of this change is that the students who are a little behind on the expected learning outcomes should get some more time and support to learn better before the beginning of the new session. There can be arguments for and against the no-detention policy; however, we must remember that every child can learn and that every child has the right to learn. Passing or failing, more or fewer marks – are a completely different matter.

> **We must remember that every child can learn and that every child has the right to learn.**

The ground reality of teachers is rife with challenges; without understanding these challenges, it is difficult to truly understand the issue. Teachers are faced with challenges like giving admission to students based on the criterion of age, teaching students from varied backgrounds and of varied abilities in the same classroom and working on competencies that could not be achieved in the previous classes while also working on competencies to be achieved in the current class. Teachers work with these challenges the whole year. Beyond the marks recorded in the report card after the annual examination, a teacher needs to have a clear understanding of each student's academic progress, which involves an understanding of continuous and comprehensive evaluation.

Somewhere between a teacher's understanding of assessment and their discernment of students' learning, lies the vision for education, which ensures meaningful learning, one that is free from the burden of competition or the fear of failure.

This is not an unexplored idea. Within the school education system, concepts such as *formative assessment* and *summative assessment* are well recognised, and there is an intention to implement them effectively. However,

Figure 1: Students write down what they know and have learned.

the real question is: Where does the true understanding and sensitivity toward assessment get lost? What steps can the school education system take to ensure that assessment, as a vital component of the curriculum, constructively serves the true objectives of education? How can learning be placed at the centre, rather than the fear of examinations or the race for marks? Equally important is understanding what learning gaps still exist and how they can be addressed.

To achieve this, we will have to understand the entire assessment process in the contemporary context and at the level of the classroom.

The objective of *formative assessment* is to comprehensively understand each student's competency in subject-related concepts and track their progress in achieving learning outcomes or the challenges faced in the same. However, this does not seem to be happening with formative assessments on the ground. As of now, one only sees the process of documenting the marks achieved in report cards at the end of the session. There is neither an analysis of the responses by students in the formative assessments, nor are the insights drawn from it incorporated into the teaching-learning process.

Now, let us discuss *summative assessments*. The concepts included in school education are not isolated or standalone; rather, they have an inherent continuity. On the one hand, these concepts are interlinked with other concepts taught in the same class, and on the other, they progress with increasing complexity across subsequent years in the school curriculum. Similarly, subjects are not confined within boundaries, there is an interrelationship among them. Given this, the assessment conducted at the end of the session in each class can serve as an effective tool for the teacher of the next grade to understand the learning level of the student. Teachers committed to providing quality education for their students must stay attentive to this.

There is a strong need to establish formative assessment in its true form. This can be implemented at two levels in schools – first, during the process of question paper creation, and second, through the analysis of students' responses after the assessment.

While designing a question paper for formative assessment, a teacher should be careful about which questions assess which skills and learning outcomes, and at what cognitive level. Similarly, while evaluating students' responses, it is essential to consciously analyse the progress in their competencies and learning outcomes, as well as identify the challenges they face

Figure 2: Students enjoy reading books of their choice.

in learning. A close analysis of students' responses will clarify the progress made on the different competencies or learning outcomes, along with the challenges faced in achieving them. If this is done, we will be able to provide the desired learning support to each student. Using the insights gained from such analysis in the teaching-learning process will create better learning opportunities for every student, providing quality school education that is inclusive and equitable.

The entire discourse on assessment so far establishes that assessment should be for learning rather than merely serving as a tool to measure what has been learned. The National Education Policy 2020 has recommended a reimagined format for the school-based assessment progress card, which is to be shared with parents. This progress card has been conceptualised as a 360-degree, multidimensional card, offering detailed analysis and insights into the cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor domains of each student's development. The objective of this format of assessment is to view education as holistic development, as stated in the definition of education. Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) is an effort in this direction. However, in today's context, our school education system appears to lack readiness for such an approach. Nevertheless, we need to take firm steps in this direction from now on, and this can begin from the current examination season itself.

As a first step, the process of assessment will have to be aligned with the classroom processes. The teacher will need to carry out assessments while understanding the cognitive levels of concepts, competencies, and learning outcomes related to their subjects. While planning for assessment, the teacher has to try and ensure that the student is able to apply, analyse, and think logically with regard to the relevant competency or concept. This will only be possible when teachers have a clear understanding and perspective regarding assessment. At the primary level, it is better if assessment is done both orally and in written form because it accurately assesses the progress in learning a concept or the problems faced in it.

It is crucial to establish a new perspective on assessment in school education. When assessment becomes a tool to aid learning, students will be freed from the fear of examinations, and the foundation for joyful education can be laid. There is a significant expectation from teachers to rethink the assessment practices being followed in their classrooms and strive to use assessment in its true essence. Only through a better assessment process can better learning and teaching be achieved.

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

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Context: Annual Examinations

Analysing Answer Sheets to Prepare for New Academic Session

Jagmohan Singh Kathait

By analysing students' answer sheets, teachers should be able to formulate and implement practical, effective and creative plans for their teaching and homework. Teachers who lack a comprehensive understanding of the academic levels and needs of students coming to new classes after passing exams cannot create effective teaching plans for new students.

In most states, the academic session ends in March, and the new session begins around April. During this time, students are free from regular classroom studies and are excited about going to a new class. Children are being introduced to new textbooks; they are looking at new pictures, and their new books are being covered and decorated. Teachers are also busy with the formalities of enrolling children in new classes. This is the time when neither students nor teachers feel the pressure of completing the curriculum.

Free from the pressure of the curriculum of the current class, this is a good opportunity for teachers to work with students on the expected competencies from the previous class. Education departments in various states also implement various plans during this period for this purpose. For example, in Uttarakhand, the education department runs *Mission Koshish*, from April to June. It aims at using innovative ways that go beyond the various everyday efforts to achieve the minimum competencies set for the new class. These competencies serve as a foundation for further learning.

Figure 1: Learning together in their new class.

Based on this context, the article suggests some action plans, highlighting what teachers can do during this time to prepare children for new classes and make the teaching process effective.

1. Analysis and use of answer sheets in teaching

Students' annual exam performance is often used merely to decide whether to promote them to the next class or retain them in the same class. Children who score more than the pass percent (33-40 percent) are enrolled in the next class. Beyond this, neither the annual examinations nor the answer sheets used by students in the annual examinations are utilised. However, if teachers gain a clear understanding of their students' proficiency levels in each subject, they can tailor the teaching-learning processes more effectively according to their students' capabilities.

The analysis of answer sheets could be conducted in the following ways:

a. Identify the questions that most students failed to answer. This gives the teacher an idea of the concepts most children do not understand. Special plans can be made for these concepts. Though one reason for skipping a question may be that children did not understand the underlying concept, another reason could be that they did not understand the language of the question, or there could be other reasons too. This will become clearer when discussing it with the children. A precise and effective plan can be made by understanding the reasons.

b. Next, analyse the questions that the children attempted but answered incorrectly. Simply knowing which questions were answered incorrectly will not provide sufficient understanding to develop a work plan. It is necessary to analyse further – what kind of mistakes were commonly made. This helps gauge where children's understanding is either wrong or incomplete. This analysis assists in understanding each child's academic level, where they are stuck and how they learn. This gives teachers opportunities to find experience-based ways to make individualised plans and modify their teaching methods.

Teachers should plan to teach subjects by using students' mistakes as examples, while ensuring that the names of the children are not disclosed. In this way, students' mistakes become an effective tool for understanding, serving as learning milestones rather than indicators of failure or falling behind. Additionally, teachers should analyse whether some children have answered those questions correctly, which most other students could not. This exercise could be useful in forming future action plans.

For example, in class V, a question was asked: 'Father gave you Rs 20. You bought a pencil for Rs 2, an eraser for Rs 1, a ruler for Rs 3, and gave Rs 2 to a beggar. How much money are you left with?' (See *Figure 2*) Analysing the students' answers, we get to understand that two students, Paridhi and Diksha, understood the concept and

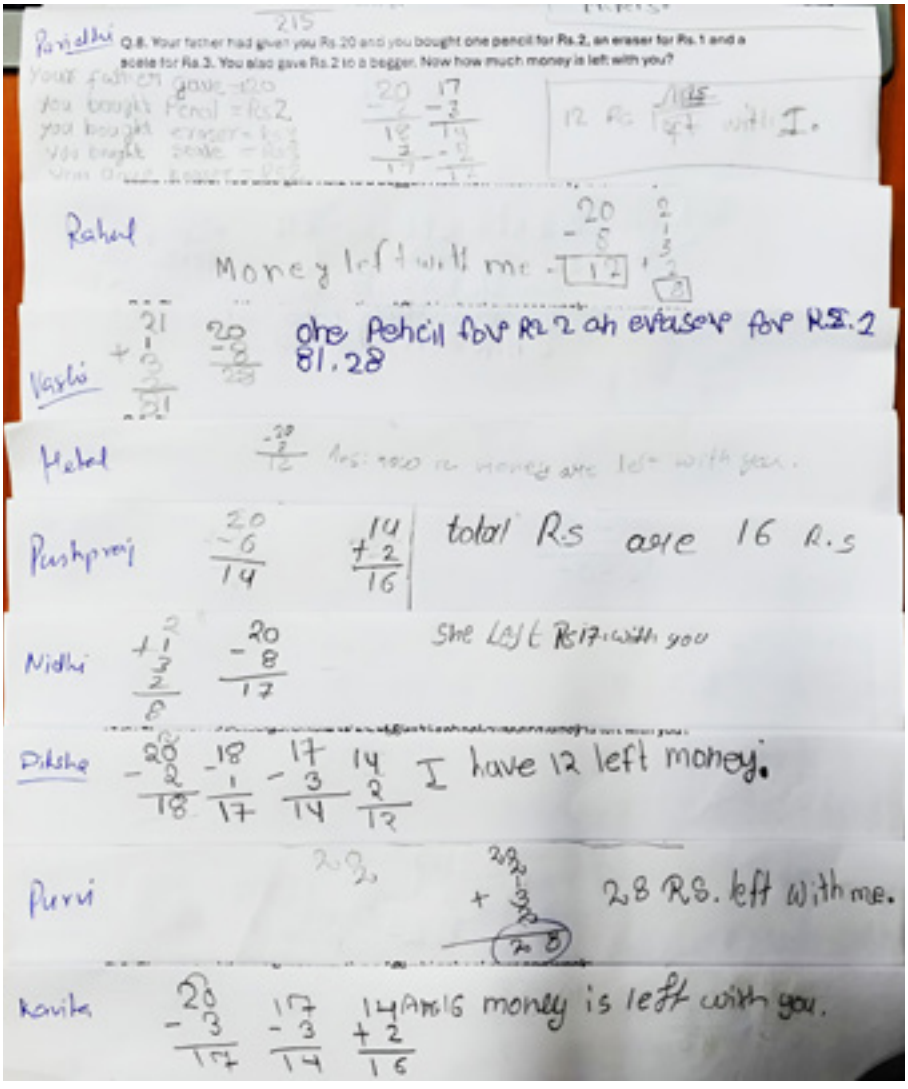

Figure 2: Solution to the math problem attempted by students.

Q: Write the fractional forms of the decimal numbers given below:

Ans:

Sl. No.	Decimal	Fractional form
a.	0.4	$\frac{10}{4}$
b.	0.8	$\frac{10}{8}$
c.	0.9	$\frac{10}{9}$

Figure 3: A sample of students' work.

Q : What is the sum of 3, 047 and 30,152?

Ans :

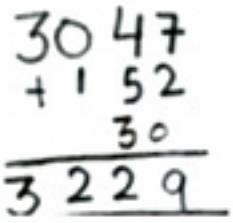

Figure 4: A sample of a student's understanding of a comma.

the process of solving the problem, as they subtracted the amounts step-by-step from the total money that they spent. However, the next step would be to learn how to subtract all the expenses at one go from the total amount.

They have yet to grasp the level of understanding that can be seen in Rahul's attempt. Vashi, on the other hand, did not understand the concept at all. The examples of Pushpraj and Kavita are interesting, as they consider the money spent on the items as an expense but seem confused about how to account for the money given to the beggar. They seem unsure about whether to include that amount as an expense. In the end, they add the amount to the total balance, possibly thinking that they received something in exchange. By speaking to the children, one better understands why they made these choices. This analysis helps determine what each child understood or did not, and what needs to be addressed. It also helps understand how children think and approach problems, guiding the teaching methods accordingly. Additionally, it shows that Paridhi and Disha are students who can assist in teaching others up to a certain level.

> **If teachers gain a clear understanding of their students' proficiency levels in each subject, they can tailor the teaching-learning processes more effectively according to their students' capabilities.**

Figure 3 shows that the student did not understand the concept of decimals and fractions, but they remembered the teacher's oft-repeated phrase used in class to convert decimals into fractions. This phrase involves writing the fraction above the line by removing the decimal point and putting one below it, followed by adding as many zeros after the one as there are digits after the decimal point. For instance, if there is one digit after the decimal, then ten is written; for two digits, it is 100; and for three digits, 1,000 and so on. However, it appears that by the end, the student forgot what to write above and what to write below. This indicates what and how to work with such students. Different methods need to be employed to address these types of concepts.

In *Figure 4*, it is evident that the student understands basic addition and carrying over but perhaps does not fully grasp how commas are used in numbers. However, this is not entirely certain, as the student has written the first number correctly. This suggests that the focus should not be on teaching the concept of addition but rather on discussing how to write numbers and use commas. This response provides insights to teachers. For instance, students often do not understand commas. It is important to consider what nuances need attention during teaching, what precautions should be taken while preparing question papers, and so on.

2. Analysis of students' copies by students

It is also essential for students to analyse their own annual exam answer sheets. First, they should review their own sheets, identifying which questions they have answered correctly and where they made mistakes. This process helps students to reflect on their reasoning and learning. After this, they can review each other's answer sheets in small groups, observing how others answered correctly and what mistakes were made. Students enjoy looking at each other's work and when they see questions they got wrong and others got right, learning becomes even more natural and straightforward. This whole process is highly enjoyable.

3. Students cooperation in teaching peers in need-based groups

This is a time to experiment with seating arrangements beyond the traditional classroom setup. Analysis of answer sheets can be very helpful here. Students should be seated in temporary groups based on the concepts they struggle

with. As needed, students from two or three classes can be grouped together to ensure that they do not feel singled out because they do not know certain things. The few students who may have answered the questions correctly can be given the responsibility of explaining the concept to their peers. Students' explanations are often particularly effective in helping other students learn. During this time, teachers should observe the different groups or the class as a whole. This approach creates valuable opportunities for learning and understanding the students better.

4. Special action plan for key concepts

By reviewing students' answer sheets, it becomes clear which concepts they did not understand at all, and which were misunderstood or only partially understood. Where are they making mistakes in concepts that were understood incompletely or incorrectly? It is important to focus on the specific parts or processes where students are making mistakes in understanding. These errors may stem from the use of words that they do not fully understand or words that carry different meanings for them. Plans should be developed for such concepts based on the errors observed. When students leave certain questions unanswered, it indicates that they do not know the related concepts. However, it is not always clear what exactly they did not understand or where they face difficulties.

To address this, a variety of activities, games, exercises and creative teaching plans based on teaching-learning materials (TLM) are required to clarify these concepts. For example, in one class, children struggled to grasp the concept of metre, centimetre and foot. The teacher used a tailor's measuring tape, had the students measure flowerbeds and different rooms, wrote the measurements in a table and discussed this in class. This helped the students to easily understand the differences between large and small units of measurement and the relationships between them.

5. Homework

Often, homework assigned to students has little relevance to their home environment. Usually, tasks that are not completed in class, need revision, or require practice are given as homework. This turns the home into an extension of school, and students often show a lack of interest in

Figure 5: Students looking for their favourite books in the Reading Corner.

such assignments. If homework is such that it connects classroom concepts to everyday life, then the schoolwork and homework complement each other.

Therefore, it is important to assign homework that helps students fully grasp concepts they did not understand or misunderstood. Homework should create opportunities for them to engage with these concepts in a concrete, hands-on way. For example, many students struggle with reading tables or charts and find them difficult to comprehend. If they are asked to conduct a survey – about family, people nearby or even animals in the village – and then record the information in a table, it helps their understanding greatly. When these tables are later discussed in class, the concepts become easier to grasp. Children enjoy such challenging and creative tasks, and it also boosts their self-confidence.

In conclusion, the post-annual exam period provides a valuable opportunity to move away from standard teaching methods and gain a deeper understanding of students' actual academic levels through their answer sheets. By creating effective teaching plans based on these insights, teachers can help students better grasp important concepts. In this way, examinations become a tool not just for promotion to the next class but for enhancing the overall learning process. These efforts can also help teachers strengthen their understanding of students and their own teaching processes.

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

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Teaching-Learning in Summer Camps and Vacations

Shobhan Singh Negi

Before coming to a higher class, it is important for students to be able to revisit some of the experiences of their previous year. These experiences help strengthen the foundations for the year to come. In summer camps and summer vacations, engaging and creative teaching-learning methods can be adopted in a joyful environment while understanding the challenges of the children's new classes.

Entering a new class is an important experience in students' lives. It is common knowledge that most children get promoted to the next class, even as the challenges of the previous year persist. It has often been observed that in government schools, new books for children are available only in July. Consequently, April-May and the summer vacation provide an opportunity for teachers to offer learning experiences that students may otherwise miss out on for various reasons. This essay describes two such experiences and observations.

Summer vacation: Teaching-learning experiences

Before the vacations start, during the initial months of the new academic session (April and May), time should be spent revising class lessons taught in the previous year. Teachers have a solid foundation to conduct revision classes since they have conducted the previous annual examinations and are aware of each student's academic level. Teachers can create study groups based on the learning levels of students and design teaching plans according to the academic levels of specific groups.

Figure 1: Students participating in a summer camp.

I have observed that discussing pictures and picture stories can be a good and comfortable starting point with children. This activity is efficient for the expression, imagination and spoken language abilities of children. Pictures and picture stories are an effective medium for developing written as well as oral language skills of students of up to class V. I have witnessed several teachers talking about picture stories to students and the latter imagining and creating stories based on pictures. Students have gone a step further and narrated new picture-based stories in primary classes.

This is an interesting and brilliant way to develop the oral language skills of students in the younger classes. Various organisations, such as *Ektara, Eklavya, Room to Read,* and the *National Book Trust*, are publishing picture books and some great children's literature. These are available in most of the schools of Uttarakhand. All of these organisations have also published many decent picture stories. Thus, on the whole, understanding the minds and linguistic backgrounds of students, instilling in them an interest in learning, and giving wings to their imagination are things that can be worked on during the vacations.

Another thing that I understood is that currently, students up to class VIII are also struggling to acquire even basic literacy and numeracy, which was aggravated during COVID-19 and has continued since. Hence, making efforts towards the development of basic language and maths skills in students is critical. We also know that libraries can be utilised better for most students to reach the learning levels expected of them in the previous academic year. Providing students with books suited to their level could be beneficial in this regard. Teaching-learning materials (TLMs) need to be chosen for students every day at a level appropriate for them, and discussions need to be held on all that they have read each day. Special attention should be paid towards understanding the relationship of students with the characters in the story and the relationships among the characters in the story. Such conversations help develop the students' interest in reading while also developing their reading habits.

> **In every school where teachers read stories together with students, an atmosphere and culture of reading and writing is organically built.**

It is important to note is that merely providing study materials to students is not sufficient. It is necessary that teachers themselves read children's literature. Mentioning one incident could perhaps be relevant in this context. A few years ago, the Barmer team of the Azim Premji Foundation arrived at the decision that extensive work should be undertaken on the topic of learning in some schools on the occasion of National Reading Day, 20 June, which is the death anniversary of Late P N Panicker, the Father of the Library Movement. Three members of the Foundation and four teachers were involved in one primary school with approximately 70 students. We chose books based on the ages and interests of the students. Students were put into small groups, and they read three to four stories for two hours on the first day.

Figure 2: A student's creation during a summer camp.

We observed that they liked stories about forests and animals the most. When asked what they would do if they were in the position of the crow or the tortoise (from the stories they had read), their answers were interesting and pointed to rather fundamental concerns. This question lifted the spirits not only of the students but also of the teachers. One noteworthy point here is that there was a teacher who usually visited different classes but showed absolutely no interest in their reading. Even we were unable to inspire any interest in him. However, it pleased us to see him around students and intently listening to their answers this time. A child even asked him, 'Sir, what would you do if you were the tortoise in the story?' He said, 'I have not read the story.' Here, we could see a change of expression on his face. He realised that when students see their teachers reading the story, it captures the interest of students. This was something I observed everywhere I saw students reading stories. In every school where teachers read stories together with students, an atmosphere and culture of reading and writing is organically built.

The method of repeating lessons or revision as adopted by teachers during April and May in schools was rather remarkable. The teachers asked every student about their favourite and most difficult chapter in their last year's Hindi textbook. All of the students were given ample time to think about the answer.

In one week, the teachers were engaging in classwork with students in the following manner:

First, every student would think of an easy chapter and a difficult chapter and tell the group about the same. Then, they would share the same information in writing. All the students were doing this one by one. This was the lesson plan for a few days. This plan was not limited to language; it was applied to maths and Environmental Studies (EVS) as well. The students were asked to narrate a good experience and a bad experience from the previous year as well. After some days, when I went to the school again, I saw that the teacher had put up these experiences of the students on a wall magazine. Although this was a simple activity, it was an effective means for the students to revisit all they had learnt in the previous year. In this activity:

- Every student 'repeated' the previous class in essence.
- The students explained why certain chapters were easy, whereas others were difficult.
- Each student was encouraged and received an opportunity to speak in a large group.
- Opportunities were provided to students for writing why certain chapters seemed easy and why some were difficult.
- The teacher learnt which concepts students found difficult and created a plan to work on them.
- The good and the bad experiences of students served as feedback for the school.

This was a brilliant method to bridge the gap between the new academic year and the previous one. This process simplified the challenges of the new academic year since the teachers worked with students on those areas and concepts that they had found difficult.

Summer camp: Teaching-learning experiences

The second experience is associated with summer classes in all the summer camps that I have seen in Rajasthan and Uttarakhand during the past 10 years. There was one thing they shared in common – the overflowing joy, passion and enthusiasm of students. They did not get bored; they seemed to learn everything sincerely. Even the teachers appeared to be stress-free. Their willingness

Figure 3: Children enjoying a play activity in a summer camp.

to do something new and creative with the students was clear. Guardians could also be seen participating enthusiastically in summer camps.

Here, positive reactions from government officials are a big source of encouragement to the teachers. It was remarkable to note that even the literate youth of the village could be seen sharing their talents and skills with the children in the summer camp. The atmosphere of summer camps appeared colourful and festive. It seemed as though students wanted to learn more and more. They were so delighted to learn that they did not even want to return to their homes. It is the teachers who had to remind them, 'Children, go home now!' On the final day of the summer camp, the students would not get tired of telling all that they had learned.

Witnessing all this, I wondered about the reason why these summer camps were so effective. I have found certain things that are common to all summer camps.

Both students as well as teachers seem to be enthusiastic and happy in summer camps, which is rarely the case during regular school days. The credit goes to how the summer camps are designed. Being rid of the stress of coursework, teachers are free to do as they please in the camps. The focus is not only on academics but also on life skills. Classes are based on interactive learning through practical activities. Even teachers can be found learning something along with children in summer camps. Teachers want to provide those experiences to students, which are not usually possible in the school or regular classrooms. This very desire of theirs fills them with joy. The encouragement received from guardians also makes them happy. This creates a flow of positive energy. Children are also free in summer camps. They have several options – from reading stories and learning how to paint to playing games.

Experiences from these camps assure us that such camps should certainly be held and more frequently. The foremost task in these camps is the familiarisation of teachers and students with each other, including the family background of students, their interests, and the reasons behind their good and not-so-good habits, to establish a friendly relationship between them. Generally, such opportunities are rare during the school session. Since the environment is informal in such camps, students find it easier to express themselves.

Figure 4: Students explain what they have made on the chart.

Second, there should be ample learning opportunities for students. There should be sports activities and enough material for arts and crafts, along with interesting books for students to read. Students should be given every opportunity for artistic expression. I have also observed that they are very attracted to theatre and puppetry. The fundamental thing about camps is that students should be free to learn.

Third, summer camps are a suitable opportunity for nurturing an interest in learning in students. When students have already entered their new academic year, it is time for them to be familiarised with their new textbooks. Post-COVID-19, most students in primary and secondary schools are still struggling with basic literacy and numeracy. Hence, in summer camps, opportunities should be provided to students for independent writing and expression based on interesting discussions around storybooks to develop their interest in learning. Efforts should be made to take them a step forward in terms of their natural pace and level. The main objective of our efforts should be to get students excited about learning and encourage them.

To conclude, the more we utilise the months of April and May for teaching students joyfully and creatively, the easier it will be for them to keep pace with the new class curriculum. This is the time for students to learn sincerely, without stress, and for teachers to develop their understanding of the aspects that need to be taken into consideration while making decisions about teaching processes and identifying techniques that prove to be effective.

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

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Impact of Summer Camps on Student Learning

Muneer

Children are always excited and eager to attend summer camps. We are talking here about the summer camps which are held in government schools just before the summer holidays. In light of the experiences of summer camps held in different states, this article attempts to present an understanding of their usefulness and provides insights on how to organise camps and assess children's learning through them.

Apart from the images that come to mind at the mention of summer camps, in the last few years, teachers in government schools have been making special efforts to hold summer camps. In many states, teachers have started organising summer camps for children just before their summer vacations, the results of which have been very positive. Teachers organised these summer camps as a voluntary effort, but when the education department saw its results, in many states, it also started supporting teachers in this effort. If the statistics are to be believed, the number of children participating in summer camps is constantly increasing.

Figure 1: A student giving his handprint the shape of his imagination.

In Chhattisgarh, over the past two years, at least 4,500 teachers across 9 districts served by the Azim Premji Foundation voluntarily organised 2,125 summer camps for 39,000 students from 2,484 schools.

> **A summer camp is designed for teachers to reflect on their practices and explore strategies that can better impact children's learning.**

To my mind, the reasons for this voluntary participation of teachers were, first, the idea was engaging and effective, and all stakeholders, including parents, could see tangible results in schools during the summer camp. Second, teachers were confident enough to introspect on their practices and had the autonomy to decide the content and pedagogy according to the level of their students, irrespective of their grade and age.

The beauty of these summer camps lay in the courage demonstrated by teachers to reflect on and adopt a set of practices that they felt were best suited to their needs and the needs of their students. There were three fundamental questions that we discussed with the teachers with whom we organised the summer camps.

1. Regardless of the grade, what is the current learning level of the children who have agreed to join the summer camps?
2. What content, teaching-learning materials (TLMs), and ideas from the summer camp module can be adapted to meet the pedagogical needs and learning levels of the children?
3. What aspects of the camp can be carried forward as an integral part of their teaching practices once schools reopen after the break?

Figure 2: Children show what they have created in the 'tear and paste' activity.

Advantages for teachers

A summer camp is designed for teachers to reflect on their practices and explore strategies that can better impact children's learning. Since the engagement is voluntary and focuses on learning rather than syllabus completion, there is more room for introspection and improvement.

Teachers gained a better understanding of assessment

The assessment of children and the adaptation of suggested activities differed from teacher to teacher, however, most agreed that improving learning levels requires assessing children's current abilities and evaluating teaching practices against the learning outcomes (LOs) of SCERT/NCERT and recommended pedagogy. While teachers still lack full clarity on LOs, recent training programmes have helped them become more familiar with the concept, and they are now making efforts to articulate it in their own words. In many camps, teachers created mind maps or execution plans based on this framework. This was made possible through full-day orientation sessions at Teacher Learning Centres (TLCs) and cluster and block resource centres with support from cluster, block, and district functionaries.

Table 1: Indicators and directions for assessment

Sl no.	What are children expected to learn?	Which activities can help achieve this?	What am I supposed to practise?

The table above serves as a self-assessment tool for teaching practices and reflects children's learning levels, encouraging teachers to start *where children are* rather than just completing the syllabus. I recall two teachers in a *WhatsApp* group praising a senior teacher for his first attempt at reciting a *Bal Geet* with actions and expressions during circle time at the camp. This demonstrated a significant shift in the teacher's approach, which impressed his colleagues.

Teachers incorporated better practices

Many teachers now incorporate poems, actions, and posters in their classrooms, progressing toward reading

and writing with these tools. In the Berla block of the Bemetara district alone, over 43 teachers use puppets to narrate at least one story per week.

Most teachers who led the summer camps returned to school with a better understanding of their students' needs, mastery of key foundational practices, and a range of engaging activities. Many took pride in offering camps for free (typically costing at least INR 5,000) — an opportunity often available only in private schools. This sense of pride and appreciation was also evident among parents and children.

Many teachers encouraged children to express their thoughts orally and in writing, compiling their work into classroom prints, handwritten magazines, and morning assembly content. Many teachers encouraged their students to write fearlessly without bothering about mistakes. They shared these writings with some magazines and newspapers and displayed some of these on wall magazines. More and more teachers began to use poems and *Bal Geet* to engage children to read and write. Teachers tracked improvements in their practices and students' outcomes.

Extending summer camps

We can continue the summer camps during the holidays

Figure 3: A group activity during a summer camp.

Figure 4: The fun of fitting different shapes to fill a frame.

with teachers who wish to teach their students grade-level competencies and some other higher-order skills. However, the real challenge lies elsewhere. Data suggests that attendance immediately after the annual examination and before school closure is significantly low. It ranges from 25-40 percent in many schools that I have visited. On the other hand, despite being on vacation, the children were excited to join the summer camp. One of the main reasons for the drop in attendance is the lack of planned activities in the classroom. Teachers often focus on grading exam papers, making the children feel that the school year is over. I would argue, however, that the content and pedagogy used in the classroom are key factors in motivating children to attend school. They eagerly look forward to an energetic, engaging, and meaningful learning environment.

All our experiences from summer camps suggest that assessment leads to improvements in teaching methods, and this ultimately affects learning. Moving forward, we should capitalise on the 15-25 days we have in our schools after the annual exams and before the summer break. To operationalise this idea, we must analyse children's responses in their annual exams, identify areas of difficulty and list the desired teaching practices to address gaps in competencies. If we manage to do this, we can implement a time-bound drive to achieve specific outcomes and practices. As teachers, let us ask ourselves two questions:

1. How can I best utilise the 15-20 days after the annual examination and before the school closes to teach children, and what is my concrete plan to do so?
2. What are the 'problem' competencies that I could map from the responses given by children in their

annual examination on which I could work during this time?

Using insights from annual exams

In my view, to achieve Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and grade level competencies at scale, and to improve our own practices, we can use the framework as shown in *Table 2* to assess the level of children towards the end of the year and have a time-bound action plan to work on.

Table 2:

Sl. no	Student	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
1	Amal	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
2	Anamika	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
3	Hafeefa	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
4	Joseph	Yes	No	No	No	No
5	Nikita	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

Let us take some examples from the ground to understand the struggle. This will help us develop appropriate methods, content, and activities to address the issue.

In the half-yearly examination, one of the questions in class V Hindi paper was to describe the *Dasara* festival in Mysore, which students had learned about in one of the chapters. This question is partly memory-based but also assesses students' ability to comprehend the text. They can only remember a text they have truly understood. If comprehension is a significant struggle for class V children, we have to plan specific activities to help them improve their reading and understanding skills.

Figure 5: A child learning to count using the one-to-one correspondence method.

Figure 6: Children read books from the Reading Corner.

A simple approach could be that while teachers focus on grading papers in their classrooms, children can read any text of their choice from textbooks or books from their *Reading Corner*.

This could begin with modelling, where the teacher reads a book, retells the story in her own words, and even writes it down. The teacher can create 3-5 objective-type questions from the content, tailored to students at or near grade level.

Many teachers lack interest in fostering a reading habit because they have either lost it themselves or never developed it during their own school years. Teachers could set up a reading challenge for themselves where they read one book from the *Reading Corner* each day, aiming for 20 books in 20 days. This would impact children's perception of both the teacher and the *Reading Corner* positively.

The approach may differ slightly for early grades (I-III), where we can set a goal for 90 percent of the children to read and write simple sentences within 15 days.

A simple approach could be that while teachers focus on grading papers in their classrooms, children can read any text of their choice from textbooks or books from their *Reading Corner.*

They could begin by reading and writing from over 100 flashcards provided by the state in FLN kits, focusing on thematic cards with pictures and text. Once students are comfortable with the words, we can apply the words to form simple sentence structures, such as, *This is a mango*, and substitute the names of other fruits in the sentence.

This approach promotes both reading and writing when teachers guide this process. Similarly, in mathematics, we can focus on expanding numbers from 2 to 4 digits based on grade level, followed by an understanding of place value, basic operations, and word problems. Each child should complete at least 25 'word problems' per operation, totalling 100 problems. Imagine a booklet containing 1,500 'word problems' created by 15 children of class V within 15 to 20 days. Another project could involve measurement and data handling.

Everything must be driven by insights from the annual examination, and our commitment should be inward-looking, focused on improving our practices to bridge the gaps we identify rather than labelling children for what they have not yet achieved.

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

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Student Morale and Learning I A Teacher's Perspective

Rajoo Patel

In school, we occasionally see children who are quiet and solitary, different from the rest. As teachers, when we come across such students, the question that comes to our minds is whether they have been like this since their childhood. If not, what could be the possible reasons for such a change in their personality? This is an account of one such student.

It was with a very pleasant feeling that I entered the school for the first time as a teacher. The atmosphere of the school was encouraging. It had about 200 children, 7 teachers, and several B Ed interns at the time. On the first day itself, teachers informed me that about 30 children from classes V to VIII could neither read nor write in Hindi. This also impacted their comprehension of other subjects. Learning this, I decided to work with the children at two levels. First, during class hours, where classroom discussions would be based on the subjects being taught, and second, during the free periods, where additional language support and practice would be provided to the students who needed it.

> **I found that while teaching, all teachers focused their attention only on those students who could immediately answer questions or knew how to read and write. Prachi seemed invisible to the teachers.**

Getting to know the children

It was my first day in class V; I introduced myself and then asked the children to introduce themselves. All the children did so with great ease, but one girl, whose name I later came to know as Prachi, seemed hesitant as she stood up to introduce herself. Thin, frail, and quiet, Prachi's body language was subdued – very different from the other children in the class. I also noticed that when she stood up to introduce herself, all the children started laughing. Prachi stood there; her eyes downcast. I waited for her to speak, then, once again, asked her to introduce herself, but she remained silent. This first class on my very first day at school compelled me to ponder over what could be done with children who are shy or introverted. It also urged me to want to explore new and creative approaches with children like Prachi.

Figure 1: The joy of reading and each other's company.

The next day, I began teaching a lesson on environmental science (EVS). While teaching the lesson, I tried to gauge the learning level of each child in the class. I asked them questions based on the lesson to check their comprehension of what I had explained so far. Almost all the children participated in the discussion, except Prachi, who remained silent. Consequently, I could not assess whether Prachi could read and write.

The next day, I held a separate class for children with special needs. Prachi was a part of this class. I felt that perhaps it was because Prachi could not read or write

that the other children laughed at her. But it also struck me that this tendency of children to laugh at someone could not have developed just like that; there must be some specific reason behind it. To investigate this further, I tried to closely follow the behaviour and actions of Prachi as well as the other children. I noticed that during lunchtime, only after all the children had gone out, would Prachi leave the classroom. Alone. Even after several days, it was not clear to me whether it was the other children who had alienated Prachi or if it was Prachi who had chosen to be alone.

Prachi, I, and the other teachers

Was Prachi herself responsible for this image of hers created in the school, or was it the other children, the teachers; or was there a collective role of everyone in this? These were my thoughts and questions as I tried to understand the perspective of the other children and teachers towards Prachi. In our conversations, all the teachers shared that Prachi neither knew how to read or write nor did she understand anything, which is why she was unable to respond to questions when asked. With the permission of the teachers, I observed their classrooms and attempted to understand their pedagogic processes.

I found that while teaching, all teachers focused their attention only on those students who could immediately answer questions or knew how to read and write. Prachi seemed invisible to the teachers.

I also realised that whenever teachers asked questions in class, both the responses or lack of responses by Prachi and other students like her became a source of laughter or anger for the teachers because these students fell short of their expectations. When these children did not respond, the teachers would also make some harsh remarks that would give everyone another chance to laugh. The teachers and children had become accustomed to such behaviour and did not find anything wrong with it.

This behaviour of the teachers was probably the reason that had gradually pushed Prachi towards silence and withdrawal. While the teachers were not deliberately being harsh on her, indirectly their disapproval was being communicated to the child. When teachers do not pay careful attention to subtle things, such problems can arise, and it is quite possible that we may not even realise the existence of such issues in the process. Over time, we become so habituated to such situations and processes that we do not see any problems with them.

Some initiatives that I took

After understanding the entire scenario, I started trying to give Prachi individual time and regularly talked with her. It took me a long time to gain her trust. During lunchtime, while all the children played ball outside, Prachi would play alone with a ball inside the classroom. I started playing with her. When I would ask her for the ball, she would give it to me and sit down. I would deliberately not throw the ball at her; instead, I would throw it in a different direction and ask her to bring the ball to me so that she would talk to me. For one or two days, she quietly brought the ball and gave it to me, but after that, she started saying, 'But Sir, you are not throwing the ball properly!' Hearing this made me very happy that at least she had begun to speak. Gradually, she started talking with me. As time passed, she began to feel more comfortable around me. She would listen to my questions and try to answer them. I would try and connect the questions from the books with her real-life experiences and context to help her feel comfortable and be able to respond. However, when asked something in front of the other children, she would become silent. Perhaps she still did not believe that she could answer correctly. She was not as afraid of her answer being wrong as she was of the children laughing at her.

> **In my view, all children need equal attention, and my primary aim was to foster in them the ability to learn and understand.**

My interactions with her continued. Gradually, she started trying to put forward her points of view even when other children laughed. I also talked to the other children about their behaviour with her. Over time, the other children started listening to Prachi and became more accepting of her. Prachi still could not read or write properly, but she could answer questions orally. Sometimes, she was also able to answer questions that the so-called intelligent children of the class were unable to. She became so eager to participate in the classroom that at times, I had to ask her to let the other children answer! Her sad face started blooming, and she began to look up more.

Challenges

There was also a negative aspect to this entire effort. When I started giving special support to Prachi and the other students like her, the behaviour of the rest

Figure 2: Students learning together.

Figure 3: A teacher uses manipulatives to help students grasp maths problems.

of the class towards me and these children changed. They complained that I prioritised Prachi. Some children stopped talking to me or answering my questions. Although this situation did not last long, it was a major concern for me for as long as it did. Perhaps one reason was that my attention, like that of the other teachers, was no longer only on the well-performing children but on the needs of the rest of the class, which might have made these children feel less 'seen'. In my view, all children need equal attention, and my primary aim was to foster in them the ability to learn and understand. It was a long effort and continued for as long as I was in the school.

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

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Learning Through Role Play in Class

Asha Singh

Classrooms frequently require dynamic approaches to tailor strategies that enhance students' understanding of concepts. Teachers often find ways to resolve children's cognitive confusion. I am sharing how role play, when used by teachers as a strategy, helps simplify complex concepts for students.

In a classroom, children were grappling with the concept of how the movement of the Earth leads to the phenomenon of day and night. The dual movements of rotation and revolution made it a difficult concept for children to understand. So, the teacher said, 'Let's play a game.' She gave the roles of sun, moon and earth to three children. The Sun, being static, stood in one place. The child who was the Earth, spun around while also circling the child who was the Sun. An animated child quickly pointed out, 'When he is turning around in one place, it is causing day and night, and when he completes a circle around the Sun, it is one full year.' They all clapped with joy at the ease with which they could figure it out themselves. The teacher also felt the joy of the children's sense of victory in understanding a concept.

Such experiences help motivate children to share their difficulties with a sense of emotional safety. The feeling of being part of a team that supports collective exploring to arrive at answers is quite satisfying. Emotional gratification generates renewed energy to learn and seek answers to complex ideas.

Benefits of role-play in lessons

Some micro studies in India have shown encouraging results of arts-based interventions. One study with children

Figure 1: Students discuss their parts in a role play.

Decision-making within a group leads to impactful learning and boosts the self-confidence of all children. This process, being highly collaborative, develops spontaneous thinking, problem-solving, poise and presence, concentration, and both conceptual and analytical thinking skills.

with disabilities reported positive results from using music and movement to enhance awareness of body parts, understanding of directions and social norms for physical distance in routine interactions. Some studies used drama to understand how children try to make meaning of family life and relationships. Children's happiness in being able to do small tasks without fear of having to answer text-based lessons provides confidence, which impacts their will to learn and engage in classroom activities.

Role play has also been used to introduce notions of space among children with visual impairment. For children who lack social skills, role-play exercises help them to reflect on social behaviours in different situations. They are given situations to create a tableau and jointly discuss the aptness of the scene. For example, in class IV, one child was shown pulling the hands of a busy shopkeeper to buy a loaf of bread. All the children laughed at this comic depiction of a child demanding attention in a public place using a socially unconventional way. All children felt compelled to give their opinion and unanimously concluded that 'We don't use actions of proximity with people we don't know.'

Decision-making within a group leads to impactful learning and boosts the self-confidence of all children. This process, being highly collaborative, develops spontaneous thinking, problem-solving, poise and presence, concentration, and both conceptual and analytical thinking skills. Creating a play with students

encourages and demands concept-building, cooperation and commitment – all necessary life skills.

> **Paper and pencil jobs are daunting for students who struggle with language and writing. However, once a story has taken shape, children, on their own, want to document it before acting it out. The will to transfer ideas on paper emerges organically, fostering literacy development.**

Improvisations enliven children's minds

A class-generated story can be improvised on any part of a textbook lesson or even a topic that interests children. As they write, students develop their characters and think about the setting, plot, and resolution. The process of conversationally creating a story seems easier, more enjoyable, and more engaging for students than being told to write a story on paper and to make sure all the elements of a story are included. Paper and pencil jobs are daunting for students who struggle with language and writing. However, once a story has taken shape, children, on their own, want to document it before acting it out. The will to transfer ideas on paper emerges organically, fostering literacy development.

When presented with a situation, children assimilate its meaning, relate it to their experiences and accommodate it within their scheme of lived reality. However, being part of a team, they cooperate for joint action, an outcome of shared realities, reflection, analyses, and judgement.

The process of improvisation is the heart and soul that enlivens children's minds as it requires thorough thinking and makes them feel challenged. Such exercises are useful to understand the focus of lessons, identify the theme, and develop expressive language.

In this group effort, the quality of their presentation depends on the extent of collaboration. Striving for the participation of all children would need exploration of a wide range of contexts and topics that appeal to diverse sets of children and are grounded in different realities.

Case study

I am using one case study to demonstrate that the use of art activities in regular classrooms is not disruptive or time-consuming. A Delhi-based master's student in Child Development attempted to use enactment mode to transact a lesson from the Hindi syllabus of class III. The results indicated a qualitative difference in children's retention of text with slightly higher scores for children who had participated in dramatic exercises rather than just the traditional chalk-and-talk method of teaching-learning.

Methods and processes

Day 1

It is best to start with something playful and engaging. At the beginning of a new session, the teacher started with a name game to get acquainted with the children. This also helps build rapport and free children of their inhibitions.

Children stood in a circle and called out their names with any one emotion. For example, Pavna put her hands up and jumped and said in a fierce voice, 'PAVNA!' The teacher stepped back and said, 'Oh my God, PAVNA!'

Table 1. Some themes for spontaneous improvisations (suggestive only)

Themes	Examples
Academic	Classroom interactions, language diversity, parent-teacher relationship
Situation-based	Depiction of scenes from a railway station, a *bazaar*, a *mela* etc.
Relationship-based	A couple with an infant, a family with school-going children, a family with teenage children.
Character-based	Special teacher, magician, ghost, beggar, etc.
Stories	In a group of 6-7, children share stories and select one to enact; they take up the roles of the characters drawing information for the content. This provides them with an opportunity to connect with social, cultural and mythical figures.
Personal experiences	Children discuss their most significant memory in the group and select one for improvisation. Sharing personal anecdotes familiarises the group with each other's social-emotional contexts.
Using props	Children can be given some props, like a stick, a bottle, a bag and a book. Using these, they are asked to enact a story. This invites children to relate their imagination to their social and physical world.

All children will not be spontaneous. On-the-spot observations, quick thinking, and instant feedback will add to the classroom energy. Next, the teacher asked the students to think about how they travel to the homes of their relatives and show it through action and movement. The class sprang into action. Some rode two-wheelers, some pretended to drive a car or sat in auto-rickshaws. Excited students collided with each other creating a commotion. Devise a way to bring order in this chaos by dribbling a ball or asking for a hands-up action with a chant, such as '*taare taare*'. This has been tried and works as a magical tool for classroom discipline.

To conclude the first session, the teacher asked the children to open the textbook to the relevant page; the teacher assigned portions of the lesson according to rows (or two rows, depending on how you divide the lesson). The chapter was on traffic, places of significance, and new developments in the city. Children were divided into groups based on the following topics and told to read the relevant parts and retell them as a story through drawings, role play, or movements.

A: Traffic

B: Historical and important tourist spots

C: Developments in the city

Day 2

Children were made to sit in their groups and plan their enactment to convey their understanding of the allotted part of the chapter. The teacher moved around and discussed how to tell the content as a story and made each group draw or write out the dialogues. Soon enough, the three teams realised that the entire class needed to collaborate to connect the different sections of the chapter. If the space for the drawings was not enough, they were guided to use the technique of narration with improvisations, for example, of the zoo or the marketplace.

Some children created dialogues; they did not have to stick to the text but could follow what they understood. Some groups worked on set design and on how to improvise elements, such as a flyover or traffic lights, etc. Many talents were put to use making the children happy.

Group A (traffic) talked about Delhi and the infrastructure as the chapter was '*Dilli ki sair'* (tour of Delhi). The number of cars and buses and how the city was building 'roads in the sky' (flyovers). Slowly, different perspectives about the changes in the city were shared. The flyovers were most fascinating, and soon children were on their fours and pretended to become flyovers. Pencil boxes were used as cars, and children realised how the presence

Figure 2: Learning and having fun during role play.

Figure 3: Students learn happily from each other.

Figure 4: Students learn and practice their dialogues.

of traffic lights eased the flow. *Group B* was busy identifying the tourist places and historical monuments. They shared excitedly how some had visited many of the spots listed in the chapter. Some even mentioned going over a new flyover. *Group C* pointed out how the construction and building of roads were causing traffic delays. Their discussion briefly touched upon the fact that short-term difficulties may eventually lead to better convivences for all.

Day 3

The children looked forward to the performance and were ready with the props to come to the front to act according to the sequence. Even as they acted, they recalled sentences from the text and corrected each other on facts. In this way, the revision of the text happened without the pressure to memorise.

The actual enactment was not longer than 15 minutes, but the excitement, debate and discussion enthralled and kept the excitement and interest in the text. As they ended, the teacher told them that there would be a small quiz (avoiding the use of the word 'test'). The objective was to assess and to know how much retention had occurred.

Outcome and conclusions

Two weeks later, the children were tested for comprehension of the content. Their answers showed a certain quality in remembering specific information such as, 'The temple was in the shape of a lotus' rather than just a generic 'flower' (in place or 'lotus'). The latter happens when children largely only hear. It is when children participate and act that they remember specific aspects of the text.

Some laughter or active engagement infuses interest in classrooms. It gives children an energised focus and willingness to dig deeper into facts and a will to learn and work in teams. Children develop social competence and a creative way to look at their surroundings. They also imbibe a sense of positivity.

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Nurturing Children's Curiosity in Science

Amrita Masih

Curiosity is the spark that ignites a child's desire to explore, learn, and understand the world around them. In the realm of science, nurturing this curiosity from a young age can pave the way for a lifelong love of learning and critical thinking. As parents, educators, and mentors, it is our responsibility to cultivate and support a child's natural inclination to question, discover, and experiment.

Understanding curiosity in science

Curiosity is a fundamental human trait that drives exploration and inquiry. In the context of science, curiosity fuels the desire to understand the underlying principles of the natural world. Children exhibit a unique form of curiosity - a natural wonder and eagerness to ask 'why' and 'how' about the phenomena they encounter. Nurturing this curiosity can help them develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and a deeper understanding of scientific concepts.

In a dynamic and engaging science classroom, it is easy to gauge children's interest in science through hands-on activities rather than relying solely on theoretical explanations.

Application-based instructions also encourage students to apply at home what they have learned in school. This article explores the importance of nurturing children's curiosity in science and provides practical strategies to encourage their scientific exploration.

Creating an enabling environment

Provide access to resources: Surround children with age-appropriate books, videos, documentaries, and interactive tools that introduce them to various scientific topics and not only broaden their knowledge but also encourage questions and discussions.

To implement this, we introduced a library class once a week in the science period to create interest in books other than textbooks. Before the class, we, along with the children, planned the activities for language development as well as content knowledge.

The first activity was individual reading of science books and sharing the review of the portion they had read, either in their own words or by reading a portion from the book. In our second activity, the teacher formed groups and provided one book to each group for reading. The children read it in groups and shared their learning and experiences related to the books with each other, which provided a platform for peer learning and making presentations in groups.

Figures 1, 2, 3: Students read, observe temperature and the expansion of liquids, respectively.

Support hands-on exploration: Engage children in hands-on experiments and activities that allow them to observe, hypothesise, and test their ideas. Simple experiments using household items can ignite their curiosity and make science tangible. For example, in class VII, we asked children to bring different types of flowers from their surroundings and make indicators to test the substances to be acidic or basic. The children were very excited to see the colours of different flower strips change. This piqued their interest in this phenomenon.

Similarly, in class VI, while studying the properties of matter, we gave students materials from their surroundings, like paper, salt, polythene, magnets, iron nails, chalk dust, sugar, oil, milk, copper wire, battery, bulb, incense stick, water etc to test the property of solubility, transparency, magnetism, conductivity, and diffusion. By doing simple experiments, they understood these concepts more clearly.

Encourage questions: Foster an environment where questions are celebrated. Take the time to answer their questions, and if you do not know the answer, explore together to find out. This demonstrates to them that curiosity is a lifelong pursuit. This also forms a classroom culture that allows students to speak freely since there is an inclusive atmosphere. All questions and answers are treated with respect, and children feel a sense of belonging that allows them to participate actively.

The teacher also employs different types of questions, which cater to different levels of students, ensuring that everyone feels included and there are also some challenging questions. When children ask questions, the teacher also asks them some probing questions to encourage them to think critically and arrive at the answers themselves and to develop their problem-solving skills. The willingness to ask questions/doubts in students is enhanced, as they clarify their understanding and curiosities with their peers and the teacher.

> **Take the time to answer students' questions, and if you do not know the answer, explore together to find out. This demonstrates to them that curiosity is a lifelong pursuit. This also forms a classroom culture that allows students to speak freely.**

Inculcate argumentation: Practising science requires one to be able to reason out arguments and put those to test. When this idea of reasoning and testing is brought into the classroom, students get a flavour of science as a field that requires creativity and inquiry.

Figure 4: A student observing onion cells through a microscope.

When entering upper primary, students come with several questions and conceptions about the world around them. However, their reasoning may be inhibited by their level of knowledge - it is not fair to expect class VI students to know that the Sun gives off energy by nuclear fusion; argumentation must be level-appropriate.

In class VI, some students had the conception that the Sun was a biotic component of the ecosystem. Since to understand the term biotic and abiotic, students should have learnt the characteristics of living organisms (movement, respiration, sensitivity, growth, reproduction, excretion, and nutrition), which they had, it was possible to use these terms to reason out whether the Sun is living or non-living. In doing so, many other conceptions and beliefs that the students held about the Sun were also revisited. For example, students thought that the Sun could reproduce because in their cultural/religious beliefs, *Surya* (the sun god) has children. Hence, it also became important for the teacher to define reproduction in a specific (scientific) manner. 'Does the Sun produce offspring like itself?' The students said no, as they understood that the Sun does not produce other suns.

This also avoids the pitting of their cultural beliefs against science.

Embracing mistakes and failure

In the pursuit of scientific understanding, mistakes and failures are valuable learning opportunities. Encourage children to view setbacks as a chance to refine their hypotheses and approach problems from different angles. By fostering a growth mindset, children learn that science is not always about being right but about the process of discovery.

For example, in a science classroom, when activities and experiments were demonstrated, the entire process was shown, which allowed the students to pick up on some nuances that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. For example, when we were trying to see electricity conductance in distilled water compared to tap water, there was some conductance seen in the case of distilled water, which is not supposed to be the case. However, the teacher performed the experiment again using multiple methods, which demonstrated to the students the importance of resilience and determination.

> **Acknowledge and celebrate a child's curiosity-driven achievements. Whether it is a successful experiment, a new question, or a concept they have grasped, positive reinforcement reinforces their interest in science.**

It is also very important to ensure that we, as teachers, do the experiment at least once before class so that we know whether the experiment will be successful, and we do not waste time during class to figure things out. However, even after this, some discrepancies may be observed, and the teacher, instead of overseeing these, must repeat the procedure with greater diligence so that the students also understand that the result may take time, and they may need to repeat the process more than once.

Connecting science to everyday life

Real-world relevance: Help children see the practical application of scientific concepts in their daily lives. Whether it is explaining the physics behind a bicycle or the biology of cooking, connecting science to their world makes it more engaging and relatable.

Figure 5: Students engaged in science experiments.

For example, in class VII, the lesson 'Acids, Bases and Salts' was being taught. For most of the discussions on the topic, real-life applications were shared with the students. Doing this regularly helps them to start thinking in that direction. When neutralisation was being discussed, one student gave us the example of when a bee stings (they have already learnt that it contains formic acid), they usually apply some *Nirma* powder (a detergent and basic substance) on the bee stung area. She linked something she saw often at home to what she was learning. This a very important skill to develop in students.

Outdoor exploration: Nature is a treasure trove of scientific wonders. Spend time outdoors observing plants, animals, weather patterns, and natural phenomena. Encourage students to ask questions about what they see and experience.

While taking class VI for a nature walk, we planned to observe the different patterns in leaves and flowers. This helped them correlate their understanding of the

connection between leaves and roots. By observing the flowers, students were able to relate their classroom understanding of dividing the flowers into male and female. This helped them build on their understanding.

Role models and mentors

Introduce children to scientists, inventors, and explorers who have shaped our understanding of the world. Reading about the lives and achievements of role models can inspire children and show them that their curiosity can lead to meaningful contributions.

Students should always be shown such examples so that they also feel motivated to try above and beyond what they think their capabilities hold. When Chandrayan was launched, students in the school were given a small talk on the whole process and why it is so important. The whole live launch was watched together, and they could see all the Indian scientists gathered, celebrating their achievements.

For the class VIII library period, we watched videos on Graham Bell and Thomas Alva Edison and the journey of their lives. This helped them to know how through different processes, inventions took place. It also shows them how common problems around them have simple solutions. This has helped them to think of different ideas for the 'Inspire Award' competition.

Celebrating curiosity

Acknowledge and celebrate a child's curiosity-driven achievements. Whether it is a successful experiment, a new question, or a concept they have grasped, positive reinforcement sustains their interest in science.

A good question by a student or an attempt at trying something new should always be appreciated by the teacher. This motivates students, makes them feel seen and builds their courage to think differently. For example, when the conductance of electricity through water was shown in class, a student, by himself, tried to experiment the same with the materials around him. Even though the experiment failed the first time, the teacher's constant encouragement motivated him to try again, and he was able to replicate the experiment with available resources.

While learning about cells and tissues, students were shown onion cells. They were shown how the slides were set up. A group of students found a discarded slide with an onion peel on it and immediately tried to recreate the experiment the way that the teacher had shown it to them. They were curious as to why it was not working, and this led to many new questions.

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A Multisensory Approach to Maths

Sonia Kundu

This article highlights the importance of exploration during free play and demonstrates how storytelling and interactive games can be effectively integrated into teaching foundational mathematical concepts. Through hands-on experiences like building with wooden blocks and bundling sticks, children develop essential skills such as number sense, place value, and problem-solving, all while having fun.

One day, I saw two children from my UKG class playing and building a castle using wooden blocks. They were quite precise in the symmetry of the walls to make that castle stand. Their talk during that play was no less than that of skilled persons.

Child 1: '*Chal ab darwaza banate hain.*' (Let's make the door now.)

Child 1 put three blocks vertically on both sides in a ratio of 2:1. On seeing this, the other child observed:

Child 2: '*Ye toh achcha nahi lag raha, ek aur block laga issme*.' (This is not looking great, add one more block to it.)

So, they added one more block to make it equal. Later, they decided to make a roof over that and added one more block horizontally on top of those vertical blocks.

This play gave me an insight into my students' play with number bonds and drew my attention to using wooden blocks in mathematics. The most important factor at this age, when children are free to do a lot of things on their own, is children's engagement with the material that they see around them and its application in their play.

At the Foundational Stage, playing with mathematical concepts is more important than 'studying' them. All subject matter should be based on the play-way method, otherwise, children become victims of boring education and are never able to free themselves from it.

There are 20 students in the age group of 5 to 6 years in my class. Free play provides me with the opportunity to integrate their experiences because it allows them to independently choose their activities, playmates, objects, and methods of play. Essentially, it enables children to select, create, and organise games based on their preferences and interests. As a result, they can pursue their ideas without specific goals, outcomes, or time constraints.

Figure 1: Students make bundles and count numbers up to 20.

I often find that when children are given free play time, they count objects, separate them based on some criteria, form groups, create patterns from objects, etc. Similarly, with the help of different objects, they become familiar with different counting methods while playing. So, I used the following game with the children to help them visualise

numbers beyond 10, build their understanding of place value, and do activities like counting in groups.

Integrating stories and concrete manipulatives

Material used: Wooden blocks, video (story on bundle counting), and rubber bands

Objectives:

- Understanding place value
- Comparing numbers
- Representing numbers in concrete and abstract forms

I planned activities in several stages so that children could engage with various experiences as they progressed with an objective of the development of number sense and the concept of place value in the 10-base system. It is essential to implement various methods to facilitate the understanding of numbers beyond 10, as this foundational knowledge is crucial for grasping algorithms and future mathematical concepts.

The example given in the beginning depicts my students' free play talk about maths, so it gave me the idea to use the same resource in learning to count beyond 10. I decided to add some rubber bands along with the wooden blocks in their play section. As per my expectation, the children started playing and having fun; they played different types of games and made buildings, roads, bridges, etc. using wooden blocks. Some children also made bundles with the help of rubber bands. No instructions were given. Gradually, after this free play, we got back to our daily routine, and I asked them to bring whatever they had made with those wooden blocks. Children are always excited to show their work; I used this enthusiasm to draw their attention to the planned topic of the day.

> **I often find that when children are given free play time, they count objects, separate them based on some criteria, form groups, create patterns from objects, etc.**

Next was storytelling. I narrated to them a story called *The Magical Rope*[1] Briefly, it is the story of a boy called Bhola, who knew how to count but forgot the number of counted items; he also did not know how to write them down. By the end of the story, he finds an easy way to count by making bundles of 10, which makes his work easier.

Figure 2: Students visualise numbers, which helps develop their ability to subitise.

During the story, there was a discussion with the children in which some of the questions were:

Q: *What should Bhola do if he forgets?*

Children: He can write it down.

Q: Why do you think he did not write it down?

Children: Maybe he doesn't know how to write or doesn't have a pencil; he lives in the forest and doesn't have a copy in which to write; maybe his teacher didn't tell him how to write numbers till 10.

Stories motivate and inspire children's imagination; they enable them to form connections with different subjects. Learners can understand meaning and context more easily when language is contextualised because it is familiar, and the story is supported by illustrations and drawings.

Next, I asked the children to make bundles, as Bhola did. During this activity, I observed that when children were counting and making groups, they were re-checking their count, and if they found some error, they restarted slowly till they arrived at a correct arrangement of blocks. While grouping blocks, they arranged them in different patterns, like 5+5 (5 blocks in each row), 3+3+3+1, etc.

This was not my plan at all, but their problem-solving skills added one more dimension to my teaching. This was related to the subitising of objects for counting just like when we roll the dice during play, we do not need to count the dots every time; the special arrangement of dots has made an impression in our minds and whenever we see items arranged in that pattern, we can quickly perceive the number. This was connected to the number line that was presented in the classroom on which children saw numbers represented in the form of objects, symbols, and special arrangement patterns.

We moved ahead, and I asked one child to act as Bhola and collect the wooden blocks from the classroom floor, and then she had to make a bundle of 10 and count forward. This was a fun activity for the children as everyone was eager to tell the girl that she was about to reach 10 and that she should make a bundle of it.

> **Stories motivate and inspire children's imagination; they enable them to form connections with different subjects.**

Next, an activity was done with the children in which they were given 11, 13, and 14 open sticks in the group and asked to make bundles of 10. The children found this

Figure 3: Students count using concrete bundles and write numbers in pictorial form.

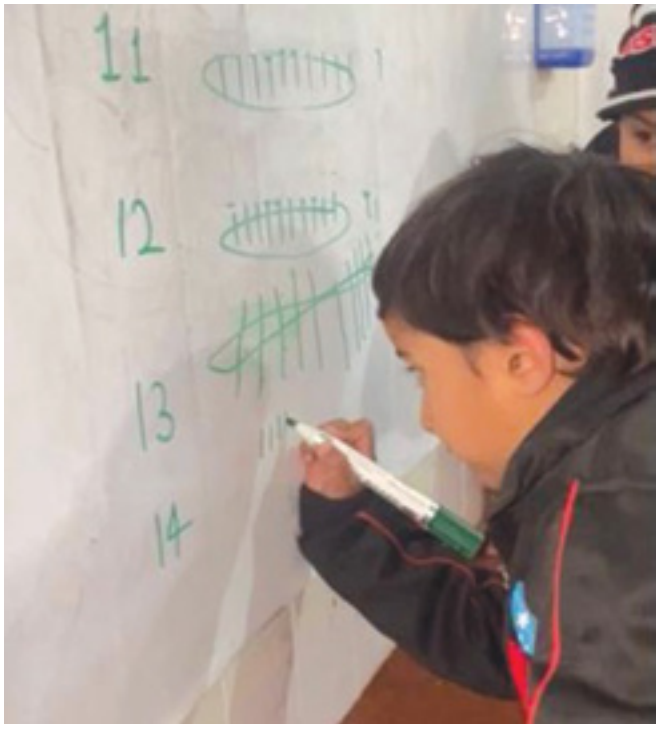

Figure 4: Students learn to write numbers using pictorial representation.

game very interesting, and even before I told them, they had started counting each other's bundles of sticks and loose sticks.

Next, I thought of dealing with the representation of the bundles, as initially, children were asked to make bundles and then count. Later, I asked them to put the bundle on their left side and loose sticks on the right so that this would go with the abstract representation, i.e., numbers. It can also help avoid confusion about presenting the concept of tens and ones in symbols, i.e., numerals.

Such activities of counting and making bundles were done for a whole week till the children became familiar and competent enough to count the objects by grouping them. After this, I asked them if they could write how many sticks they had counted. 'How can we write it?' they asked. I replied, 'Let us try to draw them.' I gave them markers and asked them to write. They represented the numbers in pictorial forms (*Figure 4*). Some of them already knew numbers, and they eagerly wrote the

By integrating stories, concrete manipulatives, interactive play, drawing, and games, students can better understand and enjoy learning numbers. This multi-sensory approach caters to different learning styles and makes math concepts more accessible and fun.

numbers along with the pictorial form. And that came out as a whole new learning activity.

At this point, I was expecting that if asked to represent 11 (eleven) sticks on the board, children might write 101. But their pictorial representation was quite illustrative. Those who already knew the pattern of counting and could write numbers up to 50 easily, and some of them who could write up to 100, helped the other children to write numbers and quickly wrote 11 instead of 101. Here, it became easier for me to tell them that in place of the bundle, we write 1 as this is a single bundle, and then we write the number of loose sticks because they learned the nominal representation from their peers. In this way, my class of 20 children went through the experience of counting beyond 10, and out of those, 12 were able to group and count, represent in pictorial and written form, and read the number in abstract form.

The way forward: My children understood the concept, and now they can apply the concept ahead. The way forward with this concept is to develop the concept of number comparison, addition, and subtraction.

Challenge: Eight children in my class are still in the learning process as they have not reached the level of transition of symbolic representation, but they can count and make bundles to make numbers by following the patterns and arrangements. To scaffold them, I will regularly allow them to play with numbers until they become familiar with and grasp the concept.

Conclusion

Around 80 percent of the brain of a child is developed by the age of 8 years. Keeping this in mind, I, as a teacher, try to familiarise them with new ideas, concepts, and experiences, which helps them learn about cause-and-effect relationships, problem-solving strategies, etc. That approach has worked well with students, but one must be careful while providing such ideas to build concepts at their age because these form the basis of their further learning. Also, since maths cannot be learnt in abstraction at this stage, the inclusion of story, enactment, and activities (such as bundle-making) by the students, and pictorial and nominal representation provide a wholesome experience to them.

[1] *The Magical Rope. BodhaGuru stories*
English: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_CcGOt6q8m8
Hindi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-Ta91qSa18

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Role of Parents in Early Years

Amrutha Murali

As the first point of contact for many families, Anganwadi teachers are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between parents' understanding and the developmental needs of children during the crucial early years. In this article, the author shares some of Makkala Jagriti's easy-to-follow, successful attempts to engage and involve parents in providing a nurturing environment for their children.

Figure 1: Anganwadi teachers are being supported in conducting effective sessions with parents.

Parents play a pivotal role in every stage of a child's life, but their influence is most profound during the early years. These formative years, from birth to six years, lay the foundation for a child's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Twenty years ago, children benefitted from growing up in joint families, where they were exposed to multiple caregivers and rich interactions. However, the advent of technology and the shift toward nuclear families have created a gap in basic human connections, leaving children vulnerable. Take, for instance, a common scene today – a child seated with a device larger than their hand, engrossed in its screen, while the caregiver mechanically feeds them. This scenario, whether in disadvantaged communities or affluent households, illustrates the diminishing quality of parent-child interaction.

At *Makkala Jagriti*,[1] we work to enhance the quality of early childhood education and care provided by *Anganwadis*. Our approach involves engaging with Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) functionaries, teachers, helpers, and most importantly, parents, to ensure holistic support for children.

The Anganwadi context

Children attending *Anganwadis* often come from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, where parents typically have little to no formal education. With their primary focus on earning a livelihood to support their families, the care and developmental needs of their children often take a backseat. Many parents are unaware of the critical importance of the

early years in shaping their child's learning journey. They often have the misconception that learning begins only once a child starts school, overlooking the foundational role of early experiences. Therefore, it is vital to help parents understand their significant role in creating a safe, nurturing, and responsive environment, which can profoundly influence and transform a child's developmental trajectory.

The responsibility of creating this awareness among parents falls upon the *Anganwadi* teachers. Building the capacity of *Anganwadi* teachers is pivotal in empowering them to engage with parents effectively and conduct meaningful meetings that emphasise the parents' role in their child's early development. As the first point of contact for many families, *Anganwadi* teachers are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between parents' understanding and the developmental needs of children during the crucial early years.

Some strategies

Engaging parents

Anganwadi teachers are provided with structured training sessions and mentoring to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and confidence to conduct meetings with parents. We prepare them to facilitate discussions on topics, such as brain development, the importance of play, and domains of early childhood education. By grounding these sessions in real-life examples and practical strategies, teachers translate abstract concepts into relatable and actionable ideas for parents.

Importance of play: An activity

To illustrate the importance of play and positive experiences in early brain development during parent meetings, a simple and interactive activity is conducted. Parents are divided into two groups, each provided with a drawing of an outline of the brain, which has scattered dots. The *Anganwadi* teacher/facilitator narrates two contrasting stories, pausing at key moments for the parents to do the activity.

Group 1: The Nurturing Environment

This child experiences:

- Responsive caregiving: The parent soothes the child when they cry. Adequate care is given to what the child needs.
- Quality playtime: Parents play peek-a-boo, engage in pretend play, and sing rhymes. There is freedom for the child to engage with toys and play materials.
- Language-rich interactions: Parents and caregivers talk to the child often, narrating daily activities or reading simple stories.
- Safe environment: The child has a clean, safe space to explore freely.

Each time a positive experience is described, the group connects two dots within their brain outline. By the end of the story, their brain has multiple interconnected pathways, representing a strong neural network.

Group 2: The Neglectful Environment

This child faces:

- Lack of interaction: Parents are too busy or not present, providing minimal engagement.
- Inconsistent responses: When parents are not consistent with their rules and expectations – agreeing to something at one time and refusing it at another.
- Absence of play: There are no toys or interactive activities to stimulate the child.
- Stressful environment: The household is chaotic, and the child experiences shouting or neglect. Many times, the child becomes the caregiver of younger siblings.
- Limited language exposure: Communication is minimal, often limited to instructions or reprimands.

Here, the parents connect the dots less frequently, resulting in a fragmented network by the end of the story.

After the stories, the facilitator compares the two brains, emphasising how positive experiences contribute to stronger, healthier brain development.

By the end of the activity, the brain representing the child in a nurturing environment is visibly more connected compared to the other, creating a stark contrast when the two brain images are placed side by side. This visual often

Figure 2: Parents engaged in the 'brain activity' representing the neural network.

Figure 3: A parent helps their child identify and describe vegetables at home.

elicits a collective gasp from the parents at the detrimental impact a non-nurturing environment can have on a child. The exercise has proven to be deeply impactful, with many parents becoming emotional and openly sharing their resolve to change their ways, pledging to be more present and respectful of their child's developmental journey. The powerful visual representation helps parents understand the profound influence of responsive caregiving and positive interactions on their child's brain development. It drives home the critical role they play in shaping their child's future by fostering a safe, enriching, and loving environment.

Changing perceptions about learning

'Learning begins in school' is one of the core challenges *Anganwadi* teachers address by shifting parents' perception of learning. We train teachers to sensitively tackle this misconception by emphasising the importance of the birth-to-six years developmental window. Teachers are provided with tools and simple resources to demonstrate how daily interactions, responsive caregiving, and play can significantly enhance a child's learning and development.

Teachers help allay parents' doubts about their ability to support their children, reassuring them that meaningful engagement does not require academic knowledge but rather a willingness to connect through play and conversation. Parents are encouraged to engage in simple, everyday activities that promote their child's development. For example, they can sing rhymes, narrate daily activities while cooking or cleaning, or point out colours, shapes, and objects during a walk. Playing simple games like *peek-a-boo* or *I Spy* fosters interaction and builds language and social skills. Storytelling or looking at picture books together enhances imagination and vocabulary.

Through their interactions with parents, teachers can share simple, practical ideas that ease the burden on caregivers while promoting the child's development and strengthening the parent-child bond. For instance, during parent meetings or home visits, an *Anganwadi* teacher can demonstrate how routine household activities can engage children constructively. For example, when they bring in vegetables from the market, they can involve the child by asking them to sort vegetables into separate piles. This activity is simple, keeps the child engaged and helps develop in them important cognitive skills, like sorting and categorisation.

Encouraging children to help with small tasks, like taking out plates for eating or folding clothes builds their confidence and fine motor skills. These activities are easy to incorporate into daily routines and help parents create a nurturing, stimulating environment that supports their child's growth. These activities not only engage children constructively but also strengthen the parent-child bond without demanding extra time from caregivers.

Teachers can invite parents to try similar activities during the session or share their own creative ideas. This builds confidence and encourages parents to see themselves as active contributors to their child's learning.

> Rachamma, a parent, shared how attending the monthly meetings has transformed the way she engages with her son, Rohan, at home. Inspired by the play-based activities at the Anganwadi, Rohan often brings his learning home, demonstrating games and activities focused on developmental domains and inviting her to join in. These shared moments have not only strengthened their bond but also boosted Rachamma's confidence in supporting his growth.

The insights gained during parent meetings have provided Rachamma with practical ideas for simple, enjoyable activities she can do with Rohan, such as storytelling, singing songs, or playing games that promote his motor skills and cognitive development. By actively involving herself in these activities, she feels more connected to Rohan's learning journey and takes pride in the progress she observes. This hands-on engagement has given her a deeper appreciation of the critical role that play and interaction have in shaping Rohan's developmental milestones.

Setting up a toy library

During home visits, it is often noticed that the children, after the *Anganwadi* hours, spend excessive time on screens (TV or mobile). To address this, a toy library can be introduced, while equipping *Anganwadi* teachers with the tools and knowledge to establish and manage these libraries effectively. Teachers connect with the local community for support, gathering donated toys and resources, and create a system that allows parents to borrow developmentally appropriate play materials for home use.

Parents can visit the *Toy Library* and borrow toys for their children to use at home for a week. This initiative not only expands the variety of toys available to children but also reinforces and extends the learning they experience at *Anganwadis*, allowing the continuation of their development at home. The *Anganwadi* teacher keeps a detailed record of the toys borrowed, ensuring they are well-maintained and returned on time. This system instils a sense of responsibility in children, teaching them the importance of taking care of shared resources.

During parent meetings, *Anganwadi* teachers can explain to parents that through play, children learn problem-solving, develop creativity, and strengthen their relationships with caregivers. For example, the toy library has puzzles, blocks, peg boards, beads, stacking cups, etc. Teachers describe to parents how playing with toys, like blocks or puzzles, helps children acquire the skills of problem-solving and independence; how using beads for activities like colour sorting and counting, helps develop fine motor skills and early arithmetic concepts.

Anganwadi Habba

As part of our ongoing efforts to redefine the role of *Anganwadis*, we believe that teachers play a pivotal role in shaping how parents perceive *Anganwadis*. One of the key initiatives we have introduced is the *Anganwadi Habba* (festival), a celebration designed to transform *Anganwadis* from places of mere care to centres of active learning. This event serves as a platform to showcase the potential for learning and development that can take place within these centres, emphasising the importance of early childhood education.

Teachers set up stations to showcase various developmental activities, such as language development exercises, creative arts, physical play, and cognitive games. Parents experience these activities firsthand and become aware of the learning potential within the *Anganwadi* setting.

Parents understand the value of play-based learning, positive discipline, and simple daily activities like storytelling to support their child's growth. The event fosters collaboration between parents, teachers, and the community, empowering families to actively contribute to their child's education and build strong support networks.

The path ahead

The role of parents in the early years cannot be overemphasised. By raising awareness, and providing practical engagement ideas, we can empower parents to become active participants in their child's development. Together, we can create nurturing environments that enable children to reach their full potential.

[1] *Makkala Jagriti is a Bengaluru-based NGO working towards the holistic development of children and diverse groups to build a sustainable and equitable society.*

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Equal Learning Opportunities for All Children

Chhote Lal Tanwar

When children, who have infinite potential for learning, start seeing school as a place they fear, where they may be beaten, teachers instil a sense of ownership and self-respect in them by trusting their ability to learn, showing affection towards them, and respecting diversity. This task is challenging, but the human-professional efforts of teachers make it possible.

Figure 1: Sitting in a circle helps the teacher observe, include and give each student the opportunity to learn.

When we started the Azim Premji School in Tonk in 2012, we began by trying to identify those children who would be prioritised for admission. After discussions among ourselves, we agreed to first enrol children from marginalised communities who were either not attending school or struggling to learn as expected. To identify such children, we visited the upper primary school in Bamor village, where teachers had information about the children in the village who had dropped out of school. They provided us with a list of children who had left school and also those who, despite being in classes IV and V, had not acquired basic reading and writing skills.

We enrolled these children in classes I to V based on their age. Accordingly, 14 children were admitted to class V; 70-80 percent did not have an understanding of letters or vowel sounds nor the ability to form meaningful words. One of these students was a girl terrified of the mere mention of the word 'school'. Her perception of the school was that it was a place where one is beaten and maltreated. She had seen other children being beaten in school and had herself been punished by teachers. Whenever we tried to meet this student in the village, she would run off. Her guardians would say, 'What can we do? We keep telling her to go to school, but she does not listen.' It took days before she gathered the courage to meet us.

The school was started with 85 children, including school dropouts of different ages, as well as children at different academic levels and socio-economic backgrounds. Our challenge extended beyond the teaching and learning processes; it also involved uniting these children from diverse backgrounds and fostering a collective sense of community among them. Often, giving admission to

children from diverse backgrounds in the school is itself perceived as inclusion, but mere enrolment does not ensure inclusion. For that, processes at the classroom and school levels are even more important.

To create an inclusive atmosphere in school, we did various things, like we organised fun activities during the admission process itself. These activities helped us become familiar with the students and create an atmosphere of comfort between us.

Children started mingling with us. As a result, not only did the school enrolment numbers increase, but that girl who was afraid of even the name of 'school' also agreed to come to school. Other children who had a similar fear of school also started to come.

We started to work with these children, believing that every child brings with them a boundless potential to learn and that all of them can learn. We were clear that children learn best when they feel safe, valued, loved, and confident. With this understanding, we started to work with them. There is a pressing need to think of and work on various aspects of inclusion. For instance, how the school perceives children coming from various social, linguistic and economic backgrounds. Contrary to our assumptions, children's ability to observe, feel, and perceive their surroundings is quite sharp. They can very quickly gauge from the gestures of adults the kind of opinions they hold about them.

There was a clear understanding among the teachers that all children should feel a sense of equality and have no apprehensions of discrimination. We also brainstormed over how all children could be included in the school processes because, in general, children, be it at home or school, are given only instructions. It does not even occur to adults that a child of 8 to 10 years can do some things using their own judgement. Another aspect is that within the school system, a child's understanding of their environment is completely disregarded. If a 6-year-old's learning is planned in alignment with the sense of language and environment they bring to school, the results will be different.

To build connections with the children, we tried to include their local language, folk songs, and folk stories. The children were exposed to some of their childhood songs that were connected, in one way or another, to their environmental experiences. For example: '*Aa re baadal kaare baadal aao zara jhoom ke, apne sang thandi hawa laao zara jhoom ke,*' '*Banjara namak laya, oont gaadi mein*,' and so on. These are children's songs deeply connected to the lives of these children.

As a result, all those children, who firmly believed that they could not learn reading and writing, gradually started enjoying the stories and poems they listened to. Initially, they would recite poems in groups. Once their fear of others laughing at their performance was dispelled, and they realised that they would be encouraged, their confidence grew. Soon, they began presenting short poems and stories of their own during the morning assembly. As a result, the older and younger, those who were at advanced levels and those who were trailing in studies, everyone started to feel at ease.

Children started mingling with us. As a result, not only did the school enrolment numbers increase, but that girl who was afraid of even the name of 'school' also agreed to come to school. Other children who had a similar fear of school also started to come.

After the admission process, inclusion does not result only from making the learning processes inclusive and comfortable, but the other school processes also need to be inclusive. To do this, various committees, such as the Mid-day Meal Committee, Safety Committee, Sports Committee, Library Committee, and Assembly Committee, were formed to ensure children's participation in school management. Every child from all grades, ages and backgrounds had the opportunity to participate in these. Along with the children, teachers were also required to be part of all these committees. As children began to take on responsibilities and realised their importance, they developed a sense of ownership over the processes and activities. They began to fulfil their roles with greater confidence. This confidence began to be reflected in their classroom as well. Such inclusion fostered a collective sense of 'community' among the children and helped them understand how to organise and manage tasks efficiently.

Along with all this, we also tried to understand the different areas of their interest through which children could express themselves more creatively. Some children prefer to express their thoughts through speech, while others prefer to do so through drawings. Singing children's songs, performing them with gestures, and expressing ideas visually are some of the key forms of expression amongst these. The experience of expressing oneself through drawings was facilitated by the art

Figure 2: Students preparing to paint with colours.

teacher. Children attempted to depict the stories and poems they had heard or read through pictures. They found this method very appealing. Children's work served as evidence that every child wants to connect with this mode of expression if given the freedom to represent their world through their experiences. This is possible only when teachers step beyond the boundaries of different subjects and perceive the connections between those different fields of knowledge. By doing so, they open new pathways for children's learning, making the process more accessible and dynamic. Such teaching activities not only provide opportunities for all children to participate but also help them identify and nurture their talents. For example, children illustrated scenes from their surroundings during Diwali and described them exactly as they had seen and experienced them. When teachers allow children to choose their preferred medium to express their experiences, activities like drawing, discussing them, and translating those ideas into linguistic symbols become as much a source of joy as writing about a festival like Diwali.

These examples strengthen the thought that each child is unique and that when teaching is connected to their personal experiences, learning becomes effective. This approach allows teachers to understand each child's background. A key principle in this process is to avoid comparing one child to another. Every child learns differently, so why do we subject them to relentless comparison daily, instilling in them a sense of inadequacy? This erodes their confidence in learning, and the children who struggle in certain academic areas begin to drift away from those areas. Similarly, children whose experiences find no place in the classroom also start to feel excluded.

This journey of teaching and learning was enjoyable and exciting for both children and teachers. Children were coming to school happily and were learning. Through the combined efforts of over four to five months, eight to ten children who previously feared school and were learning significantly less than our expectations began reading stories and poems, discussing the texts and expressing their thoughts through various mediums. Now, these children had the opportunity to work equally on all language skills. There was no visible separation among different age groups and even among children at various learning levels; there was a sense of ease rather than of separation. This made the environment more comfortable, and now, at least within the four walls of the school, feelings of hierarchy and discrimination were not displayed among the children. This was a significant sense of achievement for the children. For us, it was an exhilarating realisation that with the appropriate environment and processes, children can learn to read and write well and move towards better human values.

> **Each child is unique, and when teaching is connected to their personal experiences, learning becomes effective.**

The processes described above taught us that incorporating children's linguistic, cultural, social, and economic backgrounds into the classroom can enrich it as a resource and transform it into a significant opportunity of learning for all. This depends on how the group of teachers working with children from specific environments view those aspects. The perspective of the teachers towards children's diversity and their ability to make necessary changes in their own behaviour and classroom processes determine whether they view this diversity as a resource or an obstacle. If this diversity becomes a resource, it will make it possible for children to achieve their learning objectives. It is certain that if teachers have this perspective, they will find solutions.

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

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Sarita is Learning

Jai Shekhar

I have always been inclined to libraries and related educational activities. As a teacher, I have always tried to make the school library an active and vibrant place through dialogues and by encouraging children to write independently. As a result, we have created many wall magazines filled with children's writings. The children's stories have also been published in children's magazines, such as *Pluto*, *Chakmak* and *Cycle*.

In the current session, the academic level of most children in my class was challenging; a majority of them were still recognising letters and alphabet and none was at the level of independent reading and writing. Given this, it was difficult to conduct library activities, especially those related to reading and writing. However, I was convinced that while connecting students with the library might be challenging, very soon, I would be able to build a culture of reading. 8-year-old Sarita, who belonged to a disadvantaged family, was also admitted to my class. She lived in a village 60 km away, where there were no schools, and so she had come to live with her uncle. Sarita did not even know how to hold a book or pencil properly. It took her quite some time to start from scribbling to writing letters. She had a deep desire to learn.

Some of the strategies I employed to help children read were as follows. I started teaching songs and poems. The classroom was made print- and language-rich with the children's creations; many posters of poems and stories were prepared and put up on the walls within reach of the children. The activities related to this reading material assisted children in learning to read.

Then, we had role plays on the stories narrated to the children. Prabhat's story *Achcha Mausi Alvida,* had three characters – a bird, a cat, and a buffalo. After a fun read-aloud, the children presented the entire story by enacting the dialogues in their own words in the style of the story. Sarita also played her role with full gestures and expressions. One day, I narrated Shweta Nambiar's story *Pehli Baar*. The role of the teacher was important here, and the dialogues were very long. Sarita accepted this challenge. With a little help, she played her role satisfactorily. There were activities like drawing pictures based on the stories. All the children would participate, but Sarita would do so with great zeal. We also encouraged the children to draw pictures or colour drawings based on their imagination.

The impact of all these efforts was that Sarita, who was timid and hesitant in the beginning, emerged as a leader in the class. One reason for this was that with her dedication, Sarita quickly learned many songs, and when she sang them in the morning assembly, the applause would further boost her enthusiasm. Everyone collectively named her 'Jugnu' after the title of the poem, *Jugnu bhai.* One day, during the midday meal, I noticed that Sarita took a second helping of food, placed it in her lunch box and quietly tucked it in her bag. I was quite surprised and wondered if her aunt did not give her enough food to eat and if she remained hungry. I was disturbed by the thought that, perhaps owing to hunger, she might be turning to stealing. So, I got Prabhat's book, *Kaisa Kaisa Khaana,* from the library and read the story aloud in class. As I read, I showed the pictures in the book and spoke to the children about food.

Sarita shared that she was taking food in her lunch box that day. Her classmates were aware of this, and no one was surprised. But I was curious and asked her the reason in a roundabout manner. Sarita replied that her aunt and uncle had gone away for a day. They had insisted on taking her along, but she had refused to go, saying that she would miss her lessons. Tears filled her eyes as she spoke. I wanted to know where she would stay till her uncle and aunt returned; she said she would just sit outside the house and wait for them! Truly, the passion for learning teaches us to face all kinds of difficulties!

Jai Shekhar, teacher, Composite School Dhusah, Balrampur, Uttar Pradesh

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

When children from a marginalised community joined school

Meenakshi Gaur

Enrolments in government schools started decreasing after the COVID-19 pandemic. Our school had also started facing enrolment issues. I looked around the school to identify children who had not been able to go to school. About one kilometre from the school, a few *Kalbelia* families had their encampments. Their children did not go to school. They spent their time collecting garbage, wandering around, and flying kites all day. I went to them and tried to convince the families to send their children to school. The children who were eligible were admitted to school. I helped them obtain relevant documents, *Aadhar* cards, etc., that were required for admission.

Although the children had started school, they did not enjoy school. They would come one day and then remain absent for a week. I always consoled myself thinking that perhaps with our efforts, someday all the children would start coming to school regularly. When I used to go to get them for school, their family members would misbehave with me and, at times, use abusive language too. They felt that I was reducing the number of helping hands that could contribute to their work and income. I explained to them that learning how to read and write would make the children capable of taking up good jobs. Education would help them take better care of themselves and their families, which is the reason the government and several other people are engaged in ensuring that everyone gets an education.

There was no awareness among the men in the community about the importance of education. Instead of being upset by the abuses they hurled at me, I would think, 'How does it matter if I get abused? Even if a few children get educated, these abuses are a very small price to pay.' The children were given the facilities available at school, and we helped them in every possible way. The mothers liked the fact that the children went to school, but the fathers were against this. They were of the opinion that going to school would not help them much. The mothers were also labourers and used to go for work and could not send the children to school on time. My colleagues and I were quite bothered by the irregularity of the children. We ensured we went to the children's homes by turns to bring them to school, but it was not enough.

I discussed the irregularity of the children in Dastak, an online group of fellow teachers in which we read informative material related to education, literature, and contemporary issues every day. The Dastak group suggested that we provide high-quality teaching to the children coming to school, give them love, and stay in constant touch with the community. They also suggested that we invite the parents to school from time to time, so that they can see the school and their children improving. We did exactly that. On the group's suggestion, the school was developed as an environment-friendly campus. Efforts were made to make the walls of the classrooms print-rich. My daughter also contributed to this process by making pictures of animals, birds, and wildlife on the walls. Posters of poems, pictures, and picture stories were made and put up.

Children's literature helped ignite the children's interest in school. However, we saw meaningful results when we were able to get a 10-year-old girl, Nirmala, to the school. She had not come to school for two months. Upon investigation, we learnt she stays at home to take care of her two younger brothers. It was ingrained in Nirmala's mind that studying was not for them. It took a lot of effort to get this notion out of her mind. We talked to her family members regularly, kept motivating them, and told them about the benefits of education; only after that did it become possible for Nirmala to come to school. A few days later, when I suggested that she bring her two younger brothers to school too, she started bringing both of them, as well as some other children from the locality to the school. Witnessing her interest in learning, we felt glad about having done something meaningful. Not only is she learning, but she is also inspiring others. She is now able to solve practical maths questions quickly because she used to purchase groceries from the market. She is also interested in reading English.

While earlier the children used to come to school in dirty and crumpled clothes, now they have started coming neat and clean. Their skin-related diseases have reduced thanks to bathing and cleaning. Their awareness about their health and hygiene has improved. Most of these children used to consume tobacco or *gutkha.* We had several discussions about this

and explained the dangers of tobacco to them. This seems to have made a difference as they stay away from tobacco. Although these positive results are not enough; our efforts have not completely failed. We hope to gain even greater success with the support of the teachers and our group members.

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Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

Encouragement helps build children's self-confidence

Nandini Kumari

In my ten years as a teacher in a government school, I have learned more from the children than what I have taught them. It is often observed that most of the children who come to our school are first-generation school-goers. Most of them come from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Given this, it is difficult to teach all the children in the same way. While some cannot read a book, others cannot write, and some hesitate even to speak. Some are gifted with talents that lie dormant owing to circumstances and lack of proper guidance. Each one has unique strengths and skills. Some are good at singing, while others are good with their hands, and some others excel in a sport.

I tried to nurture the talent of one of my students in my own way, and the result was that she gained recognition in the field of art. Sugandha, along with Sunanda, were students of class VIII. Both were average in academics, but Sugandha used to sing very well. Her voice was melodious, but she was very hesitant to sing because in her community, dancing, singing or playing music was not considered respectable. Also, she was shy and timid.

I went to her house and spoke to her parents. Initially, they were also hesitant, wondering what people in the village would say about her singing on stage. Since our region is Bhojpuri speaking, I gave them the example of Sharda Sinhaji, who is a professor and also an internationally known singer and also Malini Awasthi, who is one of the country's most esteemed folk singers. I was able to convince them after a couple of meetings. They trusted me, and my being a teacher played a big role in this since they believed I would have their daughter's best interests in mind.

When it came to getting Sugandha rid of her shyness in singing, I too started singing a little with her, when we would be by ourselves. Then, slowly, I started singing with her along with the children in class. I also encouraged the other children to sing songs and poems. Whenever I got a chance, I would ask her to sing something. Initially, she was shy; her legs would tremble, and she would break into a sweat. I had to work with her over an extended period of time. I encouraged her to participate in the programmes held in the school, such as Republic Day, Independence Day and other cultural activities. All the teachers would praise her singing. The support of the teachers was significant in that it played a big role in promoting co-curricular activities, not just for her but for the other children as well.

There were one or two occasions when we had organised Sugandha's performance, but she did not come to school due to fear and apprehension. I kept trying and after some time, she learned to face the stage. Then, one day, some people from the media came to the school, and they later published an impressive story about Sugandha's singing talent. Sugandha got the chance to do a stage show at the district headquarters. Now, an album of hers has been released, and she has an entire world of her dreams to reach out to.

The confidence she got from this experience also made Sugandha do better in her studies. Some children get left behind due to low motivation. They can learn with encouragement and do well in their chosen fields. Sugandha's success brought

fame to the school. The cultural and literary environment in the school was further enhanced. Such activities should be taken seriously. After this, several children started receiving encouragement from home as well. The parents' attitude towards cultural activities in the school also started changing – these began to be seen as activities that promoted the culture of reading and writing.

Nandini Kumari, Government Secondary School, Bhediya Suara, Vikaskhand Dehri, District Rohtas, Bihar

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

Children composed poems in English on their own

Upma Rani

One day, while flipping through the new NCERT English book *Mridang* for class II, I was drawn to its bright colours. This was my first time teaching from it, and as I skimmed through, I came across an open-ended poem titled 'Everybody Stop, Everybody Stand.' After reading the poem, I had an idea. I could write something new and creative with it. The title made me think of how teachers often give instructions like 'Everyone stand up' or 'Everyone sit down,' so I thought we could use these familiar classroom commands as inspiration for writing a new poem.

I decided to try this activity with my students of class V. In class, one day, I announced that we would write a poem together. The students immediately assumed they would be copying a poem from their textbook. However, when I told them that they would be writing their own poems in English, they appeared unsure. I reassured them that it would be fun and encouraged them to give it a try.

I began by modelling the activity and wrote a short poem on the blackboard, reading it aloud two to three times.

Everybody stop

Everybody stand

Everybody sit

And raise your hand.

The students recited it along with me. I explained that we would start by changing the action words in the poem and shared three simple rules:

1. They could only use three action words.

2. The action words should be related to each other.

3. In the third line, they needed to ask a question related to the action words. For example, if the words were 'eat, drink, play' the question could be: 'Why do you eat and drink?'

4. The fourth line would be the answer to the question, say, 'To stay healthy'.

The students began brainstorming different action words like 'drink', 'jump', and 'hop'. I walked around the classroom, observing their work and ensuring they followed the rules. A few girls struggled to think of English action words, but they were more comfortable with Hindi and enjoyed drawing. I encouraged them by asking, 'Why do you draw and paint?' They responded, 'Because it feels good!' I suggested they could incorporate this into their poem, using the example of the poem, 'Oh Water Fun'.

One boy wrote ‘hop’, ‘jump’, and ‘go’, and I asked him to find words that rhymed with ‘go’. He said, ‘Bow, bow’, and I accepted his answer as I felt that it is more important for them to try, explore and be creative than to be correct. It was heartening to see all the students enjoying the activity.

As a teacher, my role was to guide them and provide opportunities for them to explore their creativity. I made sure not to over-correct them, as I didn’t want to discourage them or make them give up. Over time, we gathered a wonderful collection of short poems. Finally, I gave each student a piece of chart paper and asked them to neatly write and decorate their poems. The completed poems were displayed on the classroom wall. One of the poems was:

Everybody come

Everybody go

Everybody walk

On your tiptoe.

The pride and joy on the students’ faces as they saw their work showcased was truly rewarding. I felt a deep warmth in my heart, knowing they had created something new and meaningful.

Upma Rani, Teacher, Government Upper Primary School, Majri Grant 1, Doiwala, Dehradun, Uttarakhand

If the teacher enjoys teaching, students will enjoy learning: Viswanath G S

Raghvendra Herle

Viswanath G S is currently a Kannada Language Teacher and the Headmaster in charge at the Government Higher Primary School, Nagarthapet, Sindhi, Bengaluru South. He is known for the innovative processes he brings to his classes. He treats all the children who come to his class from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds with respect and instils self-confidence so that they do not hesitate to use their mother tongue. At the same time, they learn the Kannada language, which is new to them. He effectively uses the school library to support this.

Vishvanath GS is the author of four books. These include two editions of poetry– *Chaukabara* and *Edeya Danige Kiviya Gona*, a collection of short stories – *Mukhavadagalu Mattu Itara Kathegalu*, and *Samanya* Gyana – a book on general knowledge. He has edited two books – *Janapada Ayisiri* and *Sampreeti.* A recipient of the Bengaluru South District Best Teacher Award (2014), and Karnataka State Workers Association's Sahitya Ratna Award in 2016, Vishvanath GS has worked as the Honorary Secretary of Bengaluru City District Kannada Literature Council as well.

For this column, Raghvendra Herle (RH) had a conversation with Vishvanath GS (VGS) on the creative methodology that the latter brings to his class. Following are the excerpts from the conversation.

Figure 1: The author (R) in conversation with Vishwanath GS.

> **The process of teaching should proceed from simple to complex. Linkages between the child's internal world and the world outside have to be established. Language and literature play a very significant role in this.**

RH: What are the new initiatives that you have taken as a teacher in your class?

VGS: Each day, I attempt to keep the class vibrant and alive as much as I can. I plan activities that are interesting for the students. For instance, making use of various songs to introduce tonal variation according to the nature of the text, and getting the class to enact plays like *Panjara Shale* (caged school) and *Billa Habba* (festival of the bow). All this demands a creative thought process in the teacher, which is necessary to break the monotony of the teaching-learning process. While teaching poems like *Hacchevu Kannadada Deepa* (we will light the lamp of Kannada), *Huttari Haadu* (song of harvest) etc., I use diverse ways of reciting poetry and singing. Then, I motivate the children to recite and sing in multiple ways. Whether the text is prose or verse, I deploy the technique of enactment. It can be mono-acting or several children acting out the text. Depending on the requirements of the lesson, I try to include questions on general knowledge, comprehension, reference to context, or explanatory and application-based questions.

My primary objective is to ensure that the teacher enjoys teaching a chapter or poem, while students derive pleasure from the learning experience. It is evident that when a teacher lacks enthusiasm for teaching, students are likely to lose interest in learning.

While teaching grammar, I ensure that students are not overwhelmed with multiple grammatical concepts simultaneously. Instead, I provide them with sufficient time to engage with each concept, allowing for a structured learning process. Rather than simply sharing my knowledge of grammar, I encourage students to discover practical examples independently. When teaching drama, I place a strong emphasis on immersion (the actor getting into the heart and mind of the character), stress and tonal variations. I can put across to the children the joy of a text only when I enjoy reading it myself.

RH: To improve the learning of students, what methods and techniques can be employed through the teaching of language and literature?

VGS: The process of teaching should proceed from simple to complex. Linkages between the child's internal world and the world outside have to be established. Language and literature play a very significant role in this respect. I make good use of the school library, which has more than 5000 books. We must transform the library into a learning resource for the children. I make use of the *Reading Corner* in my class systematically for supplementary learning by encouraging students to read the books of their choice and recording this in a register. Further, I encourage them to speak about the poem, story or essay they have read. I motivate them to write down their feelings and impressions. From the library, I borrow critical works and book reviews that are suitable for my students and exhibit them for the children to notice. I ask them to collect the details about writers and their texts, to collect proverbs and to create a file/book (handmade) of such collections. Developing their skill for collecting material and information is very important. I entrust the children with the responsibility of celebrating Independence Day, Children's Day, Teachers' Day, Sports Day and other cultural events at school and make sure that they manage the events successfully. During the annual and mid-term holidays, I encourage students to write a diary and ask them to read it to the class when they return to school. The teaching of language and literature has an effective role in developing the comprehension, expression and creativity of children.

RH: What methods and means do you use to develop the literary interests of students inside as well as outside your class? Do you think that such literary interests would prove helpful for their holistic learning and managing school activities?

VGS: I have already mentioned the activities designed for the classroom. As for outside activities, I have taken my students to Freedom Park to stage the play, *Sangoli Rayanna*. Every year, for the Annual Day Celebration, I have my students enact a drama under my direction. I also provide them with guidance for participating in singing competitions of *Pratibha Karanji* (talent competition).

I have written a play, *Putaani Picnic* (children's picnic), for children and am going to have my students enact it for this year's Annual School Day celebration. I believe that such experiments and activities have a positive impact on their literary interests. I have seen students benefitting greatly from such activities. In this context, I miss my mentor, Kannada teacher, Mahalingaiya, who influenced me greatly in my high school days.

RH: In the context of students in government schools, especially in a multilingual environment, how can we resolve their problems of, and barriers to, language learning?

VGS: In every class in our school, we have children whose parents are natives of Bihar, Nepal or various other Hindi-speaking regions. These children face difficulties in learning the Kannada language. To start with, I encourage them to talk to their Kannada-speaking classmates.

The other important thing is to accept their oral expressions as valid, whichever language they choose to communicate in. This includes the use of body language and gestures. Once they attempt to speak in Kannada, I focus on their pronunciation. I adopt positive reinforcement, repeatedly, to get them to acclimatise to our linguistic environment. I remember how, once, a boy from Nepal by the name of Bishal Kumar learnt excellent Kannada in my class. He still calls me and speaks with me in Kannada over the phone. He is doing a diploma in engineering.

More important than our efforts is the collaborative engagement of students from different linguistic backgrounds. It is essential that our native students interact with their peers from different language backgrounds with respect and kindness, thereby cultivating a welcoming environment.

RH: In today's context, what kind of challenges do language teachers have at the primary level? How can they overcome those challenges?

VGS: The greatest challenge faced at the primary level is the multilingual environment. Teachers must acknowledge this fact while teaching, ensuring that it does not become an obstacle to their teaching. Also, many teachers are not aware of the different approaches to teaching texts and often fail to notice the areas where they can use demonstrations. There is a need for them to engage in creative exploration, both personally and professionally. They must learn to break free from conventional thinking to innovate beyond established models. Additionally, there is a need to appreciate texts through the enhancement and recreation of knowledge.

RH: Our policy documents state that the medium of teaching at the primary level should be the home language. What do you think about this? How do you fundamentally view various teacher training programmes, workshops and professional development programmes? What is your opinion on the practical capabilities and effectiveness of their implementation and accountability?

VGS: According to me the home language should be the language/medium of instruction at the primary level because it is the home language that resonates deeply with the children. Regardless of the language we engage with, our understanding is fundamentally shaped by our home language. This familiarity fosters the growth of our vocabulary and enhances our language skills. It acts as the primary tool through which we navigate our daily interactions. The home language will always form the cornerstone of education upon which we can construct our linguistic framework.

When it comes to teacher training programmes, these days, numerous subject-specific training programmes are conducted. However, by the time these programmes are integrated into the school setting, their anticipated outcomes have often changed. It is essential that new programmes are introduced only after evaluating the success of the existing ones, taking into account both their impact, as well as their shortcomings. When many programmes are launched simultaneously, it leads to confusion among the teachers. Training programmes must align with the actual needs of the classroom; they should not be just theoretical but also be effective practically. They should include the preparation of teaching aids and demonstration of teaching. Emphasis should be on ground-level responses more than on a higher quest for knowledge. Instead of having several training programmes, there should be just one or two that are of excellent quality. There is a need for evolving a mechanism that would examine the realisation, at the classroom level, of what is learnt by the teacher in a training programme.

RH: How does the school management contribute to the learning process of students? In this regard, what unique steps have you taken on an individual level?

VGS: The head teacher is like an oarsman leader who has to work hard to direct the work of creating a learning atmosphere for the children and the teachers that is different from the ordinary. It is essential for the head teacher to possess strong administrative capabilities, as well as the ability to mobilise resources and foster the development of the school.

During my tenure as headmaster, I have invited several resource persons to enhance the educational experience for students in both curricular and co-curricular activities. I recognise that the daily operations of the school are as crucial as the annual educational plan, and I have given equal significance to both. Effective daily activities contribute to the quality of the annual plan. I have also taken the help of donors to buy computers and other infrastructure materials for the school. I have the confidence that I have worked hard and successfully to strengthen the learning atmosphere of the school in a well-disciplined environment.

Translated from Kannada to English by Ganesh U H; English to Hindi by Nalini Ravel; Hindi to English by Eklavya, Bhopal

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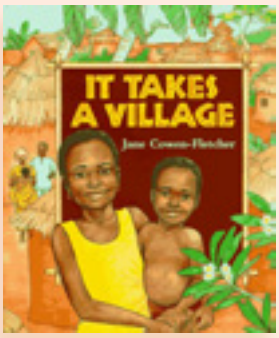
It Takes a Village

Reviewer: Anita Dhayani



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Language: English (also available in Hindi as *Gaon Ka Bachcha*)

Publisher: Scholastic Inc

This book is about a mother and her two children living and working during a market day in an African village. The story begins: 'The sun was slowly rising in the sky, but the villagers had been awake for a while.' Reading this, I felt that my assumption of this story being about the lives of villagers struggling with hard work and hardships was right. The story was indeed moving towards this. People in villages have to wake up early. Who knows in what difficult situations the village children might have been portrayed in the story, I wondered. 'Yemi,' mother said, 'Today at the market, you take care of your little brother.' I will be busy selling mangoes.' My assumption became even more certain. The story did seem to be heading towards the hardships of village life. Yemi said, 'Come Koku, today I will take care of you, just me!' 'Just you?' Mother looked at Yemi and questioned, smilingly. Mother knew everything.

Mother knew everything, this sentence suddenly gives rise to many questions and curiosities in mind. What did the mother know? Why did the mother smile at Yemi's words? What is it that Yemi is unaware of, which only the mother knew? Every line of the story holds a mystery.

The story shows glimpses of solidarity and harmony in the village. *It Takes a Village* is a unique story of love and the sense of belonging in a village.

One of the women selling fruit said to the mother, 'Yemi has grown up now. She helps you so much!' 'Yes,' the mother said, 'Today she will take care of Koku'. '*Just me*!' Yemi added. At this, the fruit-selling woman smiled because she knew that village children grow up and become adults by the age of 10-12 years. They begin to understand their responsibilities towards the family. Yemi does not yet fully understand the behaviour of the village people, which is why she thinks that she will take care of Koku all by herself. Through her repeatedly saying 'Just me!', the author succeeds in portraying Yemi's awareness of the responsibility assigned to her and her happiness for it.

Beyond this, the pictures speak more than the words in the story. The illustrator has infused such emotions in the characters that they appear lifelike.

Yemi carries Koku on her back and takes him around the market. After a little while, Koku starts getting restless. Yemi feels that he is hungry. She puts Koku down to buy peanuts. In that short time, Koku disappears. Yemi, worried, searches for him here and there. And here unfolds the mystery of '*Just me*!'.

Yemi worries that Koku might be hungry. But a woman feeds him, holding him in her lap. Yemi feels that Koku might be thirsty. But another woman happily gives him water to drink. She thinks that Koku might be scared. But he is happily sitting with someone. Yemi searches for Koku at the shops, in baskets, in pots, under the bed, everywhere. She wanders around. She thinks that Koku must be feeling hot. But a village woman bathes him by splashing water on him.

Yemi searches for Koku amongst the chickens, sheep and goats. When Yemi cannot find Koku, she shouts, 'Koku is lost!' But the pictures tell a different story that Koku was not lost at all. He was on the other side of the path where Yemi was. The mat seller asks, 'Is this your Koku?' Yemi, lovingly picking him up, shouts, 'Yes!' Yemi thanks all those who had taken care of Koku.

Reading this story brings back memories of our childhood, the relationships in the village, uncles and aunts, grandparents, siblings, everyone and how these relationships bring comfort.

It is true that it takes a whole village to raise a child. The village contributes to a lot more, such as when there are weddings. A daughter or son belongs to the village, and every family in the village supports them by giving money for their wedding. At the wedding of a daughter, gifts and household items are presented by the whole village.

The story is filled with limitless emotions. The entire landscape of the village in the story has been etched by the author through words and the illustrator through pictures. It is a remarkable story, woven with human concerns, that introduces us to the soul of rural life steeped in the values of solidarity, care and a sense of belonging.

This story will resonate with all readers who have experienced village life and are now engaged in spreading the fragrance of its values in urban spaces.

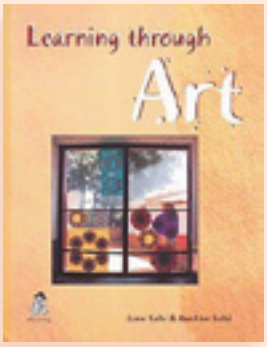
Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

Anita Dhyani is an Assistant Teacher at a Government Inter-college. She teaches Hindi language. She is interested in reading and writing stories, poems, and essays. Her hobbies include writing for children, travelling and listening to music.

Learning Through Art

Reviewer: Vijay Ravikumar

Learning Through Art is a collection of activities that primary school teachers can use to bring art into their classrooms. These activities are beautifully designed and use easily accessible resources, including natural materials like plants and sticks and waste materials like old newspapers. Moreover, the activities are simple for teachers to conduct and seem like a lot of fun!



Author: Jane Sahi

Illustrator: Roshan Sahi

Recommended for teachers

Print length: 172 pages

Language: English, Hindi, Kannada

Publisher: Eklavya Publication

The book employs a wide definition of art, including games, stories and observational exercises, in addition to drawing, painting, and sculpting. Throughout the book, children's sensory experience of the world is emphasised, and art is fundamentally an exploration and expression of this experience. Indeed, our immediate sensory experience is a bridge between the self and the world around us – our family, neighbourhood, and even our society – and by developing our observational skills, we can begin to make sense of it. For example, an early series of activities focuses on understanding the role of water in our lives.

The first activity has children describe their experiences in the rain and then draw something they can think of in connection with the rain. A second activity has them discuss the sources and usages of water in their lives, as well as how it is stored, through both storytelling and drawing.

A third activity introduces water as a material for making art, for example, mixing it with paint and letting it flow over a wax crayon rubbing. The fourth and final activity explores how materials like stones and leaves behave when dropped into a small water body, followed by a challenge: build a boat (with sticks or paper) that can carry a small stone across the water body.

Other units explore concepts like air, space, light, food, and shelter, while also exploring a range of physical materials in highly creative ways.

The final two chapters focus on activities that relate more directly to mathematical and language skills. But even these activities do not view art as an instrument of achieving an end, but rather as a crucial link between a child's inner life

and the outer world. For example, the chapter on mathematical activities is great for developing a sense of pattern and symmetry, through activities that emphasise working with sticks, stones, and leaves, observing patterns around them, and responding with patterns of their own.

The chapter on language focuses on storytelling, with activities aimed at helping students build their own stories, beginning with their experiences in their homes. In addition, there are activities around responding to (and empathising with) other people's stories – whether they are classmates or more distant people. Finally, there are also activities for enacting stories using puppetry and masks.

Although the bulk of the book is a detailed collection of activities for students, there is a final chapter on discussion-based activities for teachers, around questions like 'What is the purpose of art in education?', and 'Are all children good at art?'. There are no simple answers to these questions, but the activities help us, as teachers, to question our own assumptions and stimulate our imaginations about what is possible in a classroom.

Early in the book, the author discusses the phenomenal level of concentration that young children have as they explore the world with their senses, whether it is playing with a cardboard box, reading a picture book, or drawing a picture of their own. The activities in *Learning Through Art* are very useful in harnessing this power of concentration and channelling it into activities that can develop confidence and (perhaps) wisdom in small children. The book would be a valuable resource for anyone working with children.

Vijay Ravikumar is faculty (mathematics) at Azim Premji University. He has worked as a freelance illustrator and theatre artist. Before the pandemic, he used to conduct art classes for children in Urur Olcott Kuppam, a fishing village in Chennai.

Let's do Some Activities!

Fun with riddles

This activity can be conducted with students from classes IV to VI. Four to five groups comprising three to five students each can be formed to conduct this activity in class.

Students sit in their groups and discuss the riddles they know with one another. Each group must think of at least five riddles. They also need to decide amongst themselves who will represent them.

The student who is representing *Group 1* will give a riddle to the students of *Group 2*. Any member of *Group 2* can attempt to solve it. Each group will get only two minutes to give the correct answer. If the answer is correct, all groups will scout clap – one-two, one-two-three – thrice loudly in rhythm for that group.

Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

When a group fails to answer correctly, the students from the group that has given them the riddle can give them some clues.

Next, the representative of *Group 2* will give a riddle to *Group 3*, and like this, the game continues. The last group will give a riddle to *Group 1*.

As a next step, children can talk to adults at home and in the neighbourhood to learn new riddles from them or create new riddles on their own to use in the next riddle-solving game.

This activity is shared by Dharampal Gangwar, Headmaster, State Primary School, Haldipachpeda, Khatima, Uddham Singh Nagar district, Uddham Singh Nagar. He has been conducting this activity in his school and has also created an active environment for teaching and learning.

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

What's cooking?

Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

This activity can be conducted with students of class IV and above.

Begin by showing the students a video of a simple dish being cooked. Follow this up with a discussion about the ingredients and the process – chopping, kneading, cooking, adding spices, etc. Present scenarios of what can happen if the correct process is not followed.

Form groups of four to five students and ask each group to select their favourite dish. Each group has to write down the process of cooking their favourite dish. Next, each group has to create a recipe card with the following elements:

- A title for the recipe
- Ingredients and their measures (by cups or spoons)
- A stepwise method of making the dish in simple sentences

Give each group an A4 size chart paper to create their recipe card and decorate it with colourful writing, drawings, pictures, etc. Display all the recipe cards in the classroom for everyone to see.

This activity helps students to observe, record and present processes in the correct order and pay attention to minor details. It encourages collaboration and cooperation with team members.

This activity has been contributed by Chandrika Murlidhar, a member of the Communications and Publications team at the Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. She is also a faculty at the University with an interest in science education.

Pick and separate

All the students in the class can participate in this activity together. This activity can also be done in small groups.

Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

Ask all the students to go out of the classroom and collect 10 to 15 things from the surroundings. Tell them clearly not to break anything or remove important things from anywhere.

First stage*:* When students come back with collected materials, ask them to sort them. In the first stage, ask them to keep the items in separate sets based on their primary material. For example, make a separate set for things made up of plastic, metal, wood, or clay. Or you can ask them to sort out the things based on their shape. For instance, make separate groups for cylindrical, round, square or flat things. You can also ask them to group the objects according to colour or make separate groups for light and heavy things, respectively. All these things can be done either on the floor or outside on the field.

Second stage: After the first stage is completed, mix all the collected objects. Form four to five different groups of students, and give them each a property of the items. For example, ask one group to collect water-soluble objects. Ask another group to select things that can easily burn. A third group can be asked to choose all the things that are grown on trees, and the fourth group can be asked to sort out things that can be reused.

While students are trying to sort objects based on their properties, they might have confusion regarding the substances that can fit into more than one groups. In such cases, let the students discuss and ask questions, and teachers should help them with the answers.

This activity was suggested by Anil Singh from Bhopal. He is associated with Parag's Library Educator course as a faculty. Primary education has been his main field of work for the last 15 years.

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

We've Got mail!

Menstruation in girls: Necessary sensitivity among teachers, schools, and society

Reading Rubina Khan's article 'Menstruation in Girls – How it Impacts Their Learning' in this issue made me realise that we often look at inclusion only in the context of children with special needs, even though a much larger group, considered 'normal,' faces challenges of a different nature. Adolescent girls form one such significant group, which struggles every month, for three to five days, due to the difficulties of menstruation and the outdated societal beliefs surrounding it.

The girls' dilemmas and the teachers' and school administrations' insensitivity towards this issue, revealed through Rubina's conversations with the girls clearly show that without addressing this matter properly, the conversation on inclusion will remain incomplete.

Anil Singh, Faculty, Parag Library Educator Course, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

A school for all, built through unmatched efforts

In Kusum Lata Sharma's piece, 'The school belongs to everyone…,' in the 'Pages from Teachers' Diaries' column, the efforts described to bring children from diverse social backgrounds together are remarkable. The author's attempts to sit and eat with the children, uniting them without using any verbal instructions, is commendable. This new column will provide information about the academic and non-academic experiences of teachers in classrooms and schools. It is a unique initiative. Kudos to the *Pathshala* team for presenting the new issue in a fresh format.

Chhaya, Assistant Teacher, Primary School Aurangpur, Mirpur Lakhavati, Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh

Enjoyed 'In the Company of Books' and 'Pages from Teachers' Diaries'

Pathshala's special issue on inclusive education is worth reading in light of the New Education Policy 2020. The cover image itself compels readers to pause and reflect.

Madhu Kushwaha's article 'Enrolment Alone Is Not Enough for Inclusion' should be read by teachers, parents, as well as school administrators alike.

In this issue, I enjoyed the columns In the Company of Books and *Pages from Teachers' Diaries*. Rubina Khan's article on menstruation and its relation to girls' learning is a crucial piece on an important subject. It seems essential to include a complete training module on menstruation in in-service teacher training.

Manohar Chamoli 'Manu,' Government Inter College, Kaleshwar, Pauri, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand

The need for inclusive thinking on menstruation in girls

I found Rubina Khan's article, 'Menstruation in Girls – How it Impacts Their Learning' in this issue to be very important to today's education system. The author's efforts to share her experiences demonstrate how poor menstrual health facilities, lack of products, information (education), and support, negatively impact girls' school attendance, academic performance, and retention. A closer look reveals that several factors affecting a child's education are often invisible but require applying inclusive thinking.

Nidhi Choudhary, Assistant Teacher, Primary School Bangla Puthri, Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh

'I cannot sing, I cannot dance, I cannot act'

This special issue on inclusive education helped me truly understand the real meaning of inclusion. The articles aided in changing the narrow definition of inclusiveness, in which we associate it only with children who have special needs.

Deepika Jhala and Mamta Singh's articles showed me how a teacher's compassionate behaviour can bring about the expected change. I found Deepika Sharma's 'Teacher's Role in Making the Arts Truly Inclusive' resonated deeply with our

experiences. Since a young age, many of us have believed, 'I can't sing, I can't dance, I can't act,' because these arts are perceived in relation to rigid standards of perfection. That's how many art forms never become a part of our lives. Perhaps none of us could experience inclusive education in the truest sense. Inclusive thought creates hope for future generations.

Parul Batra Duggal, Azim Premji Foundation, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

'Let's do Some Activities' – A crucial initiative

The magazine, in its new format, looks fantastic, and I found this special issue fascinating and valuable in many ways. We had not been able to consider inclusion in education in such a comprehensive and nuanced context. The articles, enriched with experiences and examples, are all worth reading. In particular, I liked the articles by Jayna Jagani and Reema Kaur, Vishnu Gopal, Mamta Singh, and Rubina Khan. The newly introduced columns, such as 'Teachers Inspiring Hope,' 'In the Company of Books' and 'Pages from Teachers' Diaries', were also meaningful, and I enjoyed reading them. The issue strengthened my belief in the possibilities of improving education. The 'Let's do Some Activities' appears to be a crucial initiative, which is directly aiding classroom learning.

Niketa Tiwari, Government Senior Secondary School, Kiran Path, Mansarovar, Jaipur, Rajasthan

We did the 'Inclusive Musical Chairs' Activity

I could deeply relate to Madhumalti's 'Teach children the way they want to learn' in Issue 22 of *Pathshala*. The piece mentioned that when it comes to libraries, we should understand the kind of books children need and make those available to them. Our school has this facility, there are many kinds of books in the library, which children can read according to their interest. Some children choose storybooks, some choose books with more pictures. I have also seen some children draw pictures they like in their notebooks. I also tried the music activity given in the section 'Let's do Some Activities' at my school. The children thoroughly enjoyed it.

Suchandra Rudra, Assistant Teacher, GMS Chadri Ranchi-1, Jharkhand

The new issue: Attractive presentation

Issue 22 of *Pathshala* is fabulous. It inspires us to think about and understand inclusion in a holistic way. The articles 'Enrolment Alone is Not Enough for Inclusion' and 'Right to Learn is Equal for All' were particularly impactful. Other regular columns and articles were also excellent. The design and presentation were attractive. Congratulations to the editorial team.

Rani Kumari, Middle School Jagsu Jamalpur, Darbhanga, Bihar

A child's caste, attire, marks and physique should not be a cause for discrimination

In Mamta Singh's article 'Affection and Equality Facilitate Learning in Students' in Issue 22, I read the story of a school in Uttar Pradesh, which seemed no different from my home state, Chhattisgarh. The girl in the story comes from a tribal community, and for her, sitting and eating with other children in school is not an easy task at all. In my classroom, I will ensure that a child's caste, attire, academic performance, or physique do not become grounds for discrimination.

Until now, my understanding of inclusion was limited to children with physical or mental disabilities. But the problem is not limited to that. This issue has expanded my perspective.

Archana Chandrakar, Government Primary School, Chagorabhata, Dharsiwa (Raipur Urban), Raipur, Chhattisgarh

A comprehensive issue on an essential topic

The *Pathshala* special issue on inclusive education is a well-rounded edition on an important subject. I enjoyed Madhu Kushwaha's article. The piece by Sujata Ravi and Dasanna Mareddy were also highly sensitive and practical. In her article, Rubina Khan has linked the common problem of menstruation in girls, which often goes unnoticed, with the processes of teaching with great sensitivity, which provides a new perspective on understanding menstruation. I found the columns 'Pages from Teachers' Diaries' and 'In the Company of Books' interesting.

Arun Shankar Rai, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

Curiosity about knowing more about inclusion increased

Reading the *Pathshala* special issue on inclusive education greatly expanded my understanding. I learnt many new things from it. Such topics are rarely discussed in such simple and accessible language. R Lalmachhuani's article sparked my curiosity to learn more about this subject.

Chetna Gola, Program Producer, National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities, Dehradun, Uttarakhand

Prompted me to reassess my understanding of art

After reading Deepika Sharma's article 'Role of Teachers in Making the Arts Truly Inclusive' in the December 2024 issue of *Pathshala*, I felt the need to reassess my own understanding of art. I realised that in our classrooms, art is often limited to just drawing or colouring pictures. This article, however, elaborated on the inclusive forms of art and the various methods of engaging children in collective artistic activities, which makes this an extremely useful read.

Lucky Singh, Assistant Teacher, Composite School, Jaddapur, Balrampur, Uttar Pradesh

Teachers should understand children's problems and support them

Reading the story of Harshita and Mayur in Jayna Jagani and Reema Kaur's article 'Small Steps to Inclusive Practices' (Issue 22) made me see how teacher Babita understood the needs of both children and helped them become part of the learning process. This aspect of learning is particularly useful for me, as I have two children in my class who do not engage in reading or writing at all and remain passive throughout the lessons. I often feel frustrated with them. This article made it clear that an important aspect of including such children in the classroom for learning is that the teacher understands their problems and provides help according to their needs.

Inclusion is not just about a child being mentally or physically challenged. There are many classroom dynamics that can hinder a child's participation, and it is important to notice and address them.

Samsun Nisha, Government Primary School, Tilak Nagar, Gudiyari, Dharsiwa, Raipur (Urban), Chhattisgarh

Inclusion: An attempt to understand at an emotional level

I received *Pathshala*'s special issue on inclusive education. Though reading the soft copy was a bit difficult, the issue was so well curated and focused on such an important topic that I had no option but to keep reading. I particularly liked the articles by Mamta Singh, Deepika Jhala, Jayna Jagani, and Reema Kaur, which attempt to understand inclusion at an emotional level; otherwise, we often tend to address inclusion only at a superficial level. Sections like 'Teachers Inspiring Hope,' 'Pages from Teachers' Diaries,' and the activities section contribute significantly to making this magazine stand out as a meaningful effort.

Shashank Shekhar, Adarsh High School, Badhupar, Kaimur, Bihar

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

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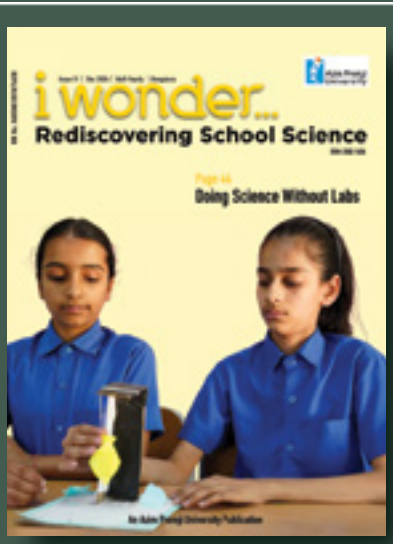

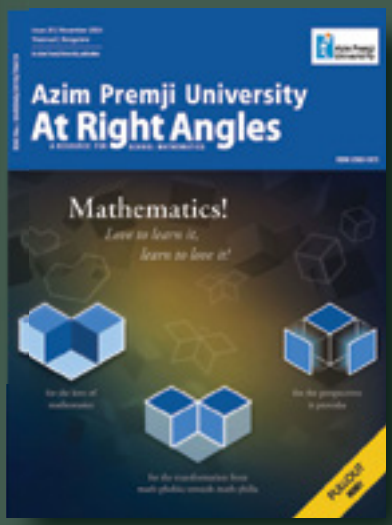

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