

A Day at an Anganwadi | Notes from my Visit

Rekha Chauhan

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

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

The children started arriving at the *Anganwadi* one by one. As each child entered, the teacher would call out their name and greet them with a 'Good morning!' Each child responded with a 'Good morning!' and proceeded to the 'Pretend Play Corner'.¹ They selected their play materials and brought them to play on the neatly laid-

out mats. This is a wonderful activity because children eagerly come to the *Anganwadi* early to pick their favourite toys to play with. When those who arrive later ask for toys, children share them. After playing, each child carefully places the toys back in their place. This activity helps children to naturally develop skills, such as sharing, choosing and organising objects, assisting others who struggle to do these tasks, and taking responsibility for their belongings.

Start of the day

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



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

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

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



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

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Stepping out

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

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

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

Introducing a concept

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

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

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

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

Activity-based learning

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

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

Later, the teacher called a few of the slightly older children and asked them to pick and give her the number of stones she mentioned (fewer than five) from a box of stones placed in front of her. The children picked exactly the

number she asked for - 3, 2, 1, 4, and so on - and placed them in her hand. Through this activity, the children got a chance to revise the numbers they had learned.

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



Figure 3. The wonder of learning something new.

Creative activity

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

Story time

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

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

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

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

Nutritious midday meal

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

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

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My takeaways

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

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

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

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

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



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

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