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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.

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

Teachers brimming with positive energy employ various teaching methods to help students learn and make the school a joyful place for them. Observing such teachers, one often wonders: What is the source of their hopeful energy? Through continuous conversations with them and by observing their classroom processes, the answer which emerged is — students' learning. While students' inability to learn causes concerns, their learning brings a profound sense of satisfaction to teachers. This satisfaction encourages them to constantly improve themselves and keep exploring new and effective ways of teaching.

Pathshala Beehtar aur Bahar attempts to collate and share classroom experiences of such teachers and practitioners from across the country. We are happy that the family of committed writers and discerning readers of the magazine continues to grow. We are encouraged by your responses to the articles published. It is heartening to know that these are able to support you in your classroom processes.

In this issue of *Pathshala*, we have curated experience-based empirical material that is useful for teaching. You will read about a common concern in schools: although students move to higher classes, their proficiency levels often do not match the expected standards of earlier grades. How can teachers respond to and address the challenges that arise in such situations? One article attempts to identify and solve a problem where students are able to answer when questions are asked orally but get confused when questions appear in written form. A teacher shares some experiences on how teaching with a structured lesson plan proves beneficial. You will also find a few examples of how peer learning plays an effective role in student learning. As always, one article focuses on early childhood education, where we learn about the efforts that helped an *Anganwadi* become a better learning centre. Along with many other such articles, the issue has all the regular columns.

We hope that you will find this issue as important and relevant as the previous ones. Please do share your thoughts and feedback with us. If an article published in *Pathshala* has played a supportive role in your classroom teaching, we would be glad to hear about it.

Keep reading, stay connected!

With best wishes,

Pratibha Katiyar
Chief Editor

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

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Developing Language Proficiency While Working Across Diverse Subjects

Shweta Vishwakarma

Language learning is not confined only to the language classroom; other subjects, such as science, social studies, or mathematics, also facilitate language learning. This article suggests experiential approaches to enhance the development of reading and writing skills, particularly among upper-primary students who have not been able to acquire the expected level of language competencies.

The main objective of language teaching at the primary level is to develop foundational skills in students. It is expected that by the time students reach the upper-primary level, their reading and writing abilities will be fully developed. However, most of the students do not acquire adequate skills in reading, comprehension, and writing even by the upper-primary level. Owing to this, besides language development, students face difficulties in understanding concepts, connecting with the text, and working on exercises in subjects, such as social studies, mathematics, and science. This creates obstacles to learning at their levels and prevents them from progressing. Teachers at the upper-primary level often face challenges, such as:

- How should they work on subject-specific concepts and competencies with students who struggle with reading and writing?
- Should they devote additional time to building foundational reading and writing skills? If they do this, then these students will fall behind in grade-level subject concepts and skills.
- Should they focus primarily on grade-level subject content and competencies? If they do this, students who have difficulties in reading and writing may lag behind in class.

The issue is complex. The question now is: How do we work with the students? What are the approaches that can help them connect meaningfully with the classroom?

In this context, an attempt was made to understand the classroom practices of some upper-primary school teachers and to observe how they are working to overcome these challenges in order to ensure students' learning. Here, we look at certain practices and processes adopted by teachers, illustrated through examples from different subjects, which can be implemented in classrooms.

“ If a child has not acquired the expected foundational skills, it is the teacher’s responsibility to understand their difficulties and provide support tailored to their needs. ”

At the upper-primary level, it becomes essential not only to work separately on reading-writing and subject-specific competencies, but also to carry forward previously acquired skills within regular subject teaching. For this, effective teaching approaches must be explored not only during regular subject classes but also by conducting additional sessions. It is vital to understand that students who are facing learning-related challenges require planned and systematic support. In such a situation, if a child has not yet acquired the expected foundational skills, it is the teacher’s responsibility to understand their difficulties and provide support that is tailored to their needs.

Assessment

Assessment is an effective process for understanding students’ learning levels in the classroom. Along with evaluating language-related competencies, it is equally important to assess where students stand in terms of subject-specific concepts and skills. For instance, can students provide examples based on their surroundings and experiences? Such understanding can help teachers plan their work with students more effectively. For example, while teaching the concept of the ‘Effect of heat in an electric circuit’ in science, a teacher may observe the learning outcomes that a class VIII student is able to achieve related to electric circuits. Can the student independently analyse the effect of heat on an electric circuit? If not, then the teacher may first need to work with the student on understanding the different components of an electric circuit before moving further.

No additional material is required to assess language competencies; this can be done during regular subject teaching itself. Let us look at some approaches suggested by a teacher:

- During discussions based on a lesson, teachers can ask questions and observe students' responses. This helps in understanding whether students are only able to answer fact-based questions or can clearly explain concepts as well.
- Teachers can give opportunities to students to read a text individually or in a group. During this process, the teacher can observe their reading progress: who reads fluently, who faces difficulties, and whether students are able to identify and explain the main ideas of the text.
- Students can be asked to present a topic or concept through drawings, flowcharts, or similar visual formats, and then write a description of it. For example, present pointers or illustrate how an electric circuit works when a switch is turned on, or how the circulatory system works.

In addition, students' understanding can also be assessed through projects, presentations, question-answer discussions, and similar activities, while continuously observing their participation and responses.

Compared to the primary stage, by the time students reach the upper-primary level, their experiences and skills have developed to a certain extent. Even if a child is not yet proficient in reading and writing, their ability to understand and learn concepts tends to improve. Subject-based assessment can, therefore, be designed around key concepts or themes of the subject. For this, it will be useful for teachers to clearly identify grade-appropriate expectations and learning outcomes related to the concept or theme. Then, it becomes possible to form groups based on the assessment and develop a teaching plan.

From everyday language to the language of the subject

At the upper-primary level, general language proficiency alone is not sufficient, as each subject has its own specific language and vocabulary. Therefore, while working with students, it is important to move gradually from everyday language towards subject-specific language and terminology, using familiar language as a foundation. This acts as a bridge for students to understand subject-specific concepts. It also supports the

“ While working with students, it is important to move gradually from everyday language towards subject-specific language and terminology. ”

development of oral expression as well as reading comprehension skills.

For example, teaching about the respiratory system in a science class, the teacher first worked on the vocabulary related to the concept. The teacher connected these subject-specific terms with simple, commonly used words and wrote both everyday language and subject terminology on the board and discussed them in the class.

Later, these vocabulary words are displayed on the classroom wall. Some examples of such vocabulary connections include: linking temperature with the idea of heat; trachea as the breathing tube; larynx as the voice box; magnetic substances as objects attracted by a magnet; circuit as the path through which current flows; energy as the capacity to do work; reflection as light bouncing back after striking a surface; refraction as light passing through; and transparent as something that is see-through and so on.

This process was not limited to vocabulary. Along with discussing and understanding the lesson, students were given multiple opportunities to read and write. For students who faced difficulties in reading and writing, their responses to questions were discussed and then written on the board. Students were asked to copy them into their notebooks. After teaching the lesson, students were asked short concept-based questions such as:

- If the switch is removed from a circuit, will the bulb glow? Why or why not?
- If a wire is removed from the circuit, what will happen?
- What will happen if the bulb itself is removed?

The answers were written along with classroom discussion. Through this process, understanding the lesson becomes easier, and even those students who are not yet at grade level are able to participate actively in the classroom.

Classroom environment

Materials displayed around students provide repeated opportunities for them to encounter different words and concepts. For students who feel uncomfortable reading extended texts, such materials offer accessible reading experiences. However, it is important that these materials match students' learning levels and needs.

For example, a teacher had displayed on the walls the words that students had learned, placing charts of key vocabulary as they worked on each concept, and presenting concepts through flowcharts.

In the classroom, students were seen reading the written words displayed around them. Through flowcharts, they were able to clearly explain concepts, such as adolescence and electricity. However, this print environment was not limited to wall displays alone.

While teaching the circulatory system, the teacher collaboratively created a large diagram on the floor along with the students, labelled its parts, and worked through the entire process together. Students who struggled with reading and writing were nevertheless able to explain the process with ease and recognise the labelled terms. Here, the teacher emphasised language development alongside subject content and created meaningful opportunities for students to engage in reading.

Use of level-appropriate TLMs

A thoughtful combination of level-appropriate teaching materials and activities helps students progress in their learning. Teaching-learning materials (TLMs) need to be designed or selected based on subject concepts in ways that make learning easier for students.

For example, while working on the concept of maps in social science, a map should be available in the classroom

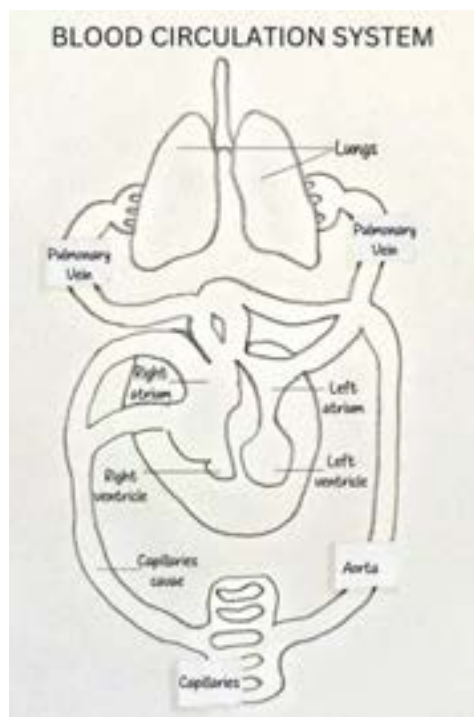


Figure 2: The TLM that shows the diagram of the blood circulation system that the students have to label.

so that foundational activities related to map work can be carried out with students.

These may include understanding directions, identifying the location of different states, and interpreting symbols used on maps, etc. Similarly, with the help of a globe, students can explore concepts, such as Earth's rotation, the time taken for one rotation, and the occurrence of day and night. The more opportunities these materials provide for hands-on engagement, the more students develop both conceptual understanding and reading skills simultaneously.

It is important to provide adequate opportunities for reading and writing with activities, such as using the spelling and structure of a word to match it with the complete word, labelling pictures, and so on.

An example from a science classroom is shown in Figure 2. In this TLM, a picture of the circulatory system is drawn along with related vocabulary. There are also slips with the names of the organs for the students to match and place on the picture. In the next activity, students can be given blank slips on which they have to write the organ names and place them on the appropriate parts in the picture.

Project-based tasks

Through project-based work, students can be actively engaged in the processes of reading, understanding, and explaining a lesson. Textbooks provide many opportunities through which students can be connected to learning processes beyond the classroom. It is, of course, important to ensure that tasks related to any subject provide opportunities for expression not only through oral communication but also through writing, drawings, and the use of words and visuals. It is also possible to design a single task in a way that integrates concepts from different subjects. Such a planned and systematic approach can help strengthen both language

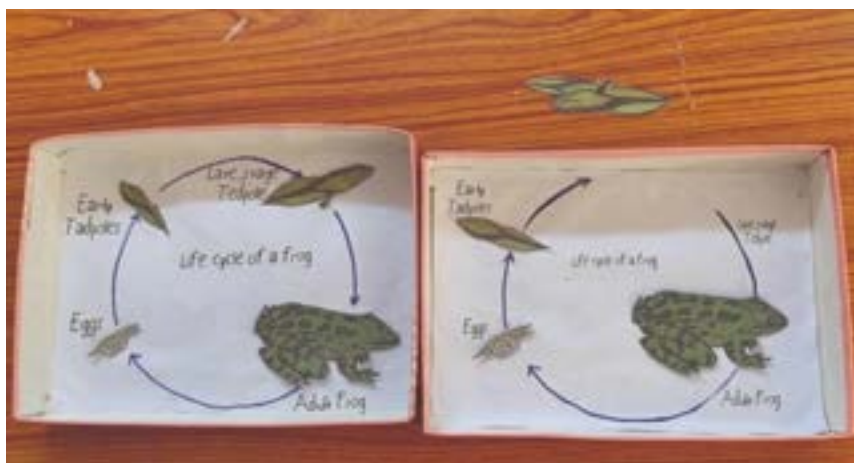


Figure 3: Another TLM for a similar exercise to explain the life cycle of a frog.

Name of the object	Material which the object is made of (Plastic/Wood/Glass/Iron/Other)	Will it be attracted by magnet? (Yes/No)	
		Prediction	Observation
Pencil	Wood	No	No
Erase	Rubber	No	No
Scale	Iron	Yes	Yes
Scale	Plastic	No	No
Clas	Cloth	No	No
Scissors	Iron	Yes	Yes
Bar	Plastic	No	No
Can	Iron	No	No
Car	Wood	Yes	No
Tiffin	Plastic	No	No

Figure 4: A classroom exercise on identifying objects, the metals they are made of, and whether they will be attracted by a magnet or not.

competencies and subject-related concepts and skills simultaneously. (See Table 1 below)

Integration of content and reading-writing skills

In all the above examples, establishing coordination between subject content and the development of reading-writing competencies is of utmost importance. During classroom teaching, the following points can be incorporated into planning while working with students who experience challenges in reading and writing:

- Teachers can observe and identify tasks a child can complete independently while understanding a concept. For example, while working on a lesson,

writing key words on the board, asking students to locate words in the textbook and write them down, and engaging students in similar activities can support comprehension.

- Efforts can be made to include certain activities in mixed groups, where students of different learning levels work together on a task. For instance, discussing possible answers to questions and writing them collectively, expressing ideas in written form after discussing a picture, reading a text collaboratively, or preparing lists together.
- Students' work may also be differentiated according to learning levels. Those who face difficulties in writing can be encouraged to label pictures, express ideas through drawings, oral responses, or other modes of expression, and gradually be supported in bringing these expressions into written form. Students who are able to read and write independently can be included in groups in ways that enable them to support and assist their peers.

As teachers, it is equally important to understand how the content of a lesson can be taught in simpler and more accessible ways. For example, presenting the key points of a lesson on the board and explaining concepts through diagrams, tables, and visual representations can help make the subject matter more comprehensible.

It is essential to give special attention to students who struggle with reading and writing, to include them in every classroom process, and to create opportunities that gradually enable them to develop language competencies.

Table 1: Examples of tasks that strengthen both language and subject-related skills.

Theme	Science	Social Studies	Connection with Language
Soil and Crops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect information about the different types of soil available in one's surroundings. • Gather information about the changes that occur in soil. • Understand the fertility levels of different types of soil. • Collect information about crops that grow locally and prepare a list of food items made from them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand different types of soil and collect information about which crops are grown in which type of soil. • Explore which types of soil are found in different regions, such as brown soil, rocky soil, red soil, and black soil and investigate the reasons behind this. • Gather information about crops, understand crop cycles, and prepare lists based on the findings. • Collect information about the crops grown in one's city or local region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the information related to the given task in written form. • Write about the changes that occur in soil, in your own words. • Find a poem related to soil, read it and recite it in class.

Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write about the different components related to food and collect information on which nutrients are obtained from which foods. Create a food mile map, tracing the journey of food from the field to the plate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the different types of food items that people eat? Collect information about the kinds of food consumed in different regions, such as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present the assigned task in written form. Write a recipe for any one dish, such as <i>dal-baati</i>.
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the water cycle, that is, where water comes from, by discussing it with people at your home or in the surrounding community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect information about the water sources available in the local area, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How was the lake formed? How old is it? How was the stepwell constructed? Who built it? And how old it is, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw and label a diagram of the water cycle. Students who can read and write can describe the process of the water cycle in detail. Gather information about water sources, their uses, and their history, and write about them in one's own words. Present the writing by reading it aloud in class. Find a song related to water, present it orally, and write it down.
Metals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a list of materials or utensils available in one's surroundings, such as a ball, hammer, spoon, bottle, earthen pot, pitcher, etc. Identify which materials are made from which metals, and find out which metals are attracted to a magnet, and which are not, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect information about household utensils, their structure, the metals used, their uses, and their historical contexts. For example: Which types of metal utensils were commonly used in the past and which metals are more commonly used today? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write, in one's own words, the information collected through the task. Write about the structure and uses of any one selected material or object. Write the history of utensils in the form of a story.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Dawangara Umat Vetter: Simran Luthra



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How Reflective Teachers Create Lively Classrooms

P Sathishkumar

'Reflective practice' can seem abstract, thereby difficult and even unnecessary. Reflection, at its core, is simply about paying attention to our own teaching: what worked, what did not, and why. When teachers reflect, they become more aware, more responsive, and more confident. Their classrooms become spaces of curiosity.



Figure 1: Students observing and drawing how shadows move every hour under the sun. (This is an AI-assisted image.)

During my work with primary school teachers, I have seen how deeply they care about their students, yet how little time they have to reflect on their own teaching methods. Between lesson plans, paperwork, and managing large classes, reflection often feels like a luxury. On the other hand, small moments of reflection—writing a few lines in a notebook, a lunchtime discussion with a colleague, or even a quiet thought while sitting in the staffroom after class—can bring real change in a teacher's confidence and classroom practice.

A few years ago, during a workshop with teachers, I met Ms Rahana, a class III teacher, who sat at the back, quietly listening. During one session, I instructed the teachers to recall a classroom moment that had stayed with them; something that went unexpectedly well or did not go as planned. Ms Rahana hesitated, then shared a story about

an activity in a science classroom in which her students struggled to understand how shadows changed as the position of the sun changed.

'First, I thought they had not listened carefully,' she said, 'but then, I realised I had shown it too quickly.' As she reflected further, she explained that she had demonstrated the activity once and moved on, without giving children time to observe how the shadow changed at different times of the day. The children were expected to understand a concept that required slow observation and repeated engagement. This realisation helped her see that the difficulty was not with the children's attention, but with the way the activity was structured.

When I asked what she would do differently the next time if the same lesson is taught, she smiled and said, 'I would

let them observe and draw their shadows under the Sun every hour for a better understanding.’

That moment stayed with me. It was not just a story about a science lesson; it was about a teacher reflecting on her own practice clearly, without judgment, with just curiosity. A week later, Ms Rahana sent me some photos of drawings her students had made. When I saw them, I could imagine the students’ excitement in drawing the outlines of their shadows on the ground.

What reflection really means

‘Reflective practice’ can seem abstract, thereby difficult and even unnecessary. Reflection, at its core, is simply about paying attention to our own teaching: what worked, what did not, and why. Teachers can do this simply by asking themselves the following questions:

- What surprised me or made me think?
- What will I try differently next time?
- What did I notice in my classroom today?

These questions take just about five minutes for us to respond to ourselves. When teachers write down their responses regularly in their diaries, they begin to notice patterns:

- Which activities engage children
- When do they lose attention
- How simple changes can make a big difference

Another powerful form of reflection happens when teachers share their classroom experiences with one another. During a cluster-level meeting, I asked teachers to bring a short story or example from their classrooms. One teacher, Ramesh, spoke about how he encouraged students to write letters to their favourite animals after a lesson on wildlife. The idea made the class lively, he said, and even the quiet students participated.

When Ramesh shared this, another teacher, Suma, said she tried a similar activity in her class—asking her students to write letters to trees on the school ground. Soon, the discussion grew into a lively exchange of ideas. The energy in the room changed: teachers were no longer active listeners to the trainer; they were learning from one another.

That day reminded me that reflection does not always have to be a solitary activity or practice. When teachers speak openly about their experiences — successes and failures alike—they build a shared pool of wisdom that no textbook or manual can replace.

“ When teachers speak openly about their experiences — successes and failures alike—they build a shared pool of wisdom that no textbook or manual can replace. ”

How teacher educators can help

Reflection is not always easy. Teachers feel they have no time or that the school does not encourage open discussions. Some teachers feel that admitting their mistakes might be seen as a weakness. This is exactly why reflection matters and needs to be supported. It gives teachers ownership over their learning. It turns everyday classroom moments into opportunities for learning and, thereby, personal growth.

For example, a teacher may realise after a lesson that only a few children answered questions while others remained silent. Reflecting on this, the teacher may decide to use pair discussion or group work the next day so that more children get a chance to speak. Such small changes, rooted in reflection, directly improve student participation and understanding. When a teacher takes five minutes after class to ask: ‘What did my students really learn today?’ it strengthens the entire teaching-learning process.

The role of the teacher educator is not to ‘train’ teachers in the traditional sense, but to create conditions where they feel safe to think and talk about their practices. During school visits, I begin by simply asking, ‘Tell me about something that went well in your class this week.’

This simple question opens up rich conversations. Teachers talk about their ‘aha’ moments, such as a shy child answering confidently, a group activity that turned out well, or a creative display made from old charts. From there, we slowly move to what did not go so well, and what could be tried next. For instance, a teacher may share that a worksheet-based activity did not engage students, leading to restlessness. Through discussion, the teacher might decide to replace it with a hands-on task or a discussion-based approach the next time. Another teacher may realise that instructions were unclear and decide to model the task more explicitly in future lessons.

Reflection needs to be supported. We need to help teachers learn from their own experience. It is not an instructional practice.

Reflection as a habit

Over the years, I have seen teachers who once resisted reflection begin to embrace it. Some teachers maintain diaries where they jot down two or three lines every day. Others form small groups that meet at specific intervals to share classroom stories. A few teachers encourage their students to reflect by asking them, 'What did you enjoy in your learning today?'

Reflection slowly becomes part of the school culture, where teachers begin to look forward to sharing their experiences. This happens when reflection is given space during staff meetings, cluster meetings, or informal conversations, and when teachers feel safe to speak without fear of judgment. Over time, teachers begin to see reflection not as an additional task, but as a natural part of their work. Classrooms become more experimental, more alive.

Closing thoughts

In one of my workshops, I asked Ms Magathi, a teacher of class IV, how her class was going. She said, 'I keep writing about my lessons. When I read my old notes, I see how much I've changed.' She explained that earlier she depended heavily on textbooks and teacher talk, but over time, her notes showed a shift towards more student

“ Reflection does not always have to be a solitary activity or practice. When teachers speak openly about their experiences—successes and failures alike—they build a shared pool of wisdom that no textbook or manual can replace. ”

interaction, group activities, and questioning. This helped her recognise her own professional growth. Her words captured the spirit of reflection perfectly—it is not about being perfect, but about noticing growth.

When teachers reflect, they become more aware, more responsive, and more confident. Their classrooms become spaces of curiosity. Reflection does not need special time or tools; it only needs attention and honesty.

Teachers carry countless stories—of lessons that worked beautifully, and of those that could have been better. Within these stories lie the seeds of professional growth. Reflection is a quiet conversation with oneself; an act of pausing and learning. It may be a note at the end of the day, a chat with a colleague, or a question asked in stillness; every moment of reflection strengthens the teacher from within.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Dawangara Umat Vetter: Simran Luthra



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Eco Clubs: Nurturing Environmental Awareness

Kirti Lamba

Eco Clubs is a significant Government of India initiative designed to enhance environmental awareness among students. Students are encouraged to participate in eco-friendly activities, thereby cultivating a sense of responsibility toward nature. This article shares the experiences of one such Eco Club led by a teacher at a Delhi government school.

When classroom lessons connect to students' lived realities, learning becomes meaningful and assured. I attempted to establish this connection in my classes, and the results were surprisingly positive. The class VII Social Science textbook has a chapter titled 'Environment', and the class VIII textbook has one titled 'Resources'. Both chapters offer a rich academic foundation for imparting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) through the formation of an *Eco Club*.

Keeping the context of these two chapters in mind, I introduced LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) to my students. As part of this initiative, I formed an 'Eco Club' in the school, now known as 'Eco Club for Mission LiFE.' These 'eco clubs' nurture the values and behaviours essential for

sustainable living and heightened environmental awareness and consciousness among students.

We began with a 'Walk and Talk' session for class VII students to explain the concepts of biotic (living) and abiotic (non-living) components of the environment.

Through the campaign 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' (A Tree in Mother's Name) campaign, students planted a sapling dedicated to their mothers and pledged to care for them.

“ Students were no longer mere passive recipients of facts; they became active agents of change for the environment. ”



Figure 1: Students preparing the soil for plantation.

Some students prepared handmade placards with the names and other scientific information of their plants, placing these with the saplings. The next morning, without any instructions from teachers, students arrived early to school to inspect their plants and water them. The sight of students looking after their plants was beautiful. This was the beginning of a curiosity about nature and the forging of a deep bond with it. Through this experience, students were no longer mere passive recipients of facts; they became active agents of change for the environment. Thus, the club was born out of genuine, collective curiosity and a heartfelt spirit of care for the environment.

Reflecting on ground realities

A discussion on sustainable development within the chapter 'Resources' sparked a debate on the club's purpose. Students began to think deeply and ask questions. For instance, Ayesha from class VII asked, 'Ma'am, why is there a water shortage despite water being a renewable resource? Why this contradiction? We hear about water scarcity in the news every day. Why is that?'

This common-sense question became the centre of a serious reflection in the classroom that day. And later, during a discussion on another lesson, 'Environment', students' curiosity emerged. Ayesha's question turned their attention from a 'textbook theory' to a 'ground reality.' The arc of the classroom discussion moved towards limited availability of freshwater, its unequal geographical distribution and human wastage, eventually connecting directly with one of the core goals of our Eco Club for Mission LiFE - Water Conservation. The students not only took an oath to save water but also made a collective resolution to make it a part of their lifestyle.

Nisha from class VIII asked, 'Ma'am, how can we conserve natural resources?' Nisha's question was a bit innocent and yet very complex, 'So, to keep natural resources safe, should we stop using them?' Ayesha was quick to intervene, 'No, it doesn't mean not using them; it means not misusing them.'

When Nisha seemed confused, Ayesha started explaining to her that throwing waste into rivers is misuse, while using river water for irrigation is 'use'. Drinking water is 'use', but letting it run unnecessarily is 'misuse'.

'Oh, okay! I understand this. I thought it meant something else,' Nisha said, reassured. Watching students question each other and clarify concepts reassured me that the Eco Club was moving in the right direction.



Figure 2: Students' handmade placards with the names and other scientific information about their plants.

Rather than answering the questions directly, I designed activities where they could arrive at the answers on their own. For example, I turned their questions into debate topics. Students began gathering facts on why there is water scarcity. Besides debates, activities included poster making, essay writing, and scripting puppet shows.



Figure 3: Students participate in a debate on the topic of cleaning the Yamuna River.

Emotional curiosity

During a discussion on a biodiversity project on the theme of 'Understanding Skills', Janhvi raised a question that was startling. 'Why don't we see sparrows these days?'

This single question stirred an emotional curiosity in the classroom. We investigated how modern concrete buildings leave no space for birds' nests and radiation from mobile towers are endangering our urban ecosystem. The significance of this collective reflection was affirmed when the conclusions of our discussions were linked to the formal objectives of 'Mission LiFE'.



The students realised that environmental issues and society are deeply interconnected.



Connecting this environmental understanding with the principles of 'Democracy,' students staged a vibrant '*Bal Panchayat*' (children's council) while they were studying the class VI Social Science chapter 'Grassroots Democracy: Local Government in Rural Areas.' Janhvi, wearing a turban, played the role of the 'Sarpanch' (village head), while students acting as the 'general public' raised serious issues, like sanitation and water scarcity. As Sarpanch, Janhvi offered a remarkably mature solution: 'Waste segregation is not just the job of officials; it is the responsibility of every citizen. Along with administration, citizen participation is equally necessary.' The students realised that environmental issues and society are deeply interconnected.

Deepening of understanding

The Eco Club was growing more vibrant with each passing day, and so was the students' understanding. The positive thing was that they were also taking responsibility for the Eco Club on their own. My role was simply to provide direction and motivation. I noticed that gradually, their questions began to acquire a new depth. They began raising questions, discussing among themselves, and then searching through textbooks and library shelves, in an effort to sharpen their thinking and to argue their points coherently. Occasionally, I would nudge them with new questions. This would give them new ideas, and their exploration would begin afresh. For instance, I asked: 'How much water can we really save by just turning off a tap? Or how much energy is saved by merely switching off one light?' To my surprise, the next day, students came back with data. They calculated how much water or energy would be wasted if a tap or switch remained on for an hour. They went further – estimating the wastage if each student in the school wasted a bucket of water, then extending the calculation to the entire city, and even the whole state.

To deepen their understanding, I encouraged them to reflect on managing water resources at the school level, helping them think more concretely and systematically about conservation.

The students' enthusiasm was soaring. They decided on a few themes for the Eco Club:

- Adopting a healthy lifestyle

- Adopting food habits that are in harmony with and dependent on natural resources
- Preventing the wastage of food, electricity, water, and other natural resources
- Stopping the use of plastic, etc.

Students first observed the places where resources were being wasted and where they could be used more efficiently in the school. A few points/questions emerged from these observations:

- A great deal of water is wasted during mid-day meals
- Water consumption can be reduced in the washrooms
- Can electricity wastage be stopped?
- What are the things that are being wasted in school that can be used?
- Are any plants wilting? Is anyone plucking the flowers?

After identifying these issues, the students systematically formed teams and took responsibility for preventing the misuse of resources. To develop a sense of belonging and collective responsibility, groups of environmentally sensitive students were chosen, divided into teams, and a duty chart was prepared. Rotating tasks kept the group active and maintained their energy through a sense of novelty.

The journey ahead

As a coordinator, my job was to help members navigate the initial challenges of starting an Eco Club. Once teachers, community members, and school staff were informed about the club's objectives, they began cooperating for the school's improvement. Members developed time-management and implementation skills by utilising lunch breaks, morning assemblies, and after-school time to ensure their studies were not hindered. Positive reinforcement and thoughtful problem-solving began to yield tangible results. Students started to feel a deeper, more personal connection with the lessons in their textbooks. Some of their curiosities were satisfied, while new ones were being born. As a teacher, their evolving questions and growing inquisitiveness were my deepest reassurance.

Sustaining interest and participation

Sustaining members' enthusiasm over time is undoubtedly a challenge. To meet this, I hold regular meetings and encourage nature walks and open conversations among the members. We have also organised ice-breaking activities, such as 'circle time' and 'adopt and name

“ Students are involved in every decision – from choosing plant types to determining the height of fences made from locally available pipes and sticks. ”

a favourite plant.’ Together, we brainstorm and plan programmes and activities, guided by the principle, ‘every member: an equal voice and an equal opportunity,’ ensuring that everyone has the space to express their ideas.

This sense of shared ownership became especially evident when some students noticed leftover paint after the school building had been painted. Rather than allowing it to be wasted, they collectively decided to use it to beautify the campus. Of their own free will, they set about painting the garden pots with care and beauty. This was not a teacher-assigned ‘task’ but a natural inspiration arising from working together.

Kitchen garden initiative

This initiative provides students with vocational experience while instilling values, such as the dignity of labour and the virtue of patience. Emphasis is placed on learning by doing—from initial gardening tasks to becoming skilled in gardening.

Students first carefully observe the germination of seeds inside a jar in a controlled setting, before planting them in soil. They measure the land area for planting and brainstorm about what must be kept in mind when choosing the right spot. We then divide sections for different teams. Students are involved in every decision – from choosing plant types to determining the height of fences made from locally available pipes and sticks. They learn how to fill the pits gently, rather than pressing the soil hard.

Based on lessons from the germination experiment, a watering schedule is planned. Attention is paid to the quantity of water, the timing of watering, and how frequently to water. They observe critical factors like the emergence of sprouts, plant height, pests, changes in leaf colour, and flowering. Students are told to touch the soil with their fingers to check for moisture before watering, ensuring it is moist but not waterlogged. They gradually learn that just as seeds cannot germinate in conditions of excess or insufficient moisture, the life of plants also depends on a balance of water; there is no universal rule for watering different plants. This is an example of experiential learning through the club’s active intervention, where students learn from direct experience.

Reaping the ‘fruits of their labour’ from the kitchen garden is a wonderful experience for everyone. When students see vegetables growing in their plots, they understand the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. The mud-stained hands of the students are proof of their firm resolution to save the environment.

Initially, we faced a minor problem when some students were plucking flowers just for fun. But this problem was resolved by talking to the students about it during the morning assembly. This was addressed not through a ‘do not pluck flowers’ sermon, but by nurturing an emotional bond between the students and plants. Students began observing the little guests who came to visit the flowers, such as bees, butterflies and realised that by plucking the flowers, plants lose their ability to ‘invite’ their pollinators. Now, they themselves care for the plants without a need for strict rules. During the school’s quiet hours, a pair of parrots and a peacock have been spotted wandering freely through the school premises — a living proof of the growing biodiversity within our school’s ecosystem.

Translated from English to Hindi by Nalini Ravel.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Sandeep Dubey Vetter: Sumati PK



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Why do Students Struggle with Word Problems?

Meenu Paliwal

Teachers often observe that many children can perform addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, but when they read word problems, they cannot determine which operation to use. In this article, we examine why children struggle with word problems.

Is mathematics just about operations and correct answers?

Consider this: A man goes to a shop and makes a purchase of ₹62. He gives a ₹100 note to the shopkeeper. Now, how much money should the shopkeeper return, a child is asked. The child answers this question correctly. Yet why does the same question become difficult for the student when it is asked in the classroom?

The girl students with whom I was working on in maths had left school after class V or VI. After a gap of three to four years, these children had started their education again. For the initial three months, they were being taught maths at the level of class III. These students easily solved the word problems when asked orally, but they had difficulty solving the operations by writing them, and they had an even greater difficulty solving the written word problems by reading them. For example, Rama had some money. Mother gave her ₹38 more. Now Rama has ₹59. How much money did Rama have in the beginning?

The question is, why is teaching maths using word problems necessary in the first place? When students are able to solve the operations correctly, what is the need for questions as word problems? The answer to this lies in the question: 'What are we willing to teach and why?' An article published in *Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar*, Volume No. 11, titled 'Mathematics: Why and How?' discusses all these questions.

“ Word problems provide students with familiar contexts and help them understand the relationships between mathematical quantities. ”

Mathematics is not mere calculation. Mathematics is thinking about the relationships between different quantities, generalising them to form rules and principles, and then applying them to different situations. Word

problems provide students with familiar contexts and help them understand the relationships between mathematical quantities. If the context is familiar, students are able to solve the word problems orally. However, not understanding written word problems has been observed on a large scale.

Often, even the students who read well expect the teacher to tell them what to do. For example, during my visit to a school, a class V student read out the question smoothly: 'Revati distributed toffees in the classroom on



Figure 1: Students engrossed in solving maths problems from the textbook.

her birthday. She had brought 55 toffees with her and gave one each to 42 students. How many toffees is she left with?' After having read the word problem, the child looked at me as if to ask what to do. When I did not help, she reopened the book and began looking at it again. I thought she was reading the word problem again, but she was not. I asked her, 'If you are not reading the word problem again, what are you looking for in the book?' She said that she was looking for the page on which this question was. In the book, all the addition problems were on one page, and all the subtraction problems were on the next page. It was clear that the student was not making an effort to read and understand the question. She was trying to find out whether the question was from the addition or the subtraction chapter to arrive at the correct answer.

Mechanical method of solving problems

Often, students memorise some steps of an operation learnt mechanically in the classroom and keep repeating these steps without thinking. In doing this, they make more mistakes. For example, in *Figure 2*, the child has correctly attempted three questions on division, but in dividing 535 by 5, the answer is written as 17. Children do not make such mistakes in everyday life. In fact, such mistakes are the result of using mechanical methods to solve problems. Children are unable to establish any relationship between numbers when they solve problems using mechanical methods. Further, because of this, they fail to see the connection between maths in school and maths outside the school.

This also develops among students an attitude of just finding out the correct answer and knowing from the teacher whether it is right or wrong. Children begin to feel happy in finding out how many correct answers they have and how many wrong answers others have. You must have often heard children saying, 'Ma'am, I was the first to answer, wasn't I?' or 'Ma'am, my answer is correct, isn't it, and theirs is wrong?' etc. The whole exercise is about who will be the first to answer. Students do not get a chance to solve the question in their own way, so there is no question as to what the students' method of solving the question is. Neither do they get an opportunity to frame new questions and solve

“ Asking questions is a more important ability than answering a question because, if there is no question, how can the attempt to find the answer begin! ”

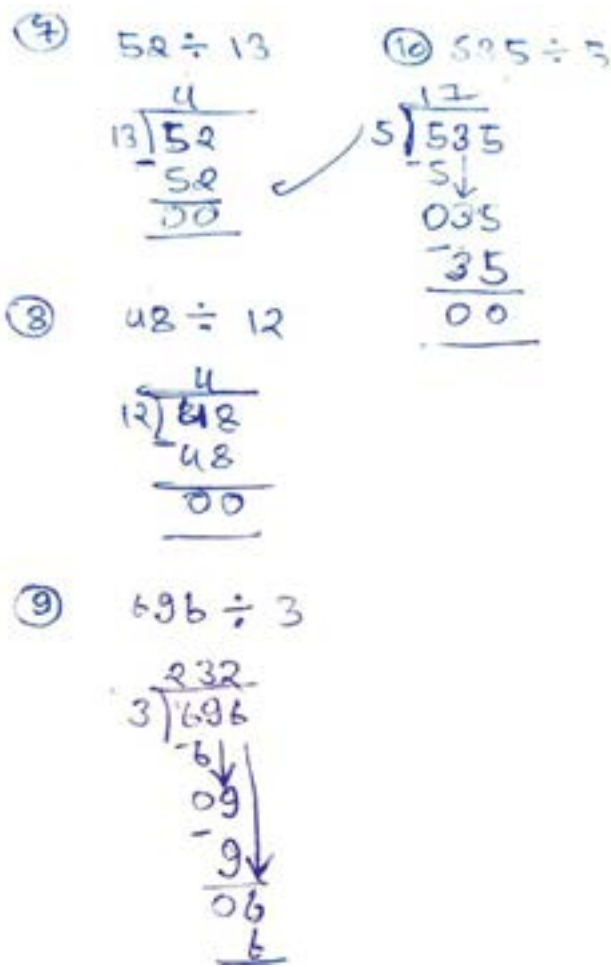


Figure 2: The student solved three sums correctly but got confused in the fourth one.

them. Tackling one question type at a time does not allow enough scope for careful reading before solving. 'What a nice question has been asked!' is rarely heard in a classroom. When I was pursuing my graduation, I had once heard a teacher telling a girl, 'You ask very good questions.' Since then, I have believed that asking questions is a more important ability than answering a question because, if there is no question, how can the attempt to find the answer begin!

I have given the following questions/responses an important place in my class:

1. How did you solve this problem?
2. Do you think this is the correct answer? Why?
3. Can you explain this problem to your friends?
4. Your question is excellent.

Working with these in the classroom requires a lot of time, but I wonder if it is not necessary to spend so much time on what we are trying to teach them? Sometimes, we do feel that there is a time constraint, but if we do not discuss like this, children will never

One shirt has 6 buttons. How many buttons will be required for 122 shirts?

$$\begin{array}{r} 122 \\ \times 6 \\ \hline 732 \end{array}$$

For 122 shirts, 732 buttons will be required.

Figure 4: When presented with a complete question, the child has answered correctly with a complete answer.

complete sentences. In Figure 4, you can see that the same child has written the question correctly and answered in a complete sentence. This helps children think about what is to be done to solve the problem and what has been done, ultimately making mathematics meaningful.

While working in the classroom, I realised that children are sure to make mistakes. Many times, the reasons for these mistakes are not clear at all, and sometimes, even the child cannot tell you how they arrived at the particular answer. No matter how good a method is, if the child is unable to make sense of it or is unable to visualise it, mistakes are inevitable. For example, subtracting large numbers from small numbers.

Understanding or visualising the meaning is possible only when the child is solving the question with a method or algorithm, logically. One thing that we can do for this is to discuss the questions in class each time. Discuss why a given answer is right or wrong, and how they arrived at a particular answer. Give freedom to students to solve a question using different methods and encourage such practices in the classroom. Allow students the space to express their logic of how they arrived at the answers. Allow space for other children to agree or disagree with that logic. If we want to teach children to think, then such practices must find a place in the classroom.

$$\begin{array}{r} 8 \times 5 = \\ 8 + 8 + 8 + 8 + 8 = \\ \begin{array}{r} 16 \quad 16 \\ + 32 \\ 8 \\ \hline 40 \end{array} \end{array}$$

Figure 5: See how a child arrived at the answer to 8×5 .

To learn mathematics, children do not just have to perform operations. Mathematics is far beyond merely finding solutions to problems. It is a way of thinking. Children learn to think by asking themselves questions. They learn what sequence and what lines of thinking will help. While doing so, children will make mistakes, but it will be more meaningful than practising simply to arrive at the correct answers. Children should solve word problems and frame them too. Word problems allow them to engage with practical mathematics, which can help them understand textbook problems as well.

In conclusion

Teaching is complex work. Some people also say that we cannot teach anything to anybody, only provide an environment for learning. Largely, I agree with this because to learn something, thinking or mental processing is essential, which cannot be achieved through pressure, but only through intrinsic motivation. We want children to struggle with questions. Context can be of great help with this. However, context alone may not be sufficient. There are other crucial factors involved as well. For example, the environment in the classroom and at home, the physical and mental health of the students and teacher, children's own interests, inclinations, and so on. Teaching has to be mindful of these factors.

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



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Planning a Story Lesson | My Experience

Arti Pandey

This article offers an empirical account of how to teach a story from a textbook in the classroom through a thoughtfully created lesson plan. The teacher sets the objectives of teaching the story based on learning outcomes and then tries out effective methods to achieve those objectives. The extent of her success, the challenges that come her way, and how she resolves them are all part of the article.



Figure 1: A structured lesson plan helps students better understand, imagine and voice their perspectives.

The story

Munshi Premchand's story *Nadan Dost* (naive friend) portrays the simple and curious nature of children. Keshav and Shyama are siblings. A bird lays eggs in their house. They are eager to know what the eggs look like—wondering how the chicks will hatch, what they will eat, how they will live, and so on. The children take various steps to shield the eggs from the afternoon sun and rain. They even place a bowl of water and rice nearby. In their attempt to care for the baby birds, the children make a grave mistake that they deeply regret. The story connects closely with the children's surroundings. Since birds often build nests in homes, every child in the class can relate to the story at a personal level.

The objectives

This story is included in *Vasant*, the NCERT Hindi textbook for class VI. For my preparation, I read the language teaching outcomes prescribed for this level. Based on these outcomes, I identified a few key objectives while planning the lesson:

- Children would be able to form an emotional connection with the story through discussion.
- They would develop a sensitivity towards animals, birds and nature.
- They would grasp the story in depth and cultivate a curiosity to read more such works.

It was also important that the lesson offered opportunities for children to think, enrich their language skills and vocabulary, nurture their imagination, and relate the story to their own experiences. Another objective was to encourage critical thinking in the narrative, its events and characters.

Discussion on pictures

On the first day, while reading the story, I engaged the children in a discussion about the accompanying illustrations to familiarise them with the narrative. Pointing to the pictures, I asked, 'What do you see here?' The children responded, 'A bird is sitting on her eggs, just like a hen does. She is incubating the eggs so that babies can hatch from them.'

Munmun said, 'The bird is looking around, to make sure no one takes her eggs away.'

Similarly, looking at the second picture, Meenu replied, 'I think the bird is trying to say something. Maybe its eggs are in danger!'

Regarding the third illustration, the children said, 'Keshav and Shyama are climbing up to see, peering at the bird's eggs, even touching them and cleaning around the eggs.'

Rohit said, 'But we should not touch bird eggs. That's what my grandmother says.' Many children agreed with them. They shared how when they see a nest, they feel tempted to go close to it to look inside. Throughout this conversation, the children were beautifully connecting with their surroundings.

Another picture showed two children and their mother. As soon as I asked about it, the children responded, 'The brother and sister must have touched the bird's eggs; their mother is scolding them.' Some children disagreed with this, but Rupali said, 'They are definitely being beaten, mothers do not just explain things like that.'



Figure 2: An illustration from the story (textbook Vasant, NCERT).

“ I created a group of children who were learning slowly, and another group of those who were doing well. Reading together helped them learn by observing each other . ”

Dhania exclaimed, 'We will only know once we read the story. Let us read it!' The children were eager to find out what had really happened. Those who could read fluently said, 'See! I was right. They touched the eggs. They did not even tell their mother.'

Reading the story

I sat with the children who were still learning to read and helped them with letter sounds and syllables. Though they could relate to the story through its pictures, they were struggling to read. I had them read a paragraph repeatedly. Eventually, they became familiar with the letters, words, and sentence structures. They were beginning to guess and read. I created a group of children who were learning slowly, and another group of those who were doing well. Reading together helped them learn by observing each other. The children who could already read and write well read the story with great interest.

Exploring the meanings of new words and idioms

The next day, I read aloud some excerpts from the story to the children, placing special emphasis on explaining the meanings of new and complex words and idioms that appeared in the story. For example, '*karun swar*'. Only Munmun responded, saying, 'To speak in a sad or worried manner.' For '*chehre ka rang udna*', Surendra explained, 'It means to feel scared.' Most children could not explain the meanings because the words seemed a bit complex or unfamiliar to them. When I asked them about the phrase '*bheegi billi*', more than half the class answered, 'to be gentle and innocent'. (In English, it means to cower or crouch down with fear).

The students' responses made it clear that many were still unfamiliar with idiomatic expressions. So,

then I wrote a few idioms on the blackboard, like: *Nau do gyaarah ho jana, Eid ka chaand hona, Aankhon ka taara*, etc. One child promptly contributed a few more: *Naak mein dam karna, Eit ka jawaab pattar se dena*. His familiarity suggested that he had heard these idioms in everyday conversations. When I asked him, he said, 'When I bother Mummy, she says I have made her life miserable.' (He used a Hindi idiom to convey this.) The entire class was thoroughly amused by this response.

I told the students that such expressions are called idioms. Through them, we can convey our thoughts effectively using just a few words. Now, each child was trying to create their own sentences using idioms.

The story and its sequence of events

We continued our discussion on the sequence of events in the story. The children shared that a bird had laid its eggs on the cornice of Keshav and Shyama's house. The children were eager to touch the eggs. They began placing things nearby under various pretexts, and eventually, the eggs broke. Shyam recounted the sequence of events, 'A bird laid eggs at Keshav and Shyama's house. They kept food near the eggs so that the birds would not have to go out in search of food. Keshav and Shyama, driven by curiosity, not only climbed up to look at the eggs but also picked them and placed them on a piece of cloth. The birds abandoned the eggs and the nest. The eggs fell and broke. Keshav and Shyama had acted childishly, and they felt very sorry about it later.'

The setting and period of the story

Now I asked the children, 'In which era would this story have been written? What was the setting, and what would life have been like at that time?'

Someone said, 'It is from the old days in our village.' Raju responded, 'It is from the time when houses were made of tiles and bricks, because more birds make nests in tiled roofs and huts.' Meenu offered a very different answer, 'It might be from our grandparents' time because back then there used to be many trees and fields.' The children gave the question much thought. Dhaniya said, 'Nowadays, we do not even know when and where a bird builds its nest.'

Possibility of a new story emerging

When the discussion turned to how Keshav and Shyama used to talk with each other and ask questions about the nest and the birds, the children gave exciting responses. Munmun said, 'They did not have any friends. If they had, their names would have definitely appeared in the



Figure 3: Another illustration from the story (textbook Vasant, NCERT).

story. If they had talked it over together, perhaps the eggs could have been saved. Sometimes friends give good advice.' Munmun's answer gave the story a new direction. I said to her, 'Imagine, if Keshav and Shyama had a friend, how would the story change?' Munmun replied excitedly, 'Yes, madam, I will think about it and write a new story.'

Characters of the story

When asked, 'What do you learn about Keshav and Shyama from reading this story?' Many children said that the two had realised their mistake. They were very good children who wanted to see the baby birds hatch. They tried to help the bird, but the eggs broke. They felt very sorry about it.

What did you like and what did you not like?

When asked, 'Which part of the story did you like the most?' The children replied, 'We liked the whole story a lot.' Surendra added, 'After the eggs broke, their mother started scolding both the children. At that moment, Shyama sided with her mother—I liked that.' While reading the story, the entire class especially enjoyed the line where Shyama asks Keshav where the chicks have gone, and he answers annoyedly, 'On your head!'

Rohit said, 'Shyama put all the blame on Keshav first, but she later realised her mistake.' Raju said, 'I liked the part where both of them were very happy to see the baby birds, and Shyama kept asking Keshav, 'Bhaiya, how are the babies doing? What will they eat? What do they look like?'

Since the children found so many things to enjoy in the story, it became essential to ask, 'What did you not like in the story?' This would make them think deeply and express their thoughts with imagination. Pratima responded, 'I did not like it at all when the eggs fell and broke.' Many of the children agreed with her.

A different perspective

Kishan's comment completely turned the whole story around. He said, 'The bird should not have dropped the eggs. It should have understood that just as she has babies, Keshav and Shyama are also someone's children. The bird felt so bad just because they touched the eggs that it dropped its own eggs! Because of this, the children were scolded, and Keshav could not sleep at night either.'

This answer sparked a lively discussion in the class about whether this could really happen. The bird only thinks of its nest and its children; it does not have human-like intelligence. Munmun said, 'They are smarter than us. If she had thought that, how would she have even told us?'

Connection with the author

Now it was time to introduce the children to the author of the story. 'Who could have written such a beautiful story?' I asked. The children did not know. I showed them a picture of Munshi Premchand on my phone and said,

'He wrote this story. Have you read any other stories by Premchand?' The children could not recall anything, so I reminded them of the lesson on the story titled *Idgah* from class V. All their faces lit up with joy. It was vital for them to become acquainted with the author so that they could be encouraged to read more of his stories. I will make sure to provide them with those books from our library.

What I discovered and understood

Working on this lesson, I was able to evaluate myself as to how far I had met the intended objectives, what remained unachieved, and what challenges I faced. I observed that most children at an early reading level were unable to participate in the discussion. One child said, 'This story is very long. I do not understand it.' Many other children in the class found it difficult to understand the lesson and express their thoughts. I will need to work with them using NCERT's *Barkha* series and other children's literature.

Through a structured lesson plan, I observed that the children were able to relate to the composition, events and characters of the story. Their emotional connection was evident in their answers. They were forming their own opinions about each event and character. Each child was expressing agreement or disagreement with reasons and justifications. This allowed them to think, understand, imagine and voice their perspectives. At times, their responses were quite surprising. They also showed curiosity about other stories. Working with the children on this was easy and built a special kind of bond between the children and me.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Sejal Arora Vetter: Bhumika Popli



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How Stories Help Children Process Social Realities

Manju Rewaria

Stories are a vital part of childhood. All of us have heard stories from our elders. Stories are often narrated for entertainment. When we tell stories to children in school, the purpose is not only to entertain, but also to develop children's imagination, help them learn about the world, understand similarities across cultures, discuss emotions, and acquire language.



Figure 1: One story can spark countless imaginations.

What we can teach children through narrating a story depends on the selection of the story and the narrator. I discussed a story with children titled '*Jald Bahut Jald*' (soon, very soon), written by Farideh Khalatbari and illustrated by Ali Namvar. I worked on this story with children from four different rural and urban schools. In this article, I present my experiences of working with children on this story.

“ Stories not only provide opportunities to openly discuss issues related to one's surroundings but also help in building a shared understanding; they also give children an opportunity to experience the feelings of the characters in the story. ”

Summary of the story

The story begins with a question from a little girl, asking her *Ammi*, 'How long are we going to stay at *Nani's* (grandmother's) house?'

Ammi replies, 'Until your *Abbu* returns.' The girl's next question is, 'And when will he return?' *Ammi* does not answer, but a shiver runs through her as she remembers an incident of a few years ago. She gets lost in those circumstances and times when she was separated from her husband. The little girl repeatedly asks when her *Abbu* will return. Whether it is an answer to the child's desire to buy a doll or while weaving a carpet, every time *Ammi* responds, 'Very soon'. When the girl returns from school, instead of studying, she whispers to herself that she already knows the answer, so why does she keep asking *Ammi* again and again?

Discussion with children

Presenting the scenario

Clear differences were observed in the discussions on this story with students from rural and urban schools. Clearly, the story is about the separation of a husband and wife. However, the reason for the separation is not revealed in the story. After reading it, the children were asked where the girl's *Abbu* might have gone. Their responses were as follows:

- Her father may be working somewhere far away.
- He could be in the army.
- He may be living away from home.
- Perhaps he had gone to God.
- He may have been martyred.

Neither children from rural nor urban schools came up with the response that the parents may have separated or divorced. Only one child from a rural school said, 'Oh *Didi!* They may have been divorced.'

I asked, 'Why did you feel that they might have been divorced?'

The child said, '*Didi!* My uncle had a love marriage. My aunt did not like living here in the village, so quarrels

began. Now, they are divorced, and my aunt has gone back to her home.'

I have given the children the freedom to share their views at any time. The story was also such that the children took time to think and share their thoughts. They shared a few things even without my asking them. For example, they said that the girl must be missing her *Abbu*; if her *Abbu* were there, he would have bought her a doll; he would have taken her out; he would have bought her toys just as their own fathers did; her mother must also feel like crying a lot because now she was alone, and so on. The children also mentioned some of their friends who do not have fathers. They said that children who do not have parents remain unhappy. They have to live with their maternal or paternal uncles, and no one keeps them in the same way as their parents would.

'And how do those children live who have only their mothers?' I asked them.

The children said, '*Didi!* If the mother is there, then it is still all right.'

I then asked, 'Tell me, is having a mother even more important than having a father?'

The response was, 'Yes, because the mother manages everything well.'



Figure 2: Students deeply immersed in a story session.

I asked, 'Why do you feel that the mother manages everything and not the father?'

The children said, 'Mothers can manage both household and outside work, but fathers can manage only outside work.'

Understanding paid work

In this story, the girl's mother made carpets. I asked children in every group why they thought she made carpets. The purpose behind asking this question was to understand how aware the children were of livelihoods. Children from urban areas responded that she must be selling them. The children from rural schools did not even consider that women could also make carpets to earn a livelihood, because they had not seen women around them engaged in such work.

I then asked the next question, 'Tell me, what kind of work do mothers do?'

There was a flood of responses. The children began to list various tasks, which included household and agricultural work. Some children shared that their mothers also did stitching; this was the response I was waiting for.

I asked, 'Do they stitch only their own clothes, or do they stitch other people's clothes too and take money for it?'

The children replied, 'They take money from others.'

I then asked them, 'How do you view the work from which we earn money?'

They started looking at one another as though they did not understand. So, I changed the question and asked, 'Is the stitching work from which money is earned similar to the work that fathers do and earn money from?'

The children said, 'Yes, *Didi!* Just that mothers do it while staying at home, and fathers go outside.'

I then told them that any work which we do to earn money is called 'employment'. A job is not only one in which someone sits in an office and works. Any work from which money is earned is a job; the place does not matter.

Next, I asked, 'Now tell me some other kinds of work that your mothers or other women can do to earn money. Once again, there were many responses. The children mentioned work, such as making pickles, *papads*, and savouries; stitching; running a beauty parlour, and so on.

'Sticking *bindis* on cards and packing them, making bundles of them, packing candles, making bangles, decorating shoes and slippers, and other such work—have you ever heard of or seen such work?' I asked again.



Figure 3: Students engaging with a story through discussions.

One child said, 'These tasks must be done by machines, isn't it, *Didi!*' A discussion followed that even today, there are different kinds of work that cannot be done by machines. I asked them all to speak with their family members and find out more about such work.

Siblings and friends

We then moved to the next part of the story. At one point in the story, the girl whispers to her doll, 'I was joking with *Ammi*. I do not have any brothers or sisters, *na*. Don't you feel the need for one?'

I asked the children, 'Why is she speaking like this to the doll?' The children replied, 'She does not have any siblings, so she is talking to her doll. Perhaps she feels sad. She wants to bring another doll for her doll, so that her doll does not feel unhappy without a sister.'

I asked, 'Are brothers and sisters so important?'

The children said, 'They are needed for tying *rakhi*, *Didi!*'

I then asked, 'What do you think about friends?'

The response was, 'Friends are the most important. Even more than brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters complain to parents and get us into trouble, but friends always support us and even protect us. Friends are just like brothers and sisters.'

I asked, 'What do you mean by "just like"? Why are friends not actually brothers and sisters?'

All the children laughed and replied, 'Because friends are not our actual brothers and sisters. Yes, but friends are better, *Didi!*'

In both rural and urban settings, most children gave priority to friends. I asked this question because all the children were responding by placing themselves in the position of the girl in the story.

Evaluating social biases

In all the schools that I went to, children were also asked whether divorce is good or bad, and why. All the children gave the same answer—it is bad; children feel sad and hurt; people do not consider divorce to be good; and married people should not separate.

I then presented two situations before them.

A couple live together peacefully for some time and then fights break out between them. There can be many reasons for fights. Can you tell what these might be?

The children said, '*Didi!* The husband might be drinking alcohol, he might also be beating her, he might not be earning, he might not be listening to his wife, he might be using abusive language.'

I asked, 'Is it always the man's fault?'

The children did not respond.

I then asked, 'Let us assume that he behaves in this manner. Should his wife get a divorce or continue to endure the violence?'

The girls responded quickly, 'She should get a divorce.'

In the second situation, the wife drinks alcohol, fights, and beats her husband. The children laughed at this. Then, should the husband stay with his wife?

The reply was, 'No, the man should get a divorce, *Didi!*'

'But divorce is a bad thing, isn't it? What will people say?'

But eventually, with some confidence, they agreed that 'they should divorce; people will talk anyway.'

I asked, 'Now tell me, is divorce good or bad?'

The children were of the view that divorce is neither good nor bad; it depends on the situation.

How and why stories work

Stories not only provide opportunities to openly discuss issues related to one's surroundings but also help in building a shared understanding; they also give children an opportunity to experience the feelings of the characters in the story. For instance, in this story, through the girl's conversation with her doll and the loneliness that emerges from it, children also experience their own sense of loneliness. By listening to a story and connecting with it emotionally, one moves towards empathy. But through it, by placing oneself in the situation of a character, one also moves towards identifying with them on a deeper level. This helps in understanding social issues more deeply.

Through this story, discussions were held about employment and different kinds of work: work that is done by hand and work that is done from home. We also discussed what definition of a job exists in our minds, and what kinds of jobs we actually see around us. At the same time, there are forms of employment that we have not observed in our immediate surroundings. This is similar to how certain kinds of work are often seen as divided between men and women. While discussing the story, we were able to overturn some established ideas.

Divorce is a social issue about which very little discussion takes place. Even if it does, it is usually negative. There are several such social issues towards which we have a negative outlook, and we often hesitate to talk about them. However, through stories, we can build a sound understanding of such issues engagingly and sensitively, without hurting anyone's feelings.

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



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The Many Advantages of Peer Learning

Shamim Bhati

The process of learning is not limited to the teacher and the student; rather, it is a social experience in which students learn by interacting with and observing one another. When students work together on a topic, discuss it, ask questions around it, and try to solve the problem by thinking through it collectively, their understanding deepens. They are able to absorb new concepts more effectively.

Some teachers consider a quiet classroom to be synonymous with an ideal and disciplined classroom, where students do not speak to one another, but do their work silently. Whereas Vygotsky's¹ theory of cognitive development expounds that learning is a social process in which conversation, collaboration, and guidance play a key role. Peer learning provides ample opportunities for conversation and collaboration.

Peer learning not only makes the learning process interesting but also enhances students' critical thinking, analytical abilities, and self-reliance in learning. The *National Education Policy 2020* considers it integral to the modern education system and recommends that learning

processes be made discovery-based, group-based, and experiential, so that students are not only confined to textbooks, but also connect with the real world and acquire practical knowledge.

In this article, through a few examples, we shall attempt to understand how peer learning supports the intellectual development of students and the positive conditions it creates during their learning process.

Counting beads

I gave some beads to students of classes I, II and III and asked them to count them one by one. First, Shubham counted and said that there were 8 (he had counted one



Figure 1: Peer learning enhances students' critical thinking, analytical abilities, and self-reliance in learning.

bead twice) beads. Sneha was very young, but she also wanted to count, and she was given the opportunity. She repeatedly touched all the beads with her finger and said 3. Gaurav counted and said that there were 9 beads in all. After this, Anjana counted and said that there were 6. She had arranged the beads randomly while counting. Then Jeevika separated the beads one by one while counting and said that there were 7 beads. Jeevika had counted each bead and had arrived at the correct answer.

I then asked them how everyone was getting a different answer. The students just smiled. I said, 'Let us count once again.' I said it exactly as I had said before the earlier exercise. However, the students made some changes to their counting method. Shubham began to count by picking up the beads one by one. When he had counted five beads and found it difficult to hold them in his hand, he kept those beads aside and counted the remaining ones. This time, his count was 7. Sneha also began to pick up the beads and hold them in her hand while counting, and she said that there were 7 beads. Anjana followed her earlier method and said that there were 12 beads.

Although only two students (besides Jivika) arrived at the correct answer the second time. Among them, Sneha had said 7 only after hearing it, but she made changes in her counting method and tried to separate the beads that had already been counted. Similarly, Shubham, after observing Jeevika, kept aside the beads that had already been counted and arrived at the correct answer.

This example showed that as students observed one another count, they kept refining their methods. Without direct teacher intervention, they were identifying their mistakes and adopting the correct method. In this example, we saw that a distinctive feature of peer learning is that students develop a tendency to think, analyse, and improve rather than merely imitate. The child psychologist, Jean Piaget, in his theory of cognitive development, stated that students learn more effectively in groups because they correct their mistakes through dialogue with one another. This understanding also establishes the importance of peer learning on scientific grounds.

“ As students observed one another count, they kept refining their methods. Without direct teacher intervention, they were identifying their mistakes and adopting the correct method ”

Understanding rolling and sliding objects

In another observation, two students of class II were working on a table given in their workbook. They had to decide which objects roll, which ones slide, and which do both. Their conversation was as follows:

Zoya: A glass slides.

Surja: No, according to me, we should tick both (slides and rolls).

Zoya: How can it be both?

Surja: (Picking up a water bottle kept nearby) Look, when it is kept upright, it slides, but when it falls down, it begins to roll. (Here, Surja used a bottle instead of a glass to explain her point, and Zoya did not raise any objection.)

Zoya: (Happily) Yes, that is right!

This dialogue shows that through peer learning, students were not only resolving their doubts but were also expanding each other's thinking. The role of the teacher here was merely that of an observer, while the actual learning was taking place among the students themselves.

Learning together

Jayshree of class IV had difficulty reading Hindi. She was a quiet and reserved girl. When her teacher began pairing students to read together, within a few days, Jayshree's reading ability began to improve. She also started participating more actively in classroom discussions. When Jayshree was asked how she learnt reading so quickly with Rounak, she said, 'I do not feel afraid of reading incorrectly in front of Rounak. I can ask Rounak whatever comes to my mind.' It is often observed that students feel hesitant while speaking with an adult. When students learn from their peers, they become self-reliant. They learn to express their thoughts clearly and understand the ideas of others. This increases their self-confidence.

School trip

Students of class V were given the task of planning a school trip. When the students began their discussion, they first talked about deciding on the mode of transport for the journey. Ayaan said, 'Five people can sit in an auto, so six autos will be required for the entire class.'

Rashmi immediately said, 'It is not only our class that will go! All 120 students up to class VIII are going on the trip. For so many students, it will become a train of autos.'

Vikram said laughingly, 'In that case, let us call a train.'



Figure 2: Students engaged in creating collaborative art.

Ayaan interrupted and said, 'The train does not come to the school.'

Vishal said, 'Then let us arrange a bus.'

Everyone liked the idea of a bus. They calculated that if 45-50 students could sit in one bus, then three buses would need to be arranged.

In this entire task, the students were reasoning on the basis of their experience and understanding and were able to think of and express their own methods of problem solving. Every student thinks differently and solves problems differently. When students learn from one another, they understand various perspectives that enrich their knowledge.

Adding by counting

Students of class II were solving addition problems. Vinay had solved all the sums. He noticed that Dilip was still working. Dilip first drew as many lines as the two numbers

“ **Every student thinks differently and solves problems differently. When students learn from one another, they understand various perspectives that enrich their knowledge .**

”

in the addition problems and then counted all the lines. Seeing this, Vinay explained to him, 'Why do you need to count again and again? Look at this (pointing to the lines drawn for one number by Dilip), you already know how many lines there are, so just count ahead from there.' Dilip expressed surprise and said, 'Oh yes, I had not thought of that!'

When one student identifies another's mistake or provides new information, they develop their reasoning and thinking ability. The other students also learn the method suggested by their peers, compare it with their own method, and make changes accordingly. In this way, the learning process helps them to develop a critical and analytical perspective.

Writing stories

Students of class III were given some pictures and asked to write a story.

Navya: 'I do not know how to write a story.'

Sakshi: 'I can write, but what should I write about?'

Navya: 'There is a man and some monkeys in the picture. Create a story about them.'

Gaurav: 'Yes, perhaps this man is scolding the monkeys?'

Navya: 'This man must be the owner of this garden. Let us begin like this—There was a man who had a big garden...'

Gaurav: 'One day a monkey came and said to the owner, "May I stay here?"'

The three students started taking the story forward by making their own assumptions and thinking about it after looking at the given pictures. Each one of them had their own abilities. This helped the group to write a better story. When students engage in dialogue with one another, express their views, and understand the views of others, they realise that with mutual support, even difficult tasks can become easy. This skill is useful for them throughout their lives.

If peer learning is understood only as 'forming a group of bright and weak students, where the bright students teach, and the weak students learn', then it would be a narrow understanding of peer learning. Instead, when teachers adopt peer learning as an essential and natural teaching method that enhances students' learning, not only does it enrich students' learning, but the teacher's work also becomes more manageable. In such a situation, teachers are able to reach a greater number of students individually.

Some suggestions for the effective use of the peer learning method

- While forming groups, it is important to consider the students' age, interests, and abilities so that participation of all members in group work can be ensured.
- Teachers should explain the task assigned to the group and the role of the students in it in simple and clear words. This will guarantee that the task is clear and ensure the active participation of all students.
- If some students are not participating in group work, identify the reasons for this and try to include them by finding appropriate solutions.

References

¹ Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky was a Russian and Soviet psychologist. He is known for his work on psychological development in children and for creating the framework known as cultural-historical activity theory.

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



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“ Peer learning is not merely a teaching strategy; it is an extension of students' natural way of learning. ”

- While students are engaged in group work and discussion, the teacher should play the role of a facilitator in guiding them in the right direction, whenever required.
- In peer learning, instead of following the same strategy each time, make changes based on the situation.
- The level of simplicity or complexity in activities can be decided according to the age and understanding level of the students.
- Appreciate students' teamwork, spirit of cooperation, and efforts. This creates a positive learning environment.
- Change students' roles from time to time so that everyone gets an opportunity to lead and to learn.

Conclusion

Peer learning is not merely a teaching strategy; it is an extension of students' natural way of learning. When students engage in discussion with one another, they not only expand their knowledge, but also develop social qualities such as 'cooperation, patience, and tolerance'. The *National Education Policy 2020* also emphasises this, stating that the learning process should be made more interactive and practical, particularly in the classroom. Teachers and parents should make efforts to encourage students to explore, experiment, and learn from one another. In this way, learning can become not only interesting but also more effective and memorable.

Using Contextual Material to Teach Language

Pompa Ghoshal

Beyond the confines of classrooms and textbooks, countless materials and opportunities in children's surroundings make the path of language learning easier for them. When a teacher connects these materials and real-life experiences of children with the classroom process, learning is not just guaranteed but is also enjoyable. This article is about such experiences.

In my childhood, my father would take me on his bicycle for rides to faraway places. He always asked me to read the signboards placed along the roadside carefully. He would point at and ask: 'Read that board'; or 'Look and tell me, what is the name of this place?' and so on. Gradually, this became a habit. I began reading every signboard, advertisement, and poster that appeared along the way. This gradually improved my reading and my confidence in reading.

As a teacher today, I believe that students' learning is not limited to textbooks; there is a bigger world beyond these. I decided to bring back my childhood days into my classroom. To be honest, this idea came to me when I looked at the learning outcomes for class IV, which included reading and understanding children's literature, main headlines of newspapers, children's magazines, as well as hoardings. Further, in the 'Curricular Expectations' section, I got the idea of searching for and reading material from the library, the Reading Corner, and even from the wrappers of various shop-bought items. I knew that even those students who are not able to read properly would gradually move towards reading through the hoardings they see in their everyday routine, the wrappers of items used at home, and the advertisements printed in newspapers. This is because the visuals present in these materials would encourage them to make connections, guess and try to read.

Creating a learning environment through conversations

The plan had already taken shape in my mind. I entered the classroom with a smile. In my hand was a packet of biscuits, and in my bag were newspapers, magazines, and several slips of paper. As soon as I entered the classroom, I said dramatically (just as in a famous biscuit advertisement), 'A little twist, a little lick, a big dunk! It's very delicious! Tell me, what is it?'

Navya was ready to respond immediately. She quickly said, 'Ma'am, this is an advertisement for [...] cookies!'

I took out the packet of the same cookies, held it up for everyone to see, and then said, 'Yes! This is an advertisement. Now, can anyone guess what we are going to do in the classroom today?'

On hearing this, the entire class echoed with excitement. Navya immediately made a guess and said, 'Advertisement activity!' There was a sparkle in her eyes.

Charu said, 'Ma'am, we did a similar activity in class III as well, didn't we?'



Figure 1: An 'advertisement activity' effectively captivates learners' interest.

“ I knew that even those students who are not able to read properly would gradually move towards reading through the hoardings they see in their everyday routine, the wrappers of items used at home, and the advertisements printed in newspapers. ”

I smiled and said, ‘Yes, we certainly did. Do you remember what we did in that activity?’

Charu nodded eagerly and said, ‘Yes, I remember!’

I pretended as if I was trying to recall it and said, ‘What was that? I am not able to remember it clearly.’

Charu explained, ‘Ma’am, all of us had brought different kinds of wrappers from our homes—salt, rice, chocolate, and *namkeens*, and also packets of tea leaves, matchboxes, and empty bottles. Then we read the information written on all those items and shared it in class. I remember that I had brought a bottle of glue, and I had read the printed weight, MRP, the name of the manufacturing company, and the method of using it. And you had asked me to read it like this: ‘This is a bottle of glue. It weighs 25 grams.’ After that, I spoke about the method of using the glue. And, I had even tried to write down all of this.’

I said warmly, ‘Very good, Charu! Your memory is sharp.’

Rajeev raised his hand and said, ‘Madam, we had done something similar in class I as well!’

‘Oh, really! What did we do?’

Meera said, ‘Ma’am, all of us had brought wrappers from our homes, and we had read them. You had even made a file for all those wrappers.’

I smiled and asked, ‘And what happened after that?’

‘Then you had asked us the names of items, such as washing powder, salt, coconut oil, rice, turmeric, and so on, that were kept in those wrappers, and you wrote those names on the board and read them aloud. Then all of us spoke about the uses of these items. Some conversations were very interesting. Saroj told us that when he has a cold and cough, his father makes him gargle with salt water.’

Meera continued, ‘We used to read that file every day; it was so colourful! Can we make it again?’

‘Certainly,’ I said, ‘We can now make it as a project.’

Bheem suggested, ‘This time, can all of us have our own files?’

I laughed and said, ‘Yes, yes, why not!’

Creating an atmosphere of anticipation

I said to the students, ‘Today I have brought some newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets for you. All of you may distribute these among yourselves. You have to look for an advertisement of something you like and that you can understand, cut it out, and keep it aside.’

As soon as the newspapers and magazines were given out, the students began turning the pages eagerly. Waving a colourful advertisement of chocolate in the air, Navya said, ‘Ma’am, I have found an advertisement I like!’

I said, ‘Very good! Now read everything written in this advertisement carefully. Observe and understand the words, pictures, and the slogan used in it.’

By the end of the class, each student had their chosen advertisement. I said, ‘Now, when you go home, watch some advertisements on television. Read the hoardings that you see on your way. If you use any packaged item, keep its packet with you. Tomorrow, we shall discuss



Figure 2: One of the advertisements created by the students.

this and together create our own advertisements in the classroom.'

Going beyond perceived reality

When the class began the next day, there was visible energy among the students. The atmosphere was very enthusiastic. Swarnika shared that she had watched many advertisements the previous day for items such as shampoo, soap, and toothpaste.

'Very good!' I then asked them, 'Do you know that sometimes companies slightly change the name of a product and sell duplicate goods in the market under a similar name?'

On hearing this, the students were completely surprised. Charu's eyes widened in astonishment, and she asked, 'Is this true, Ma'am?'

'Yes,' I replied, 'People who cannot read carefully often buy fake products thinking they are real.'

I explained, 'They make the duplicate product look almost like the original. They only make a slight change in the spelling of the product name. This makes people think that it is the original item. That is why whenever we read something, we should read it very carefully.'

Meera said, 'This is a kind of cheating!'

'Yes, absolutely! It is indeed cheating,' I agreed. 'That is why it is important to know how to read properly.'

Exploring creativity

I said, 'Now it is your turn to become advertisers. Take the advertisement you cut out yesterday, tweak some of the words, and make it more creative so it takes a new form. In this way, create your own advertisement.' This activity included giving students space to express their creativity, encouraging them to think in new ways, and writing down their ideas.

I gave them old calendars to write their advertisements on the blank side. They shared coloured pencils, crayons, glue, and scissors among themselves.

'Ma'am, may I create an advertisement for a magical shampoo?' Navya asked.

'Why not? Go ahead!' I replied with a smile.

Soon, the entire class began speaking at once, sharing their ideas. Rajeev raised his poster and said, 'Ma'am, please look at this!' On his poster, written in large letters, were the words—*Dubraj Rice, unmatched in taste and fragrance!*

'Wonderful! This is very good,' I said.

Sunita asked, 'Ma'am, may I make it in Chhattisgarhi?'

'Yes, of course, that is a good idea,' I replied.

She wrote, '*Bah! Abbad mahmahaat he, aaj Dubraj randhe has ka vo?*' (Wow! What a fragrance! Have you cooked *Dubaraj* rice at home today?)

All the students were very happy.

After one hour of creative work, it was time for the presentations. Each student came forward one by one, holding the charts they had prepared. In a very dramatic manner, Meera said, 'Ma'am, my advertisement is for a toothpaste which will make your teeth shine like pearls!'

Building understanding and critical thinking

During the discussion on advertisements, a question arose: 'Ma'am, is everything said and written in an advertisement true?'

'That is a very good question. What do you think?' I asked.

'I don't think so,' Navya said thoughtfully. 'Shampoo advertisements claim that they make hair longer, but that is not true.'

'Exactly,' I said, 'Advertisements often show only one side of the story. Fairness creams promise fair skin within one week, but is that true?'

'No!' the entire class chorused in agreement.

'Ma'am, my mother says that no one becomes fair by using fairness creams. It is all a marketing strategy,' Charu shared.

'Yes, absolutely right,' I said. 'In any case, the very focus on skin colour is superficial. People are not good or not-so-good because of their skin colour. Why should anyone *have* to become fair? If we understand this, then there is no need for such creams at all.' I had found an opportunity to weaken the wall of discrimination between fair and dark complexions in the minds of the students.

I also began to find links to this activity in the textbook and in their practice questions.

Building connections and communication skills

We had to read Lesson 4, 'Food'. I said, 'Today, before reading the lesson, we shall do an activity. We will select some items from the lesson and create advertisements for them. One group will create the advertisement, and

the other group will become customers and question the claims made in the advertisement.'

The classroom turned into a mini market.

The list of items selected from the lesson included rice, pulses, potatoes, lady's finger, gourd, milk, curd, banana, mango, guava, and other such items.

Navya stood confidently. A large picture of a carrot was pasted on her chart. 'This carrot is truly amazing. Eat it, and you will become a wrestler in just one day,' she announced loudly. Rajeev was playing the role of the customer. Raising his eyebrows, he said, 'Is that really so? Overnight? Can you prove it?'

Navya burst into laughter. 'Yes, it is a magical carrot! Just eat it and see.'

The classroom echoed with laughter, but the point was clear that it is important to question such claims. I observed that through this activity, all the students were not only enjoying themselves, but their reading, questioning, and ability to express their ideas in new ways were also improving. The students had now begun reading hoardings and signboards on their way to and from school, which they discussed in the class the following day. Some students had started keeping wrappers of food items so that they could paste them into their files and write about them. I began thinking about the next lesson I could connect with this activity and conduct it again in a new/different way.

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Ways to Improve a School Library

Kamlesh Chandra Joshi

Many teachers have made various efforts to ensure the effective functioning of their school libraries. This article presents a brief account of some of these efforts. It also describes certain changes seen in students' reading and writing habits as a result of these initiatives.

When looking at a school library, it is natural to wonder how effectively it is functioning and how it can be improved. There are many administrative and academic aspects to understand this. For example: how many and what kinds of books are available in the library; how many students visit it regularly; how well students use the books; the teachers' perspectives on children's books and their use; and so on. Along with this, the effectiveness of a library is also reflected in the activities conducted among students, the presentation of books, their upkeep, the availability of space, and so on. It also depends on how much time teachers are able to devote to the library.

Teachers in some government schools are actively working to improve and strengthen their school libraries. During my conversations with some of them working in schools in Udhm Singh Nagar, they shared several important ideas regarding better library management and making libraries more impactful.

Teachers' preparation

Teachers working to strengthen their libraries said that they participate in sessions related to library development as part of their preparation. They discuss related topics among themselves to develop a deeper understanding and interact with experts in children's literature and libraries. In addition, they regularly read good children's literature and quality children's magazines. These include books, such as *Bus ki Sair*, *Nanhe Karamkalla*, *Nanhe-Munne Geet*, *Barasta Tarbooz*, and *Nanihal mein Guzre Din*, and children's magazines, like *Chakmak*, *Pluto*, and *Cycle*.

“ Teachers working to strengthen their libraries said that they participate in sessions related to library development as part of their preparation. ”



Figure 1: Children sitting together and happily reading storybooks.

Teachers hold in-depth discussions among themselves on the themes, events, characters, illustrations, and perspectives emerging from these books. They also discuss what kinds of, and which books would be appropriate for students of different class levels.

Some teachers continue to reflect on questions such as: How do students learn to read? How can their curiosity for reading and habits of self-study be nurtured? What can we do to help students become good readers? For this preparation, they have collectively read and discussed teacher-oriented books, such as *Padhne Ki Samajh*, *Padhne ki Dehliiz Par*, *Bachhe ki Bhasha aur Adhyapak* and *Padhna Likhna Seekhne Mein Kitabon ka Mahatwa*. They have also read several articles, such as *Kya Kya Ho Ek Achhi Kitaab Mein*, *Kahani Kahan Kho Gayi*, and *Padhne Ki Aadat*, in order to build a deeper understanding in this direction. All this preparation has helped them develop a perspective for working with students and managing an impactful library.

Teachers shared that such efforts have created among them a willingness to read and understand children's literature. One teacher mentioned that they also joined Eklavya's *Library se Dosti* course, and as a result, they have been able to work better in their school and support fellow teachers in using children's literature. They mentioned that this encouraged them to continue to manage the library alongside other responsibilities at their schools.



Figure 2: Students reading out from their textbooks.

Reading period

Several teachers shared that they have set aside a specific time in their schools during which students come to the library, pick books of their choice, sit and read. During this reading period, teachers observe students reading and occasionally interact with them. Some teachers also sit and read alongside students. (A detailed article on

this was published in *Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar*, Issue 16, June 2023.)

Selection of books

Teachers said that adding new books is necessary to keep the students' interest in the library alive. Students who have read most of the books more than once begin to lose interest and need new books. However, school libraries have limited budgets. Sometimes, books provided by the education department are not suitable for primary-level students. In such situations, teachers take initiative and procure books through their own sources.

Among the books are not just books of stories and poems but also informational books, books that help understand one's surroundings, travelogues, diaries, creative prose, books on making things, puzzle books, dictionaries, and so on. In addition to this, they also take care to arrange *Big Books*, picture books, and poetry posters for younger children. Some teachers have also included books in English, along with Hindi.

Through mutual discussions, teachers also became familiar with the 'Parag Honour List' of children's literature and have begun procuring books from that list as well. A significant observation is that once teachers experience the energy that comes from a well-used library, they continue to procure books for students from time to time and keep enriching their libraries. Some teachers even visit the World Book Fair (New Delhi) to buy books for their schools and their colleagues.

Organisation of books

Teachers emphasised that the way books are arranged and presented in the library affects how students access them. When books are visible and within reach, students can choose them more easily. Towards this, teachers adopt different methods according to their circumstances. Many teachers have taught students that returning books and keeping them in the correct place is important, and students have begun doing this. In some schools, students have taken the responsibility of organising the library and managing its functioning.

How students develop a connection with books

Teachers shared several experiences of how students connect with books, emphasising that books should not remain limited to the library. They also use books from the library in their classrooms. Based on discussions with teachers and classroom observations, some aspects of building students' connection with books are presented below.

Use of books in the classroom

Teachers mentioned how they connect library books with their lessons and use them while teaching. For example, while teaching class V lesson *Nanha Fankar* from the Hindi textbook *Rimjhim*, which focuses on Emperor Akbar's humility and his openness to learning from ordinary people, teachers also used the book *Shehenshah Akbar Ko Koun Sikhayega?* Similarly, for the poem *Cheenti* in class III textbook, discussions were held by linking it with the book *Cheenta*, published by Eklavya.

I also observed that discussions around textbook lessons often included references to children's literature. This was a deliberate effort to connect students with children's literature and help them see the lessons in a broader perspective. This showed that books that were earlier limited only to issuing and returning were now being used both for the joy of reading and as part of planned teaching.

Regular observations and conversations with students

Teachers began paying attention to students who were borrowing books and those who were not. They sometimes spoke with students about the books to understand whether they were reading them or not. Through this process, teachers could understand the type of books each student enjoyed, and this helped them in recommending books to students.

Activities based on books

To enhance students' interest in books, teachers started conducting activities based on them. These included teachers reading books aloud, selecting stories and having students perform role plays, narrating stories using puppets, and asking students who could read to narrate stories from their favourite books, and so on.

The most important observation was that teachers began planning discussions around books and initiating conversations with students accordingly. Plans were seen around books, such as *Chhutki Ullee*, *Mitwa*, *Khush-Khush Kachhua*, *Nilofar ki Muskaan*, *Panchhi Pyara*, *Budhiya ki Roti*, *Mahagiri*, *Kyun-Kyun Ladki*, and others. In expanding students' exposure to books, it was also observed that, besides poems and stories, teachers

gave students opportunities to read puzzle books and activity-based books.

Motivation to write

As mentioned earlier, teachers gave students opportunities to orally express what they had read. They gave them the opportunity to create new stories and poems and encouraged them to write down their own experiences. Teachers sent these experiences to some of the children's magazines, and some of the students' works were published. This motivated them to continue reading. Some older students also began writing book reviews.

Summary

Through conversations with teachers and observations of school libraries, it became clear that with effective library management, teachers could understand that reading books impacts not only students' language development but also their overall personality. Not only does it strengthen their expression, but it also increases their confidence and enhances their ability to understand different things. Teachers felt that students who read books perform better in other subjects as well. They also observed that books made it easier for them to discuss many issues, including discrimination based on caste, gender, language and region, which may be difficult to address directly but could be explored through stories and books. They realised that to build meaningful understanding around books, careful planning is required so that meaningful discussions with students can take place. They also felt the need to read good children's literature themselves and continuously develop their own understanding in order to do this effectively.

To run a school library well, it is necessary to think holistically. At the core of this will always be the aim of nurturing good readers and building students' bond with books. Alongside this, teachers managing libraries must keep strengthening their understanding of children's literature. For this, it is important that they cultivate their own habit of reading and continue discussions with colleagues on the selection and use of children's books. Only then will they be able to manage school libraries effectively.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Pragma P Vetter: Simran Luthra



Kamlesh Chandra Joshi was with the Azim Premji Foundation in Udham Singh Nagar for 17 years and has been associated with the field of primary education for three decades. He has worked extensively with teachers at the primary level on language teaching, school libraries, teacher training, and related areas.

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A Teacher who Transformed Anganwadis into Learning Hubs

Ananya D

In the Jogur (2) village of Kalaburagi (rural) district, Karnataka, there is a story that every parent and child now tells with pride. It is the story of Shankaramma, an *Anganwadi* teacher who transformed what was once a simple food distribution centre into a vibrant hub of learning and laughter for 3–6-year-old children.

A quiet beginning

When Shankaramma joined the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) department in 2010 as an *Anganwadi* teacher, her centre was like many others—children came mostly for food, and parents had little awareness of preschool education. Barely 10 to 15 children attended, and structured learning activities were almost non-existent.

Shankaramma, known for her regular attendance and sincerity, always dreamed of giving children something beyond mid-day meals. Her opportunity came in 2019–20, when the Azim Premji Foundation started its Early Childhood Education (ECE) intervention in the Kalaburagi Rural Block. Through monthly workshops, block-level meetings, ECCE Days, *Bal Melas*, and Teachers' *Melas*, Shankaramma learned about the importance of early years and theme-based learning. Equipped with the *Chilipili Curriculum*,¹ she was determined to bring about change.

The centre came alive

It began with small steps. Shankaramma started opening her centre at 9:30 AM sharp and engaged children until 1:30 PM with a full routine that included free play, songs, storytelling, cognitive, creative, and theme-based activities, as well as engagement in Learning Corners.

One challenge was the lack of resources. During a workshop, Shankaramma had experienced the use of different teaching–learning materials (TLMs). Inspired,

“ To make the Learning Corners rich and engaging, Shankaramma mobilised materials from the local community and shops. Parents began to see how even simple household objects could become learning tools for children. ”



Figure 1: Children dipping blocks in colour and making patterns of their choice.

she began creating her own. With the help of her family, she prepared TLMs for each student so that every child had something in hand to work with. This changed the energy of the classroom. Children, once passive, began to enthusiastically participate in activities.

Earlier, during storytelling, Shankamma would simply read stories aloud. Children would neither listen attentively nor remember much. She decided to change her approach. Using story cards and puppets that she made herself, she explored four to five different methods of storytelling—oral narration, reading aloud, picture sequence stories, mono-acts, and role play. The results were magical. Children, who once sat quietly, now eagerly enacted characters and retold stories in their own words.

Shankamma also introduced variety into creative activities—colouring, bead-setting on pictures, and paper ball pasting. For cognitive development, she introduced weekly theme-based activities, like matching, puzzles, sorting, and identifying missing pictures. These exercises

form the base for critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Playtime took a new shape. She introduced the *Chilipili*-themed play, the traditional games she knew and free play in the Learning Corners. The Pretend Play Corner became a favourite—children acted out roles of parents, doctors, or cooks, imitating real-life activities, like making *rotis*. The centre buzzed with imagination and laughter.

To make these corners rich and engaging, Shankamma mobilised materials from the local community and shops. Parents began to see how even simple household objects could become learning tools.

When she realised that there was no running blackboard in her *Anganwadi*, Shankamma did not wait for external support. Instead, she painted a section of the wall black and turned it into a writing space. Children scribbled, drew, and wrote freely on it. This simple innovation became a powerful tool for eye-hand coordination and fine motor skill development.



Figure 2: A running blackboard is a powerful tool for eye-hand coordination and development of fine motor skills.



Figure 3: Children excitedly surround a teacher who puts on a mask.

She asked other beneficiaries of ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services), such as pregnant and lactating mothers, 0–3-year-old children, adolescent girls, parents, community and other services beneficiaries to come to the *Anganwadi* centre only after 2 PM, thus keeping the mornings dedicated entirely to preschool activities.

Parents were surprised. Children, who once wandered around, now stayed inside the *Anganwadi* compound for four continuous hours. They sang, danced, asked questions, and narrated stories.

Enrolment

Shankamma noticed another gap—enrolment. Despite her efforts, many children in the village were still not attending the *Anganwadi*. So, she took another bold step—organising monthly ‘ECCE Days’². Children showcased what they learned—songs, action rhymes, stories, and playful activities—in front of parents and community members. Shankamma also shared the progress of the children with their parents. Slowly, awareness began to spread.

From 10 children, the enrolment rose to 45 children in one year. She conducted over 20 ECCE Days within 2-3 years. She also conducted a *Bal Mela*³ in her village, which brought together 200 villagers. For Shankamma, *Bal Mela* became a platform to highlight her centre’s innovative practices. Her children confidently performed songs, engaged in cognitive activities, and showcased

“ Parents were surprised. Children, who once wandered around, now stayed inside the *Anganwadi* compound for four continuous hours. They sang, danced, asked questions, and narrated stories. ”

their artwork, which inspired other teachers and earned appreciation from parents.

Seeing these efforts, the Panchayat members and the community started contributing items, like paints, play materials, and even small funds for the *Anganwadi*. Parents joined a *WhatsApp* group where Shankamma shared daily updates on their children’s progress.

Her *Anganwadi* had become more than a centre. It was now a learning hub!

Children found their voice

Children could sing more than 25 action songs, retell stories, and express their feelings freely. They no longer needed helpers to escort them; by 9:00 AM sharp, they arrived eagerly at the centre.

The impact showed when they moved to primary school. Teachers reported that Shankamma’s students were more active, asked questions, and grasped lessons quickly.

One story remains close to her heart. A child in the village, who was initially thought to have a speech disability (did not speak), began speaking after joining her *Anganwadi*. The joy of the parents, who once believed their child would never speak, knew no bounds.

Another parent, who had shifted their child to a private school, re-enrolled their child to the *Anganwadi* after seeing the difference Shankamma’s methods made. ‘Our child learns better here,’ they admitted.

“ The impact showed when they moved to primary school. Teachers reported that Shankamma’s students were more active, asked questions, and grasped lessons quickly. ”

New beginnings, new struggles

Recently, Shankamma was transferred to Kotnoor (D) village near Kalaburagi city. Her journey started all over again—but this time, with tougher challenges. The *Anganwadi* operated in a small, rented building with minimal infrastructure. Though many children were enrolled, only one or two attended regularly. Initially, the local community resisted her presence, saying that since many educated members already lived in their own village, there was no need for someone from outside. Parents preferred private schools.



Figure 4: Children learn as they play.

For many, this would have been discouraging, but not for Shankamma. With guidance from the Education Department and the Foundation, she implemented simple strategies:

- Began preschool activities even if only two children turned up.
- Conducted home visits, patiently explaining the importance of preschool education to parents.
- Organised small parents' meetings to build awareness regarding pre-school education, sometimes with just two or three attendees.
- Involved parents in storytelling sessions on ECCE Days and cultural events by asking parents to share some local stories, and asked parents to help their children in colouring, pasting (creative activities), and engaged both parents and children in play where parents were paired with children.
- Displayed children's drawings and learning materials proudly to show the evidence of their progress.

Slowly, change began to take place. The *Anganwadi* attendance increased from 2 to 12 children. Parents began appreciating her efforts, and some even donated uniforms and materials. The same community that once resisted her had now started trusting her.

Beyond the classroom

Shankamma's influence did not stop at her *Anganwadi*. She went on to present a seminar paper at Azim Premji University, titled 'The Importance of Stories and Songs in the Language Development of Early Childhood Children'.

In this paper, she described how songs and stories are powerful tools to:

“ Simply telling the moral at the end of a story does not benefit children; what matters more is allowing them free and open thinking. ”

- **Build vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence construction**

Through exposure to more and more songs, children learn rhyming words, word combinations, and sentence construction. Listening to stories helps children learn new words and use them appropriately. Story activities, such as sharing ideas, looking at books, recognising letters and sounds, observing printed materials, and learning new words, all support children's language development. They also gain awareness of printed materials, connections between letters and sounds, and gradually acquire the ability to read and write.

- **Develop memory, listening skills, and curiosity**

Young children generally have short attention spans and are easily distracted. Storytelling engages them and helps improve concentration, turning them into better listeners. Listening to and retelling stories strengthens children's memory, and it helps when they enter the next stage of schooling.

- **Encourage imagination, creativity, and cultural awareness**

Listening to stories helps children imagine characters, places, and plots. It allows their imagination to flow freely and helps them visualise content even without visual media. Storytelling based on traditions and culture also helps children learn about cultural practices and heritage.

For young children, the moral of a story is less important than the chance to listen, imagine, talk, connect with the feelings of characters, and think. Simply telling the moral at the end of a story does not benefit them; what matters more is allowing them free and open thinking. Asking appropriate questions during and after stories encourages children to think about problems in the story and find possible solutions.

Some challenges and solutions

Shankamma came across many challenges with the new set of children. Children were unable to concentrate while stories were being narrated. Some children from a community that had a different home language could not understand Kannada. Children would talk amongst themselves and found it difficult to sit together in a circle. But these did not deter her, and Shankamma found

her way around the small problems that arose. During storytelling, she adopted the following strategies:

- Using instruments like *Khanjiri* (a musical instrument like a tambourine) to attract children's attention
- Encouraging children whose home language was not Kannada to sit and play with Kannada-speaking children
- Asking questions during storytelling to engage children. For example, 'Who is speaking? What happens next?'
- Clapping hands (like the *banana clap*- children clap at the count of one and two, then act as if they are peeling a banana and eating it) to regain attention
- Using picture cards related to the story to help children focus
- Using puppets while narrating stories to reduce children's tendency to talk among themselves

While singing songs too, she realised that children are unable to follow or sing along. They had difficulty in constructing sentences and joining words while singing. They would not stand in a circle while singing. Even when they were asked to repeat after her, some children sang

alone, not in unison. A few children remained silent and did not sing at all. Shankamma had her ways to deal with these.

- She started to sing the song first as a demonstration. After this, children were asked to repeat.
- She would focus on rhyming words, word combinations, and sentence construction within the song.
- Using actions, expressions, and gestures while singing, she made the activity more engaging, which also supports language development.

Her insights reflected not just her academic knowledge, but her lived experience from years in *Anganwadi* classrooms.

From Jogur-2 to Kotnoor-D, Shankamma's journey shows how one teacher's dedication can rewrite the story of early childhood education. She turned doubt into trust, silence into speech, and bare spaces into centres of joy. Today, her children walk into primary schools with confidence, curiosity and eagerness to learn. Her story is not just about transforming *Anganwadis*; it is about transforming futures.

References

¹ The *Chilipili Curriculum* is an Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme developed for children aged between 3 to 8 years in Karnataka.

² ECCE Day is celebrated once a month at *Anganwadi* Centres to showcase children's learning and to create awareness among parents and the community about the importance of preschool education, healthy routines, and play-based education. On this day, children present action songs, stories, rhymes, and theme-based activities that they have learned. Parents are invited to watch and participate, which builds trust and ownership.

³ Bal Mela is an annual/bi-annual event where children from multiple *Anganwadi* Centres come together to play, learn, and showcase their talents. It includes games, art, cultural programmes, storytelling, and stalls that display children's learning materials and creative work. Parents and community members also participate, making it a celebration of early childhood learning.



Ananya D joined Azim Premji Foundation as an Associate and is currently Block Coordinator, Chittapur Block, Kalaburagi district, Karnataka. She is currently working in domains, like ECE, primary language and maths, upper primary maths and is part of the Foundation's work with youth.

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Pages from teachers' diaries



A puzzle a week keeps boredom away!

Mokhtar Zaman

Every Monday, I write a simple, but thought-provoking math puzzle on the whiteboard next to the entrance gate of our school. These are not from the textbooks. For example, a snail climbs 3 steps up a wall each day but slips back 2 steps each night. The wall is 5 steps high. How many days will it take for the snail to reach the top?

This is a reasoning-based question that even students of classes I, II and III can attempt. Sometimes I also choose puzzles that focus on patterns, shapes, or simple numbers to keep things fun and easy for children.

I observe how children respond to these. At first, there is curiosity. A few students stop by and read the question carefully. Some whisper guesses to their friends, while others pull out their notebooks and write down to solve later. I have also seen students from classes II and III trying to read the puzzle and discuss it with students in higher classes. And the best part? The senior students do not just give the answers; they also try to explain to them how to think step by step.

By lunchtime, the puzzle becomes a topic of discussion. Some students confidently claim that they have solved it, while others wait to check their answers before submitting. A locked box in front of the staffroom awaits their responses. They treat this fun activity very earnestly. Each one scribbles their answer and notes their name on a piece of paper, folds and drops it into the box.

A week later, I unlock the box and go through the answers – some right, some wrong. As I separate the correct ones, I imagine the students' eager faces, waiting to see if their names will be displayed – names of all the students who get the answer correct are displayed on the board.

Activities like this create opportunities to take mathematics outside the classroom. They also create an environment of excitement and curiosity. Some other important things happen:

- Students think. Instead of memorising formulas, they learn to approach problems logically, step by step. They learn to split big questions into smaller parts and think logically.
- It creates a culture of learning. Younger students get guidance from seniors, and discussions happen outside the classroom, making learning effortless.
- It builds patience – the waiting period before the results are revealed teaches students to be patient.
- It gives a sense of achievement. When their names go up on the board, their confidence grows. They feel motivated and ready for the next challenge.
- It makes school exciting. Instead of just following a routine, students look forward to something unexpected, something that sparks curiosity.

Week after week, a new puzzle appears, and the cycle goes on. Gradually, it becomes a part of the students' everyday life, where, together with excitement, they take up the challenge, discuss and try to solve it. This makes their school day a little more interesting.

Mokhtar Zaman is a teacher at Azim Premji School, Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh

Teaching beyond the boundaries of subjects and languages

Dron Sahu



The new session of the year had just begun. I was given the responsibility of teaching Hindi to class III. When I read through the textbook, I found that a few new lessons had been added. They looked less like Hindi lessons and more like lessons in Environment Studies (EVS). I was to work with the students on *Lesson 3: How Many Legs?* I decided to have an oral discussion with the students about the lesson.

I began by talking about human legs. I asked the students to name creatures with two legs. They named quite a few: peacock, eagle, humans, etc. While giving these examples, some students also began naming animals with four legs. Seeing their growing interest in the discussion, I became curious to see how many different animals they could name. So, I asked them to name animals based on the number of legs they have.

Saying this, I drew a few columns on the board. I told the students that we would categorise creatures by the number of legs they have. Everyone enthusiastically agreed with the idea.

The students began naming creatures, and I wrote the names in the appropriate boxes on the blackboard. Some students knew the names only in their own languages, so they were hesitant to name them. Sensing their dilemma, I told them they could name the creatures in any language they knew. And then there was no stopping them—one by one, they began calling out all kinds of new names for creatures. Many of these creatures I had not even heard of myself. I would ask the students about the creature's size, colour, and where it lived, and they would describe it with great enthusiasm. For example, when I asked what a '*bitta-nappa*' insect was like, the students explained that it moves on leaves and on the ground in the same way we move our hands while measuring a span (*bitta*). From this, I understood that the students were talking about loopers (inchworm caterpillars). They offered similar descriptions for many other insects and creatures, too. Their descriptions were enough for me to understand which creature they were referring to.

The discussion kept moving forward, and our list kept growing, organised by the number of legs. Many students also knew the names of some creatures in English. During the discussion, they would use the English names too, and we included those in our conversation. I repeated those English names aloud so that the students could hear them properly.

As I said earlier, we had begun with two-legged creatures. After that came four-legged creatures, then six, eight, and even ten. There also came a moment when, for creatures like the centipede (*kankhajoora*), we simply could not settle on a definite number of legs. So together we decided that we should make another box on the blackboard, one for creatures with countless legs. And so, another category was added. In the same way, a category had to be created for legless creatures, too.

The conversation was flowing along in a lively atmosphere when suddenly a problem arose. One group of students said that a monkey is a two-legged creature, while another insisted that it is a four-legged animal. Both groups were offering all kinds of arguments, each in their own way. One group said that a monkey uses all four of its limbs while walking, while the other argued that when eating, it uses only its hands. It became difficult for me to decide which group was correct and in which category the monkey should be placed. Both sides had valid points. The most heartening thing about this exchange was that even those students who never usually came forward in class and who never liked to speak were

sharing their opinions. Finally, after a great deal of back-and-forth, both groups agreed to place the monkey in the box for two-legged creatures, because it looks like a human. Similar arguments happened regarding kangaroos, frogs, and crocodiles. For the kangaroo, I even had to pull out a video on my phone!

In the middle of all this, some students showed an interest in knowing about creatures with one leg or three legs. I asked them to find out about such creatures at home and come back with their findings. Some students, gazing at the boxes on the board, volunteered to find out about creatures with 8, 10, and even more than 10 legs. I also suggested they could look for this information online.

And just like that, the 90-minute class passed by. The very lesson I had felt half-hearted and uncertain about before teaching had brought my classroom alive today. I could see so many possibilities in this lesson. The students were using their own language, learning new words, and, because of what the lesson was about, getting opportunities to participate and express themselves. My own vocabulary was also growing. This was possible only because the lesson was rooted in their world, their immediate surroundings, their environment.

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

Dron Sahu, Teacher, Primary School, Bijemal, Mahasamund, Chhattisgar

Emotional safety in the classroom

Poonam



We were discussing the story titled *The Bee and the Elephant* in class 1. At the end of the discussion, students were expected to answer a few questions, for example, the name of the story, its characters, and the plot, etc. Before beginning, I had given them instructions and written the title, names of characters, etc., on the blackboard.

I narrated the story while the students followed it in their printed copies. Then, the students came forward one by one to answer questions on the story. Some struggled with reading difficult words and identifying the plot, so I briefly explained these again.

Then I was called for some urgent matter, and I had to step out of the class. After less than 10 minutes, when I returned, I saw 10-15 students gathered around Sunita's seat. Two or three students ran towards me and said, 'Ma'am, Sunita is crying!' I immediately asked, 'Why is she crying?' but no one knew.

When I approached Sunita to ask what had happened, she remained silent for a while and denied being hurt or teased. Before leaving the class, I had asked the students not to discuss the story any further and had assigned Sunita to maintain discipline. Another student was meant to assist her, but as she did not take an interest in the task, Sunita had to handle the responsibility on her own, which left her under pressure.

Finally, she spoke, '*Mein bacchon ko bol rahi thi ki sab log chup ho jao, koi chup hi nahi ho raha tha. Fir mujhe ekdam se gussa aya aur maine apna scale lekar apne hath par mara.*' (I was telling the children repeatedly to be silent, but they just did not listen. In a rush of anger, I struck my own hand with the scale.)

I: Why did you do this to yourself?

Sunita: No one was listening to me, and they just wouldn't stop talking.

I: So, did they listen to you after that?

Sunita: (Shook her head) No.

I: Sunita, tell me, did your solution solve your problem?

Sunita: No.

I: 15 minutes back, we were discussing this in the story – the bee was in trouble, and someone helped the bee to find her forgotten house. Was the bee just crying, or was it trying to find its house?

Sunita: The bee was searching for its house.

I: Did the bee hurt itself?

Sunita: No.

I: Have you found the correct solution in the story?

Sunita: Yes, the bee asked for help, and the elephant helped it.

I: So, if the bee had just sat in one place crying and hadn't asked for help, would it have found its home?

Sunita: No.

I: I think you are smarter than the bee. You can find the solution to your problem instead of crying or hurting yourself.

Sunita: (nodded her head) Yes.

After the discussion, Sunita felt relaxed and spent the rest of the day actively participating in the activities. As a teacher, I considered it my duty to inform her parents, so I called her father and explained the situation. He was very supportive, emotionally connected to his daughter, and shared that similar incidents had happened in the past when Sunita became upset—sometimes leading to self-blame or even self-harm.

Over time, with consistent guidance, Sunita became more confident. After seven months, she happily manages responsibilities during assemblies. Her father shared that even at home, she talks about how comfortable she feels handling these duties. She has also learned that if she is not comfortable with doing a task, she can take on some other responsibility. This realisation has given her both confidence and a sense of belonging.

Working with sensitive children requires careful choice of words and thoughtful planning of activities. Such experiences should help them understand real-life problems and find solutions. Most importantly, they should know that if they cannot manage a situation alone, it is alright to seek help from a trusted person. They can also let some problems remain without solutions, but never cause self-harm.

This experience shows that classrooms must nurture not only academic skills but also emotional growth. Through storytelling, open discussions, and supported dialogue, teachers can help children manage emotions, solve problems constructively, and seek help when needed—preparing them not just for tests, but for life. Creating a classroom and home environment where children feel safe to talk, ask questions, and share their problems is one of the most valuable support we can give them.

Poonam, Teacher, Azim Premji School Dineshpur, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand



In the spotlight

Teamwork makes a school better - Kavita Singh

Manish Kishore



Kavita Singh

Kavita Singh is a committed and inspiring school principal working at the Mahatma Gandhi Government School, Bhatawala, in the Sanganer block of Jaipur. There was a time when her school was struggling with a lack of basic infrastructure, declining enrolment, and a weak academic environment. Amid

these challenges, she focused on students' learning and set up a Reading Corner in the school. Through this, and by working together with the community, staff, and students, she revitalised the academic atmosphere and a culture of learning. At the same time, she connected the community with the school and created an environment of shared responsibility for fellow teachers. To understand this journey, Manish Kishore spoke with her. Here are some excerpts from the conversation.

Manish: What were your priorities when you took charge as the principal? How did you work on them?

Kavita: In the beginning, when I tried to understand the actual situation of the school, two major challenges were evident. The first was the absence of basic facilities such as drinking water, electricity, and a safe building. The second was the continuously declining enrolment. At that time, enrolment had dropped from 105 to just 70 students. This was a matter of serious concern.

To address these problems, we created a joint plan with the staff. With the support of a donor, a borewell was installed for water in the school, and regular contact was maintained with the local lineman to ensure a stable electricity supply. This improved the physical environment of the school.

To increase enrolment, we spoke with parents to understand why they were not sending their children to school. Their primary concern was the quality of teaching.



Teachers began to appreciate students' efforts rather than comparing their achievements, and all students were included in activities without discrimination. This has created an inclusive and collaborative learning environment.



We assured them that we were committed to improving it and requested that they give us some time to implement a better learning experience for the students.

Teachers began focusing on warm and respectful interaction with students in the classrooms, ensuring regular attendance and effective teaching, and creating a positive environment for learning. These efforts slowly restored parents' trust. Today, enrolment has increased from 70 to 142 students.

Manish: What initiatives did you undertake to create an environment for learning and teaching in the school?

Kavita: We tried to ensure that every student feels safe, respected, and included in the learning process. We made it a point that in classrooms, students' backgrounds, abilities, and pace of learning are respected. With the use of activity-based learning (ABL) kits, students have the opportunity to learn at their own pace, without any pressure. Teachers began to appreciate students' efforts rather than comparing their achievements, and all students were included in activities without discrimination. This has created an inclusive and collaborative learning environment.

The Reading Corner has been developed as a space for dialogue. Here, students read books of their choice, narrate stories, and participate in open group discussions. This has enabled even shy students to gradually express themselves. The morning assembly has also been linked

with expression. Students present poems, plays, songs, and personal experiences. Teachers and students listen carefully to one another and give positive feedback.

This empowered the students in many ways and encouraged them to organise a children's fair in the school. They planned it together, divided work into groups, prepared food, set up stalls, and marketed their products. This developed a sense of cooperation and responsibility among them.

All students are enthusiastic towards learning. For me, all these are true signs of a healthy academic environment.

Manish: How do you see community participation in teaching-learning processes, and what do you do about it?

Kavita: I consider parents' participation very important in the development of the school. I speak with them not only about the students' academic progress but also about their behaviour, interests, and regularity. If a student hesitates to speak or lags in group work, I suggest simple practices to parents, such as storytelling or role play at home, so they can be involved in the child's learning.

Many parents contribute through voluntary work in the maintenance and cleanliness of the building, listening



Figure 1: Students reading books in the library.

to children during children's assemblies, and sharing experiences during festivals. But a continuous dialogue and participation have strengthened trust between the school and the community.

Manish: What brought your attention towards creating an academic environment in the school, and what efforts did you make for it?

Kavita: Prompted by students' academic struggles, I felt the need to establish a Reading Corner to foster a learning-focused environment. My conviction that regular book access could bring about positive change was reinforced during an Azim Premji Foundation meeting for the NIPUN Mohanpura campaign. There, the Reading Corner was redefined as not merely a storage space for books, but as a safe, vibrant, and inviting sanctuary where students can choose and read books of their interest.

I discussed students' needs and the idea of creating a Reading Corner with fellow teachers. Some helped arrange seating for students, and others suggested including reading time in the timetable. One teacher took charge of the Reading Corner, while others helped classify books class-wise and arrange them attractively in the Reading Corner. Through these collective efforts, the Reading Corner was started in the school.

Students were allowed to take books into classrooms, read them during free time, and take them home. Teachers do not expect them to write summaries. Instead, they ask, 'What did you read, and what did you like about it?' This reduced their hesitation, improved oral expression, and, gradually, children developed an interest in reading and self-confidence. Today, students voluntarily sit there and read.

Manish: It is often believed that students tear or damage books. What did you do to change this perception?

Kavita: Teachers were a little concerned about students not taking good care of the books. In the morning assembly, we discussed the importance of books and how to care for them, such as considering books a treasure of knowledge, reading them with clean hands, not using saliva to turn pages, not scribbling, avoiding folding or tearing, and keeping them in the right place after reading.

Along with this, students were also given responsibilities related to book care, such as arranging books properly, keeping count, and repairing damaged books with glue or tape. One day each week was kept aside for book repair activities. These efforts gradually developed a sense of responsibility among the students, leading to the preservation and maintenance of books.

Manish: What efforts were made to develop reading and writing habits among students?

Kavita: The Reading Corner plays an important role in developing reading and writing habits. To achieve this, we ensured four things. First, we provided the students with a wide range of good books. Second, they were given the freedom to choose books according to their likes and interests. Third, platforms were created for them to share what they read with peers. Fourth, they were given opportunities to express what they learned in their own language and words, both orally and in writing.

Manish: What was the process of setting up the Reading Corner like? What preparations did you make?

Kavita: Some aspects I have already discussed. Additionally, with regard to setting it up, we classified books based on students' age, language level, and interests. Separate sets of books were arranged for classes I-II, III-V, and VI-VIII. Priority was given to books with simple language, effective illustrations, engaging storylines, and relevance to local and students' life contexts.

Teachers collectively read and selected the books. Some of the books children loved, included *Mahagiri*, *Nanhe-Munne Geet*, *Teen Poonchh Wala Chuha*, *Billi Ke Gale Mein Ghanti Kaun Baandhega*, *Bus Ki Sair*, and others. Students of classes VI-VII read in the Reading Corner, while teachers take books to classrooms for classes I-V. The second period has been designated as Reading Corner time. After reading, discussions and book-based activities are conducted during this time.

Manish: What strategies did you adopt to connect teachers and students with the Reading Corner?

Kavita: Teachers' understanding and the department-led '*Prakhar Rajasthan Campaign*' have played an important role in connecting both teachers and students with the Reading Corner. Students were divided into four subgroups according to their reading levels: *Beej* (Seed), *Ankur* (Sprout), *Pushpan* (Bloom), and *Phalan* (Fruit).

Picture books, short stories, poems, and books in simple language are placed separately for each group, so that students can choose according to their abilities. Initially,

“ When teachers develop the habit of reading good literary and educational books, both for children and adults, it helps them choose better books for the Reading Corner and use them more effectively. It also brings positive changes in the way they teach subjects, interact with students, communicate with them, and ask thought-provoking questions in the classroom. ”

teachers sat with students, looked at books together, discussed the pictures, and narrated stories and poems. Gradually, students began to take an interest in reading on their own.

Continuous engagement with different books also increased teachers' interest in Reading Corner books. Along with books, like *Divaswapna*, *Bache Ki Bhasha aur Adhyapak*, *Bachchon ke liye Khel Kriyaen*, and *Totto-Chan: The Little Girl at the Window*, teachers began to particularly include those books that students showed a liking for. Many teachers felt they had almost lost the habit of reading children's literature, but reconnecting with these books brought them joy.

Manish: What kinds of changes were seen in teaching and learning after these efforts to develop reading and writing habits?

Kavita: After reading or listening to stories and poems, we focused on short conversations to improve language skills. Students were asked what they liked in the story, which character they liked, and why. This encouraged them to speak, and gradually their expression became clearer and more confident.

Simple activities were conducted to nurture imagination and creativity, such as thinking of a new ending or title for a story, drawing something based on the stories, or speaking as a character. Some students even started to write and share their own short poems and stories inspired by what they had read. Gradually, they began picking up books on their own, expressing a desire to take them home, and reading during free time. Improvements became visible in self-study habits, reading skills, language, behaviour, and confidence. Many students now remind teachers that they need reading time.

Not only this, when teachers develop the habit of reading good literary and educational books, both for children and adults, it helps them choose better books for the

Reading Corner and use them more effectively. It also brings positive changes in the way they teach subjects, interact with students, communicate with them, and ask thought-provoking questions in the classroom.

Manish: What kind of challenges did you face in these efforts?

Kavita: There were challenges in making the Reading Corner a part of the school culture. Initially, some students hesitated to choose books, and some teachers considered it an extra activity and could not give it regular time. Limited resources also made it difficult to ensure the availability and maintenance of good-quality books. To address these challenges, we relied on small, practical, and collective efforts. We made a flexible timetable. Sometimes reading time was scheduled after prayer, sometimes before recess, or for 10-15 minutes at the end of a class. We reiterated to ourselves that the Reading Corner is not extra work but a natural medium for developing language and understanding.

Manish: How did you create a positive school environment where teachers felt comfortable contributing to your efforts?

Kavita: We built an environment of trust, dialogue, and participation. The effort was to ensure that teachers

felt involved in every decision. Open discussions were initiated on every issue. While discussing the reading level of the students, all teachers were asked how the Reading Corner could be improved, instead of being given instructions. Some suggested defining book levels, others recommended adding 15 minutes of daily reading activity to the timetable. Responsibilities were also divided through mutual agreement. This conveyed that the initiative belonged not to one person but to the entire team.

Similarly, to increase enrolment, some teachers took responsibility for connecting with parents. When plans are made with teachers' consent, a natural sense of responsibility and involvement develops on its own.

It was also ensured that teachers' efforts were appreciated from time to time. Special attention was given to creating a safe and trustworthy environment where teachers could share their problems, challenges, and needs without fear or hesitation. This strengthens their confidence and encourages active participation.

Ultimately, when teachers witness that even their small efforts are visible in the development of students and the school, each teacher begins to see themselves as an active part of that success. This collective spirit keeps the school moving forward.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Pragya P Vetter: Sumati PK



Manish Kishore has been working with the Azim Premji Foundation in Rajasthan for the last six years. He is associated with the Foundation through its Associate Programme. He works on Hindi and mathematics at the primary level and in social sciences at the upper primary and secondary levels.

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In the company of books

Ped ka Pta (Address of a Tree)

Reviewer: Prabhat

When Sushil Shukla, the author of this storybook, writes that 'A tree on earth is my address', it means that the address of a tree is also the address of us humans on earth. The day the address of trees disappears from the earth, the address of us humans will also disappear.

This slim book of just 26 pages contains 19 short pieces of prose. If dates were also written on these pieces of prose, then we could have called this book a writer's diary, because there is a deep internal dialogue in them. How a person sees their surroundings, how they feel about it, and what they think while seeing and feeling, is described in this book in a way that the reader may wish that they, too, could write like this.

Each piece of prose in the book has a title. Translated into English, some of these would be: *Those Three Trees, Name Plate, The Diary of a Cow, The Diary of a Ghost, A Single Shoe*, to name a few. These titles are such that if a teacher wants, they can write these on slips of paper and give one to each child in the class and ask them to write a few paragraphs on whatever comes to their mind after reading it. Then whatever each child has written, all the children in the class can listen to it. After that, they can read what the author has written. This activity can do wonders in the class.

These are pieces of prose written by a person who is filled with awe on seeing nature. 'Where that big furniture shop is, there used to be three trees. Two tamarind and one neem.' One day, he climbs up two floors in this four-storey shop, just like climbing on a tamarind tree. And after coming out of the shop, he thinks—'When I make a green sun, the teacher scolds me. It is strange that when someone makes a furniture shop from a tree, no one scolds them.'

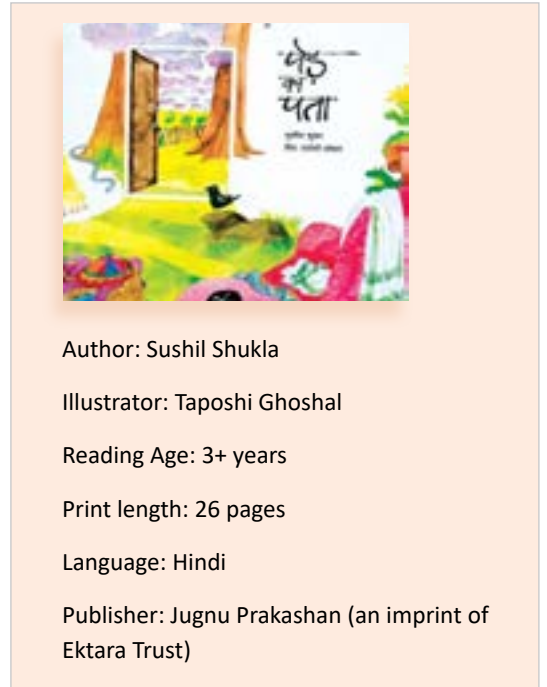
The furniture shop is the address of three lost trees. The forests are being cut, which also means that the tribals living in the forest are being made to disappear from the earth. On the one hand, we dream of creating an egalitarian society where everyone has equal rights to live; on the other hand, the greed of some people is never satiated, even if trees, forests, and people have to be made to disappear. *Karachi Ka Chaisa, Seth Aur Uska Aadmi, Name Plate*, etc., are such pieces of prose from which questions can be discussed in the class. The human aspects between the two countries, inequality, the tragedy of migration, etc., can be discussed.

Neither language nor life can escape the author's imagination. 'When flowers bloom on the tree, the shadow of the tree also blooms.... The poignancy of some of the pieces is truly felt, such as 'Name Plate', in which he writes of a demolished house. Of the fan under which we sit, he asks, 'Who is running this fan?' And in search of the answer, he reaches the workers working in the mine who are extracting coal that produces electricity.

Taposhi Ghoshal's illustrations are equally unique. What is written for the word can be considered as written for the pictures as well.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Bansi Vetter: Sonam Kumari

Prabhat has been working independently in the field of education. He has published several books of poetry and many stories for children. For his outstanding literary contributions, he has received several awards.



Author: Sushil Shukla

Illustrator: Taposhi Ghoshal

Reading Age: 3+ years

Print length: 26 pages

Language: Hindi

Publisher: Jugnu Prakashan (an imprint of Ektara Trust)

Jai Bheem

Reviewer: Dinesh Madagaonkar

As the first book to portray Dr B R Ambedkar as a superhero, this unique children's book marks a bold and refreshing departure from traditional storytelling. Framed as part of a children's series, this short yet powerful volume uses a vibrant narrative style to present constitutional values through the lens of heroism and justice.

The author, Vikas R Maurya, envisions Ambedkar not as a historical figure confined to textbooks, but as a living, breathing superhero—clad in blue, armed with a pen, and ever-ready to defend the vulnerable. This concept draws children in by tapping into their fascination with superheroes, like Superman and Spider-Man, while simultaneously introducing them to a real-life figure of immense national importance.

The story unfolds with the phrase 'We the People of India', borrowed from the Preamble of the Constitution, and becomes a rallying cry throughout the book, tying the narrative to the constitutional spirit of justice and equality.

The book's illustrations, brilliantly crafted by Suresh R Arkasali, play a crucial role in bringing the narrative to life. Each image is not only visually striking but emotionally resonant, capturing the intensity and symbolism of every scene. The colour blue plays a dominant role throughout, representing Ambedkar's heroic presence and the ideals of justice. Meanwhile, red and brown are used to symbolically depict the turmoil and struggles created by society's negative forces, adding depth and emotional weight to the unfolding incidents. These colour choices strengthen the overall impact of the story, helping to convey the urgency of the issues being addressed—be it inequality, exploitation, or resistance.

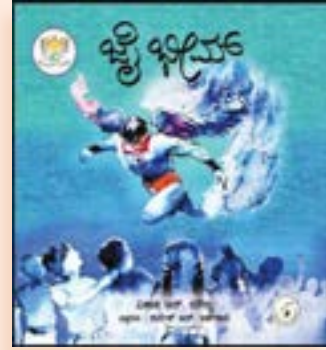
These visuals do more than accompany the text—they expand it. They depict the story with powerful imagery that communicates complex social realities in a way that is immediately understandable to young readers. Whether it is Ambedkar shielding children with the Constitution or confronting injustice face-to-face, every illustration reinforces the core message of empowerment and justice.

The narrative is rich with symbolic scenes, like a private school refusing admission to children from poor families, until the superhero arrives to defend their right to education. In another episode, he halts a bulldozer operated by a wealthy builder and rescues child labourers from a burning warehouse, all the while teaching moral lessons to those who exploit the powerless. His voice echoes with strength and clarity, 'The children of the poor are not the property of your household,' directly challenging entrenched privilege and injustice.

As the story progresses, the antagonist, a wealthy, arrogant man on his mythical 'Maya horse', mockingly declares, 'Even if a hundred people like you were born, I would outsmart you with the brilliance in my head.' Yet this arrogance is met by the united chant, 'We the People of India!'. When bullets fly, children and adults retreat in fear only to discover that they are protected by an invisible shield: the Constitution, held high by Ambedkar and his companions, as the cry of 'Jai Bhim' rises above the chaos.

In this moving and symbolic tale, the author succeeds in conveying a powerful truth: the Constitution is not merely a legal document; it is a living force that stands with the people, especially the oppressed. Through thrilling scenes and vivid characters, he instils in young readers a deep respect for justice, equality, and democratic values.

Few children's books have so effectively conveyed the importance of the Constitution and the vision of Ambedkar. *Jai Bhim* is a book every parent should read with their children, not only for its story, but for the message of courage, compassion, and constitutional awareness that it leaves behind.



Author: Vikas R Maurya

Illustrator: Suresh R. Arkasali

Reading Age: 6 -12 years

Print length: 20 pages

Language: Kannada

Publisher: Navakarnataka Publications

Dinesh Madagaonkar is a member of the Communications Team at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. He has authored a short story collection, translated children's books into Kannada, and worked as a regional language copywriter.



Let's do some activities!

Find your match

Through this activity, students will be able to **distinguish between living and non-living things**. It will encourage the skills of observation, quick thinking, interaction with each other, communication and collaborative learning.

Age/class: Students of classes II and III

Group size: 24 students (can be adapted for any even-sized group of students)

Materials required:

- 12 cards with pictures of living things (depending on the number of children, this number may be more or less.)
- 12 cards with pictures of non-living things.

These cards should be kept hidden or upside down till the round begins.

Note: Teachers can cut out pictures from old newspapers/magazines and paste them on cards made from old charts or household items, packets, etc. They can also draw pictures themselves and involve the children, too.

Suggestions for living things: hen, boy, girl, monkey, sparrow, frog, banyan tree, mango tree, ant, spider, lizard, litchi tree, lotus, rose, goat, buffalo, elephant, cow, parrot, peacock, pigeon, fish, cat, snake, earthworm, human, butterfly, plant, sugarcane, camel, crow, friend.

Suggestions for non-living things: earthen pot, school bag, bicycle, chalk, cricket bat, book, rickshaw, fan, steel plate, cot, kite, stone, lantern, door, phone, slippers, spoon, black board, table, light bulb, bus, scooter, brick, window, wall, umbrella, doll, bell, flag, clock, tea, mirror, water bottle.

Easy level: Find your partner

- Distribute the cards. Randomly give one folded card to each student with the instruction that no one should look at it till the teacher tells them to.
- On the teacher's signal (ready, steady, go!), students look at their cards.
- Each student must find a partner who has a card from the same category (living or non-living).
- Once they find a match, they sit down together as a pair.

Intermediate level: Find two partners

- Repeat the process, but this time, each student must find two other students with cards from the same category. For example, if a student has a card for a living thing, the student has to find two other students who also have cards of living things.
- They form groups of three.



Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

Difficult level: Find partners with the same theme

- Repeat the process, but this time, each student must find two other students with cards from the same theme. For example, someone with an animal card (such as, cat) will have to find another two who also have animal cards (such as, monkey, cow).
- They form groups of three.

Tips for Teachers:

- Mix up the cards after each round. Introduce new cards in the later rounds to expose students to a wider range of examples.
- Encourage students to explain *why* they think something is living or non-living after each round.
- Have the whole class reflect on which things they grouped together and why.
- End with a short discussion or a drawing activity where students sort or label items into two columns as 'living' and 'non-living'.

Silent roads

This activity will help students build **trust**, **non-verbal communication**, and **collaborative problem-solving** through physical movement and teamwork. This can be done with children of classes III, IV and V. An open space is essential for this game.

Age/class: Students of classes III, IV and V

Group size: Any even number of students. Divide students into pairs (1 driver + 1 vehicle in each pair).

Easy level

Step 1: Pair Up

- Divide students into pairs. One student becomes a 'vehicle' and the other its 'driver'.

Step 2: Blindfold the child who is the 'vehicle'.

Step 3: Create silent signals

- Each pair decides on non-verbal signals that the driver will use to guide the vehicle. For example:
 - o One tap on the right shoulder = Turn right
 - o One tap on the left shoulder = Turn left
 - o Two taps on the back = Move forward
 - o A gentle tug on the sleeve = Stop



Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

- o Light tap on both shoulders = Reverse

Step 4: Navigate a simple path

- Set up a simple pathway with chalk lines.
- The driver (student) stands behind the vehicle (student) and guides the vehicle (student) using the agreed-upon signals.

Step 5: Swap roles

- Once done, have students switch roles and repeat. The driver becomes the vehicle, and the vehicle becomes the driver.

Difficult level

- Add a time challenge or a small object pick-up task.
- Encourage reflection: How did you feel when you were the vehicle? Was your communication clear? How did it feel to depend on touch instead of sight or speech? What helped you trust your partner?

Tips for Teachers

- Monitor for safety and fairness
- Discuss how we communicate even without words—great for building empathy and understanding different forms of expression

These two activities have been contributed by Silja Samuel Bansriyar. Silja is part of the Design Team at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru.

Fruits, Flowers and Vegetables

This activity can be conducted with a group of 10 to 15 children. There is no concept of winning or losing, and all children get an equal chance to participate. Everyone gets a turn.

Easy level

To begin the game, one child is asked to volunteer and come forward. The child pretends to be carrying a basket on their head. While the rest of the children stand in a circle, this child walks inside the circle, calling out, 'Fruit, flower, vegetable'. At any moment, this child can stop in front of anyone and call out one of the three words: 'fruit', 'flower', or 'vegetable'. The other child has to immediately name one item belonging to the category that has been named. For example, if it is 'flower', the child must name a flower. Similarly, for the other categories.

The game moves quickly, so the children must stay alert. If a child is unable to respond, or gives an incorrect answer, for example, says 'potato' when they have been asked to name a fruit, the basket is placed on that child's head, and that child then takes the turn of walking around the circle in the same manner to continue the game.



Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

Difficult level

The game begins in the same way, with the child calling out the three words, but they may stop in front of someone and say two words instead of one. For example, fruit and flower. Now, the other child must name one fruit and one flower.

The difficulty level can be increased further, and at the next stage, the child may say all three words together. In which case, the respondent must name one fruit, one flower, and one vegetable.

This gradual increase in difficulty keeps the game engaging and helps children build attention, speed, and quick thinking in a playful and stress-free manner.

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

This activity has been contributed by Anil Singh from Bhopal. He is involved in the work of children's literature and enrichment of libraries with the Tata Trusts' Parag Initiative.



We've got mail!

Anganwadi Workers and Supervisors appreciated ECE special issue

All the articles in the special issue highlight important aspects related to early childhood education. The article by Shreshta Mishra and Rajat Sharma, titled 'Scaffolding the Anganwadi Worker Effectively,' presents the supervisor's role in a very positive way in the development of both the centre and the *Anganwadi* worker. The authors state that supervisors are 'agents of change' in the *Anganwadi* centre, and even small efforts by them can bring meaningful improvements. The role of a supervisor is also helpful in the professional development of the *Anganwadi* worker. I shared this issue with a few *Anganwadi* workers and supervisors. They read and appreciated it.

Rupali Verma, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand

Special ECE issue deepened my understanding of children's learning

After reading the ECE special issue, I understood that the ultimate goal of the ECE programme is the child's growth, and not the content. I am also able to observe in my own surroundings that discussions are always centred on what should be taught, rather than on how children learn, or how children's own thinking develops. This issue made it interesting to understand that children develop at different paces and that we must understand their learning patterns. It also helped me see delays in learning in a positive way. I had only heard the name of *Anganwadis* earlier, but now I would like to visit one myself and see what and how children are learning there.

Sandhya Singh, Teacher, Nagar Nigam Prathamik Bal Vidyalaya, Mehrauli Dargah, New Delhi

Article reminds us to keep children happy

I completely resonate with the point made by Sunil Kumar Sah in his article, 'Environment of Anganwadi Centres must be Joyful'; that these centres should not be seen only as nutrition centres but should be developed as joyful learning spaces. The author has rightly said that we often get burdened by heavy learning theories, which takes away the joy from the work. Playing with colours or using locally available seeds shows that teaching children does not require expensive resources; rather, it requires a positive environment. The article reminds us that if we keep children happy, learning will happen on its own. This article is a guide for us.

Shaista, Anganwadi Worker, Kendra Bangla Puthri, Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh

Learning through drama appealed to me

The article 'Early Education and the Role of Drama' published in the special issue, appealed to me the most. This theme is based on children's natural ways of learning. Through drama, children use imagination to understand the world. It helps develop children's creativity freely. It also improves their language and communication skills. Through play, they learn social roles and are able to express their emotions in a safe manner. This makes learning a source of joy rather than a burden. In this way, drama becomes an effective medium of teaching. It emphasises learning without any pressure. This connects well with the objectives of early education.

S D Farooq, Government Secondary School, Gunnali Taluka, Bidar, Karnataka

Author reiterates children's democratic rights

The article by Kishan Lal Salvi, 'Fear Hinders Learning' in Issue 24, directly challenges the social belief that if children are to be taught, beating/punishing them is the only remedy. This belief very often echoes on many platforms. Certain steps taken by teachers are very important for children's learning, such as removing the stick from the classroom, using

children's language in teaching, giving them opportunities for free expression, activity-based learning, and creating an environment free from restrictions.

From some of my own experiences as well, I have understood the need to create a democratic space for children's rights. I have been making such efforts in my teaching for the past 15 years.

Pramod Kumar Dhruv, Teacher, Government Primary School Aroud, Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh

Common questions on ECE answered

The special issue on ECE provides very interesting and accurate information about young children. Along with *Anganwadi* workers and preschool teachers, it is also extremely useful for parents. The article by Jigisha Shastri, 'Frequently Asked Questions by Early Childhood Teachers', answers common questions and helps both *Anganwadi* workers and parents understand children better. Parents can easily understand that when children are playing, they are actually learning. *Anganwadi* workers and parents are also able to understand that small children do not like to sit in one place for a long time. They keep changing places frequently and also keep changing their toys. This is part of their continuous process of learning.

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

Conversation with Anganwadi Worker was inspiring

In the 26th issue, the conversation conducted by Nivedita Tiwari with *Anganwadi* worker Sunita Singh for the column 'Teachers inspiring hope' was very meaningful. I shared it with all the *Anganwadi* Workers and Helpers in my sector so that they could take inspiration from the article and try to transform their *Anganwadi* centres into new and child-friendly spaces. This will also help increase the enrolment of children in *Anganwadi* centres under the ECE programme.

Sangeeta Jain, Supervisor, Anganwadi Centre, Sanganer, Jaipur, Rajasthan

The Editorial motivated readers to read the special issue

The ideas in the special issue (ECE) are extremely beneficial for every teacher, *Anganwadi* worker, and supervisor associated with *Anganwadi* centres. In this new phase of teaching and learning, such ideas are useful for both teachers and students in early education, because education today is no longer teacher-centred but student-centred. Educating students is considered a challenging task. It is believed that students appreciate the teacher who starts by understanding them. The editorial of the issue attracts readers to read every article in the magazine.

Shashidhar Singh, Government College, Secondary Department, Haran Halli, Karnataka

Author explained the importance of discussions in the classroom

In Issue 25, I read Vineeta Chauksey's article 'Discussions are important in the classroom'. Although I do talk with children about their experiences, I did not fully understand the importance of such discussions or their role in reading and writing. Through examples, the article helped me understand that we should listen carefully to children, respect what they say, and give them ample opportunities to speak. Writing down conversations helps develop confidence, expression, and creativity in children.

Preeti Saxena, Primary Teacher, Government Primary School, Leta, Jalore, Rajasthan

Inspiring work by teacher so no child is left behind

In the *Pages from Teachers' Diaries* column, 'Creating a nurturing Anganwadi' published in Issue 26, the author Sandhyawali Gupta explains that when she works with children on a particular topic or theme, she ensures that all the necessary materials related to that topic are made available in the centre in advance. This ensures that all the children can participate in the activities equally. Regardless of the children's family backgrounds, she ensures that no child is deprived of learning or participation in activities.

Zia Ansari, Library In-charge, Azim Premji School, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand

Thought-provoking article on drama at the Anganwadi stage

Parul Batra Duggal's article, published in the special issue, presents the process of adopting drama as an educational experiment in the *Anganwadi* in well-defined stages.

- It helps develop the understanding that the direction of learning is shaped by children's experiences and responses.
- The role of the *Anganwadi* worker is presented not as a director or controller, but as a facilitator and observer. This is an important educational insight.
- This experiment was not limited to a particular 'activity', but became a part of the everyday educational process of the *Anganwadi*. This presents a perspective of integrating drama into learning rather than conducting it as a separate activity.
- The limitations and uncertainties of this experiment have also been acknowledged, such as the unequal participation of all children or the unpredictable nature of the process. This makes the article more credible and grounded.

This article is a serious, experiential and thought-provoking presentation on understanding and adopting drama as an educational experiment at the *Anganwadi* level.

Bhuvan Tiwari, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

How teachers transformed a school that was on the brink of closing was very motivating

The article 'Transformation of a School' published in Issue 24 shows how a dedicated team of sensitive teachers worked together to reduce the gap between the community and the school. The committed teachers gave special importance to sharing children's learning with the community. This effort became a ray of hope for a school that was on the verge of closure. The increasing number of students and their achievements drew everyone's attention. The reading methods developed by the teachers are very interesting. In the Reading Festival, different approaches, such as reading through a mirror, newspaper reading, reading an upside-down book, developing mathematical understanding through dramatic transactions, and zigzag reading, were particularly engaging. The way teachers continued to move forward while learning from challenges left a strong impression of hope on me.

Deepa, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Magarlod, Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh

Special issue on ECE is a strong medium for capacity-building

This special issue on ECE felt not merely like a magazine but like an ongoing conversation in the field. One of the major strengths of this issue is that it attempts to understand ECE not through idealistic or heavy policy language, but through the real experiences of children.

This issue can be used directly as reference material in sector meetings, teacher meetings and training sessions. Excerpts from the articles can be read and discussed so that training becomes a process of 'thinking and understanding' rather than simply 'instructing'. The magazine can become a strong medium for building the capacities of people working in this field.

This issue presents a balanced and trustworthy perspective on Early Childhood Education, where research, experience and ground realities come together. I believe that this magazine [issue] will be useful for *Anganwadi* workers, pre-school teachers, trainers and people associated with policy and will deepen the conversation around ECE.

Ananas Kumar, Azim Premji Foundation, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand

A good example of working with drama in Anganwadi

The article by Parul Batra Duggal on Early Childhood Education in the special issue was very good. Often, the genre of drama is associated only with children at the school level. One reason for this may be that teachers sometimes hesitate even to enact stories or poems with expressions and gestures, and drama is considered a step beyond that. Conducting drama requires a certain level of preparation and engagement with children. This article presents a good example of working with drama with children in *Anganwadi*. If drama is approached in the right way, children of every age can

participate in the process and learn from it. The issue is not the age of the children, but the need to work on it in a systematic and regular way.

Purna, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Damoh, Madhya Pradesh

Author's views moved me deeply

The first line of the article 'Education in the Early Years: A Conceptual Exploration' published in Issue 26, written by Kinnari Pandya, 'For young children, education means helping them connect with the world,' deeply moved me. The article explains that the first eight years of a child's life are the most influential. I have observed that through play, children not only develop physically but also remain very happy. The most important point is that when children come to school happily and with self-motivation, they learn and become enthusiastic readers. This article is very useful for early education.

Meenu Nayal, Teacher, Government Primary School Kumrah, Khatima, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand

Article explains the role of drama in a simple and clear way

The article 'Early Education and the Role of Drama' by Parul Batra Duggal, included in the December 2025 issue, explains the role of drama in ECE in a very clear and simple manner. It was encouraging to see that drama is presented as a natural and engaging medium of learning for children. Drama is not merely entertainment; rather, it gives children the opportunity to connect with their surroundings, classmates and everyday situations. The author explains that drama provides children with opportunities to express their emotions, thoughts and imagination. This is extremely important for enhancing children's confidence and their ability to express themselves.

Vivek Soni, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Chamoli, Uttarakhand

Two articles that focus on developing human values

From the efforts made by various teachers described in the 25th issue, it becomes clear that when we understand children and organise teaching activities according to their needs, meaningful learning takes place. In S Kavita's article, 'How I used storytelling to foster emotional intelligence,' the efforts made in story-based teaching in class IV are explained. Through the medium of storytelling, good examples of developing values are presented, such as empathy, kindness and emotional intelligence among children. Aman Madan's article 'The Teaching of Maitri' helps develop an understanding of processes that encourage cooperation and mutual support among children, while reducing the competitive environment that often develops among them.

Deepak Yadav, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Jalore, Rajasthan

Pathshala inspires readers

The magazine inspires readers to understand the challenges related to education and to move forward in addressing them. I read it regularly. In the special issue on Early Childhood Education, Sunil Kumar Sah's article 'Environment of Anganwadi Centres Must be Joyful' explains that it is extremely important for the learning environment to be joyful. This encourages young children to take an interest in the activities of the centre and helps them remain engaged. As a result, young children's learning through small poems, stories and various games becomes stronger and more enjoyable. There is also an *Anganwadi* centre near my house. I will try to visit it and engage in observing, thinking, understanding and doing some activities with the children there.

Sangeeta Gupta, Head Teacher (Retired), Government Primary School Pandri, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand

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

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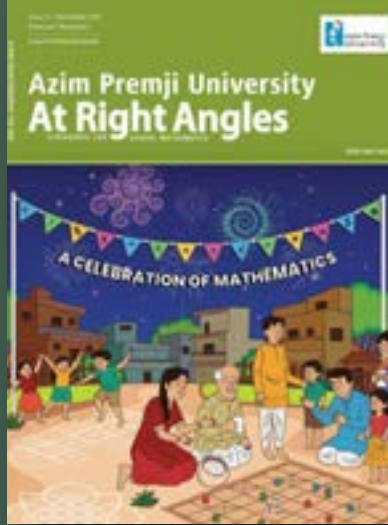
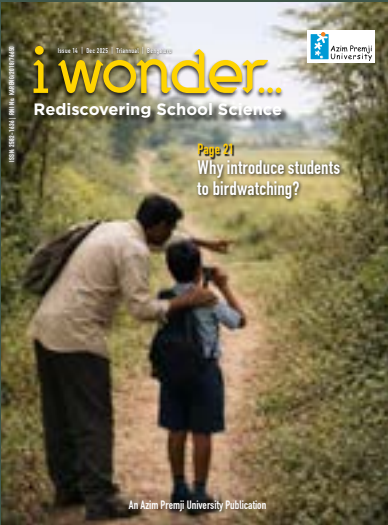
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