

Learning Outcomes and Assessment

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The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted student learning to a large extent. Educational institutions have explored various online options to ensure uninterrupted learning. However, there is enough and more evidence to suggest that remote learning options do not work. Education is a deeply intimate process of enquiry, discovery and meaning-making that happens between the teacher, the student and her peers and personalisation and collaboration are necessary to make learning possible. Coupled with this, the inadequacy of internet access and smartphones make online solutions impractical alternatives.

In the last few months, various state governments, such as Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have initiated community-based learning programmes like *Vidyagama*, *Padhai Tuhar Dwar* and *Hamara Ghar-Hamara Vidyalaya* to ensure continuity of learning. In many other states across the country, several committed teachers are innovating with unique solutions like *mohalla* classes, roping in alumni networks and the older children of the community, etc. to provide face-to-face opportunities for student learning. However, for many others, online classes are the only workable option.

Whichever mode of learning is utilised by a school, the common questions that all schools are currently grappling with during this truncated year are:

- How should schools decide what to teach? What kind of activities should be used to engage students?
- How does one know if students are learning and if there are gaps in learning?

Answering the vital questions

There are no easy answers to these questions boggling the mind of every educator in the country, but one could explore a few pragmatic solutions. These solutions can be split broadly into four sections.

1. Prioritisation of Learning Outcomes

There are between 10 and 15 chapters in a language or mathematics textbook of grade I. The number of chapters increases in higher grades. It is practically impossible to teach all the chapters in this academic year. In order to decide which chapters should be selected, teachers could identify a few core or foundational, learning outcomes (LOs) prescribed for the grade in question. For instance, at the primary level, in language for grades I-V, one could prioritise the following LOs (Azim Premji University, 2020).

Language I-II	Language III-V
<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Develop the skill of listening comprehension and the connection between sounds and wordsb. Develop basic reading and writing skillsc. Understand events occurring in the surroundings and express them orally	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Develop the ability to read and write independentlyb. Develop the ability to comprehend textual materials presented in different forms like poems, stories, notice boards, posters, etc.c. Develop the ability to express one's thoughts with confidence in both oral and written formsd. Understand the basic structure of the language and apply it to writing

These LOs form the foundation of all advanced learning in language and therefore, prioritising these will help the teacher in addressing *foundational*

literacy. A similar exercise needs to be done for all other subjects at the primary stage. For the upper primary stage, LOs that are core in building

a *conceptual understanding* of the subject must be prioritised.

Once the LOs are selected, the teachers could select one or two units from the textbook to address the LO. For instance, to develop basic reading skills among students of grades I and II, the teacher could choose a variety of short texts from different units of the textbook. The focus should be on familiarising students with the sound of the word, engaging with the characters of the story/poem, scaffolding reading aloud, explaining the text in their own words etc. A close association between the LOs and content will help in developing coherence in the classroom transaction.

The selected LOs should not be restricted only to the cognitive areas. Nurturing outcomes that develop dispositions of sensitivity, care, resilience and empathy are very critical in these times. Specific outcomes on maintaining health and hygiene, precautions in public places, personal hygiene etiquette should also be given adequate importance.

If a teacher is teaching multiple subjects, she could choose three or four broadly relatable themes like the family, the environment, etc, and then identify a few LOs from each of the subjects. She could then plan her lessons in a way that allows her to integrate content from different subjects. For example, a grade III teacher can integrate lessons from the Language and EVS textbooks. This will not only reduce the content load but will also help her to comprehensively address the LOs in an integrated way.

2. Selection of appropriate pedagogical strategy

Direct learner-teacher interactions have become limited, therefore, it is important to make these fewer encounters more meaningful. The focus should be on identifying students' learning gaps and addressing them through systematically developed lesson plans that clearly spell out the chapters to be transacted, the resources to be used, the activities to be conducted and the assignments to be given as follow-up. Care should be taken to emphasise on the areas that students are struggling with or the (pre-requisite) concepts from previous grades that students may not have mastered.

In most cases, the instructional strategy would be a combination of online, offline and self-learning opportunities. Each of these modes, whether online or face-to-face, should be used for specific purposes and could focus on explaining a new concept with adequate examples. For instance, in an EVS class the teacher can use student interaction to teach how plants make food through the process of

photosynthesis, or listening to students' doubts about their assignments and clarifying them, or actively engaging with a particular concept that is foundational to a particular task the students are executing. In either mode, these classes should be further coupled with self-learning tasks given to students, for example, reading the chapter or selected pages of the chapter that describe the concept or attempting a worksheet on the concept. Instructions on how to solve the worksheet/perform the tasks should be spelt out clearly. Subsequent encounters should discuss home assignments to ensure continuity in the learning process.

For higher grades, introduction to new topics could also happen through exploratory projects and surveys. For example, prior to teaching a chapter on democracy, the teacher could ask students of her class to collect the names of all the elected MPs from their constituency, their respective roles, unaddressed issues in their area, etc. Once students have collected these and collated them in a survey report, the teacher could use these to introduce the concept of sharing of power in a democracy.

During student interaction, the teacher must encourage students to share personal stories, narratives of challenges faced during the pandemic and also discuss these as a group. Listening to students, giving them a voice to share what they think and how they feel is more important today than ever before.

Teachers could also collaborate to create a common repository of resource materials like songs, stories, short videos, puzzles/games, worksheets that they can use to actively engage with the students. Group assignments should be encouraged and designed in such a way that students can work with each other and leverage their personal experiences to complete them.

3. Integrating assessments in the teaching-learning process

Planning, designing and using assessments meaningfully can be quite tricky during this period. The purpose of all classroom assessments should be to improve student learning. They should provide insights to teachers about the learning levels of students and also about the effectiveness of her teaching methods. Any assessment that tends to merely *evaluate or judge* the student can cause stress and anxiety and should be strongly discouraged. In these times of massive interruptions in learning, the

last thing students need is an intimidating test!

More formative assessments are, therefore, desirable. These should be integrated with the instructional process. Short quizzes, games, interactive discussions with open-ended questions are some strategies that could be adopted by the teacher to get a quick sense of the effectiveness of her method. It is likely that children may not be able to provide accurate answers to the questions posed by the teacher due to the inadequate duration of the engagement. In such cases, it is important for the teacher to listen to students' responses carefully. This would give her an understanding of

what students have not understood and plan her subsequent instructions more effectively.

Greater importance should be given to authentic assessments that allow the students to demonstrate their learning in meaningful ways. Projects, assignments, surveys can be used to enable this. Instead of pre-deciding projects, the teacher could co-evolve ideas for project-work along with the students. Integrated projects that cut across subjects could also be used. For instance, while working on the theme of *Family*, grade III students can work on a project that integrates LOs from Language, Mathematics and EVS.

Theme	Language	EVS	Mathematics
<p>Family- grades III, IV, V</p> <p>These ideas can be used for any grade – III, IV or V.</p> <p>A set of activities can be designed that spans across all subjects.</p> <p>Students can take 3-4 weeks to work on this.</p> <p>All concepts associated with the theme can be taught along with the students' work on the project.</p>	<p>A writeup or description of one's family – names of members / What they do.</p> <p>For older students - essay or guided paragraph writing on <i>My Family</i>.</p>	<p>A picture showing family members, with their names. A family tree can also be drawn.</p> <p>Students could be asked to draw their homes and surroundings. They can be encouraged to name the plants, animals, water bodies, structures like bus stops, cowsheds, post office, etc. around their homes.</p>	<p>Children can be asked to note the age, weight and height of all members of their family and tabulate it.</p> <p>He/she could make a calendar of some key activities and their timings by respective family members e.g.</p> <p>When do all members wake up? When do they sleep?</p> <p>For slightly older children, this information can also be represented in bar graphs.</p>

A rubric can be developed for assessing this project, the criteria of which could be co-evolved along with the students.

Besides integrated projects, teachers can also use worksheets with different types of questions. These worksheets can be filled offline as self-learning material. The teacher should discuss the students' responses on questions given in the worksheet either during face-to-face or online classes.

Students should also be encouraged to do self-assessment. Simple assessment checklists with smileys and emoticons can be used with younger children. More elaborate ones specifying learning outcomes and students' mastery over them can be used with older children to help them monitor their progress. Using the approach of *Assessment as Learning* would also enable the teacher to empower students to be in charge of their learning process.

My Self-Assessment Checklist			
I like to recite rhymes			
I like to draw and colour			
I like to do counting with pebbles and leaves			
I know how a circle looks like			

In the case of online classes, maintaining e-portfolios should be encouraged. The teacher and student can systematically collate their work in the e-portfolios to demonstrate their learning during this period. Such a document will also work as evidence for the teacher to analyse the students' progress, their strengths and possible areas of improvements.

Portfolio to include

- ✓ Worksheets by students
- ✓ Projects
- ✓ Anecdotal records made by teacher
- ✓ Any self-assessment checklists/students' reflections

In doing all of the above, one must be exceedingly careful of not creating any undue stress of examinations on the children. Consequently, instead of allocating marks or grades, students should periodically be given qualitative comments on their performance. End-of-the-year promotions should be based on these qualitative records. A comprehensive assessment of the students' progress in content-specific areas, skills and dispositions should be reported and shared with the parents and caregivers.

4. Involving parents and caregivers

As children are spending a lot of time at home,

involving the parents and caregivers in the child's learning through constructive ways would be useful. One possible way could be to share the grade-appropriate LO list with the parents and also with the students. Several states have designed attractive posters on LOs for parents and students (DSERT, Karnataka, 2018). This would be the right time to actively disseminate the contents. Projects and other assignments given to the students can consciously involve the parents. However, it should be brought to the parents' attention that the assignments are for the students to complete; parents should only help. Any effort by the parent to complete the assignment on behalf of the student should be discouraged.

A final word

This has been a trying year for all those involved in education although until schools reopen with the required safety protocols in place, teaching-learning processes will continue with whatever possibilities are available. Given the intimate nature of the teaching-learning process, particularly in the formative years, it is important that there are community classes at least once or twice a week. In all such interactions, the focus should be on addressing the LOs, rather than covering the syllabus or completing the lessons from the textbooks. Pedagogy and assessment approaches should be based on sound educational principles rather than poorly-conceived learning solutions. One has to evaluate the efficacy of the approaches and systematically weed out all such processes that make education a meaningless set of routines and procedures.

* Chomal, A. Summary of a panel presentation made at the MTA, 2nd Annual (online) Conference, *Theme- Mathematics Education during the pandemic- Issues, Challenges and Possible Solutions*, 5-6 September 2020.

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