

Worksheets as a Learning Resource

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My journey as a schoolteacher started meaningfully with the Azim Premji School, Barmer, in March 2019. In our school, we believe in the holistic development of children, and everybody works towards it. With dialogue as a mode of conflict resolution, we focused on providing meaningful academic experiences to children. In the first three grades, we provide oral and written exposure to them through a print-rich environment, a variety of teaching-learning materials (TLMs), audio-visual aids, rhymes and stories etc. I was the class teacher of class II and taught English. As it was my first teaching experience where I was deeply involved in dealing with children at different learning levels, I had to learn and unlearn a lot of things as a new teacher. From spending a whole week working only on one rhyme to the proper planning of a theme/chapter, daily interactions with the children helped me become a better teacher.

In my planning and execution of a specific theme/chapter, I prepared various activities with diverse resources. While doing this, worksheets emerged as a great learning resource for my students. Here is a short description of using worksheets as a resource.

Worksheets as a resource

I began using worksheets specifically for engaging level-1 children, that is, those who were not at grade level. Since engaging multi-level children together becomes a bit difficult, I planned level-wise engagement for three groups for all activities other than oral and common work with the class. As level-1 children required more interesting activities and engagement to pay attention to learning, I provided them extra resources in their class time.

Initially, I downloaded worksheets from the internet, mostly related to hand balance and alphabet practice. After realising how useful

these worksheets were, I got a few more which were associated with the theme I was covering. Along with the level-1 children, I distributed some worksheets to other children who showed interest in working on these rather than in their notebooks. So, I got worksheets with colouring exercises for all the children. From then on, there was no stopping in the making of worksheets as a classroom resource for the children.

Customising worksheets according to theme and level

When I realised how meaningfully I could engage children through worksheets, I planned to bring worksheets into the classroom, so that children get comfortable with worksheets when they get them as their assessments or classroom exercises. When I planned my teaching chapter-wise, I incorporated the worksheets into my content-mapping (Figure 1), so that I could design worksheets according to my plan and the requirement of the theme. It is essential for a teacher to understand when, where and how many worksheets to use according to the theme. For example, there were a few chapters where I did not need worksheets because classroom activities, TLMs and homework exercises were enough to cover the theme but for other chapters or themes, I designed worksheets based on the chapter or theme objectives. So, the theme and its objectives guide a teacher in how to plan activities, worksheets, and assessments. In a classroom, we have children under three (major) levels, so a teacher should provide contextual and level-wise learning resources to every child. I also customised theme-based worksheets, according to children's levels, for example, the worksheets would incorporate colouring exercises, hand balance, letter-word exercises, simple sentence exercises and exercises that challenged the children to create stories etc.

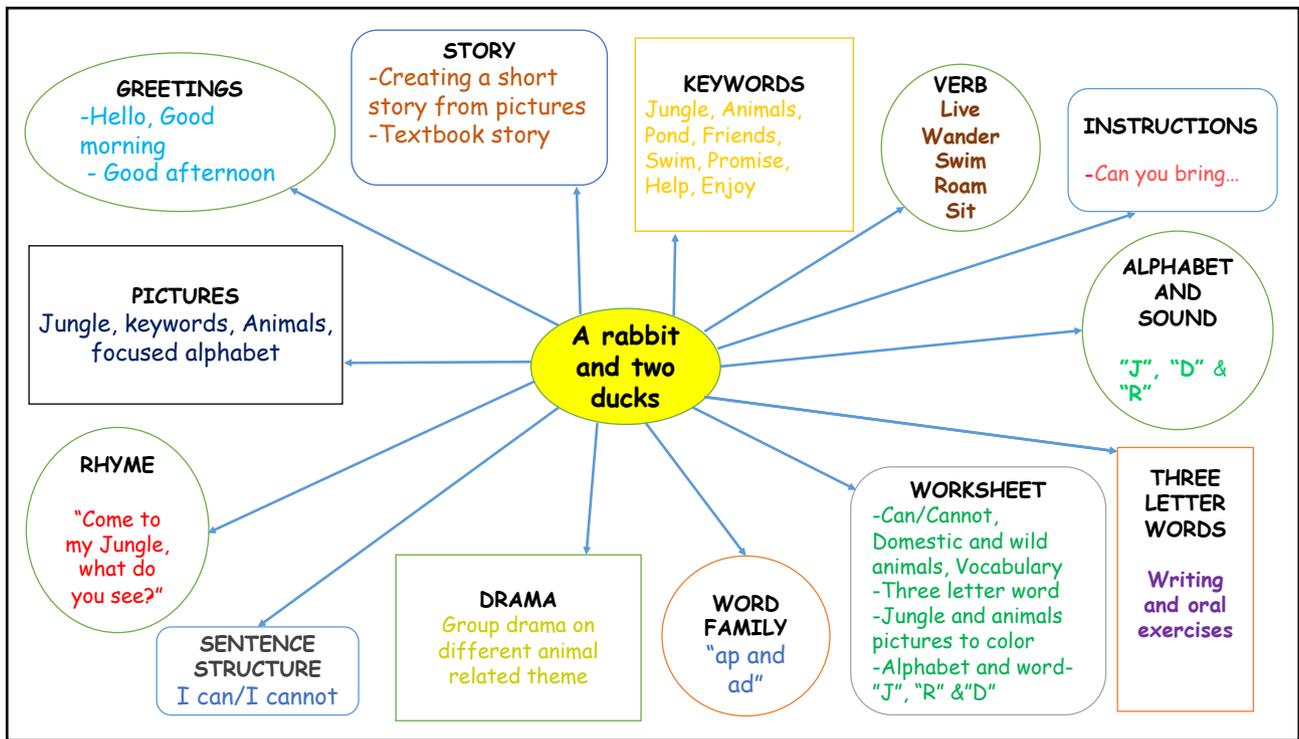


Figure 1. Content mapping

Designing worksheets

Often teachers find it difficult to work with worksheets because those available online may have been designed by experts or people with good knowledge of technology, but often the worksheets are not contextual for children. So, teachers find it difficult to find relevant worksheets. One can try designing worksheets according to one's needs. Initially, I created worksheets for hand balance and letter-word practice by hand and got them photocopied; children simply joined the dots and practised writing the letters and words in the given

lines. With time, I made these worksheets on my laptop with clip art images from the internet so that children get to colour the images and can relate to these images better. So, introducing contextual and easy-to-colour images was my priority to develop children's interest.

Besides getting good colouring worksheets, I also made worksheets according to the objectives and exercises of the topics we were doing in class, because textbooks were limited, less interesting and the exercises, which focused primarily on writing, were difficult. So, I tried to design

Name- EKTA Date- 19-02-22

Let's write your family members names and occupation:

| | Name | Occupation |
|--------------|---------|------------|
| Grand father | Umasam | Doctor |
| Grand mother | Samda | Home makes |
| Father | Madan | Driver |
| Mother | Sarita | Taibr |
| Brother | Amq | student |
| Sister | Sax bhi | student |
| Pe | Mina | student |
| Me | EKTA | student |

Figure 2. Information gathering home assignment

worksheets which provided practice on different concepts and children could explore information-gathering, identifying, self-creation etc. which not only developed their interest but also enhanced their reading and writing skills.

Children's response

Children respond with great interest and enthusiasm to anything that is out of their routine or different from their textbooks or the regular work that they do in their notebooks. That is why it is important to incorporate diverse activities and TLMs to build interest and support the learning process. My plans also involved activities and TLMs, but when worksheets were introduced, children took great interest in self-learning; colouring, practising and information-gathering worksheets were of great interest to them.

Talking specifically about the three-level groups I had in my class, the level-1 children showed great improvement in their writing skills, their hand balance and letter-word learning through different tasks and interesting games in the worksheets. Sometimes, writing the same letter or word ten times in a notebook becomes just a mechanical homework exercise to complete but when the same letter is worked on through five different exercises in a worksheet, the child takes a keener interest in doing it. Similarly, levels 2 and 3 children showed great improvement in learning new vocabulary, sentence structures, creating mixed-language (Hindi and English) stories, inventing spellings using their letter-sound knowledge etc. Children also worked very creatively on experimentation with colours and expression through drawing.

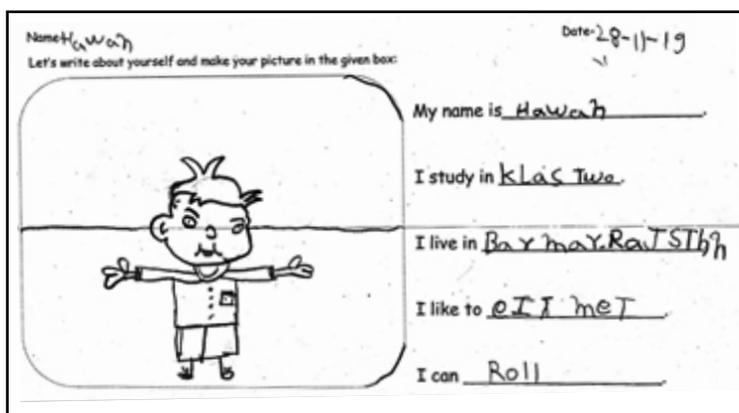


Figure 3. Sound-letter association

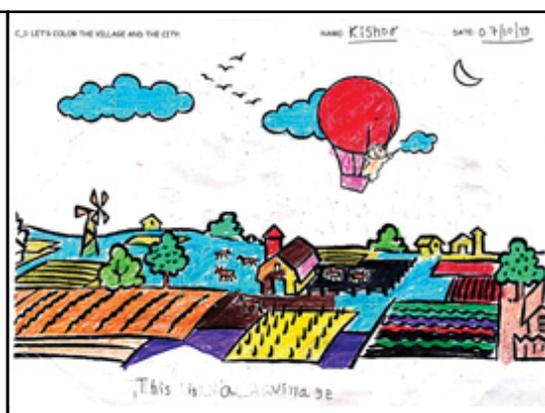


Figure 4. Colourful work of a child

Using worksheets for various purposes

Although worksheets are mostly used for assessment in schools, they can serve many other purposes. A teacher can provide meaningful practice to the children, assess their learning, track their progress over time, engage a multi-level class simultaneously, etc. Worksheets served all these functions in my classroom. For example, along with the worksheets, I incorporated into my routine, lesson planning for practising different concepts, even as children continued to practise the same concepts and skills in their notebook as homework. I attached their worksheets in their portfolio file, so that I, other teachers and parents could easily see how a child had progressed in reading and writing skills over time.

I designed their mid- and end-term assessment sheets using the same patterns that we had worked on in the worksheets but changed the exercises so that I could understand whether the children had learnt what they had been taught, and they could

understand the exercises easily. As they were familiar with the instructions, they did not face any difficulty in understanding the questions. So, worksheets helped me in preparing my children for assessment exercises, tracking their progress over time, providing them with the practice of different concepts and deepening their interest in learning, etc.

Summing up

With worksheets, I gave my class the opportunity to become familiar with other resources too. Picture cards, game boards, posters, videos etc., were all used so that children get to see, hear, and then practise in their notebooks and worksheets. Worksheets alone cannot do all the magic; they support the learning process.

The importance of worksheets as practice tools has been established by the government during school closure. Workbooks were created for children to practise at home whatever they were taught in school. These worksheets are being used by teachers who may not have the experience of incorporating

them with their routine work; so, the task is likely to be limited to simply filling the exercises without other oral or written reinforcement of the concepts

covered. Hence, proper guidance is required to use this resource meaningfully in schools, so that children can benefit and learn through them.

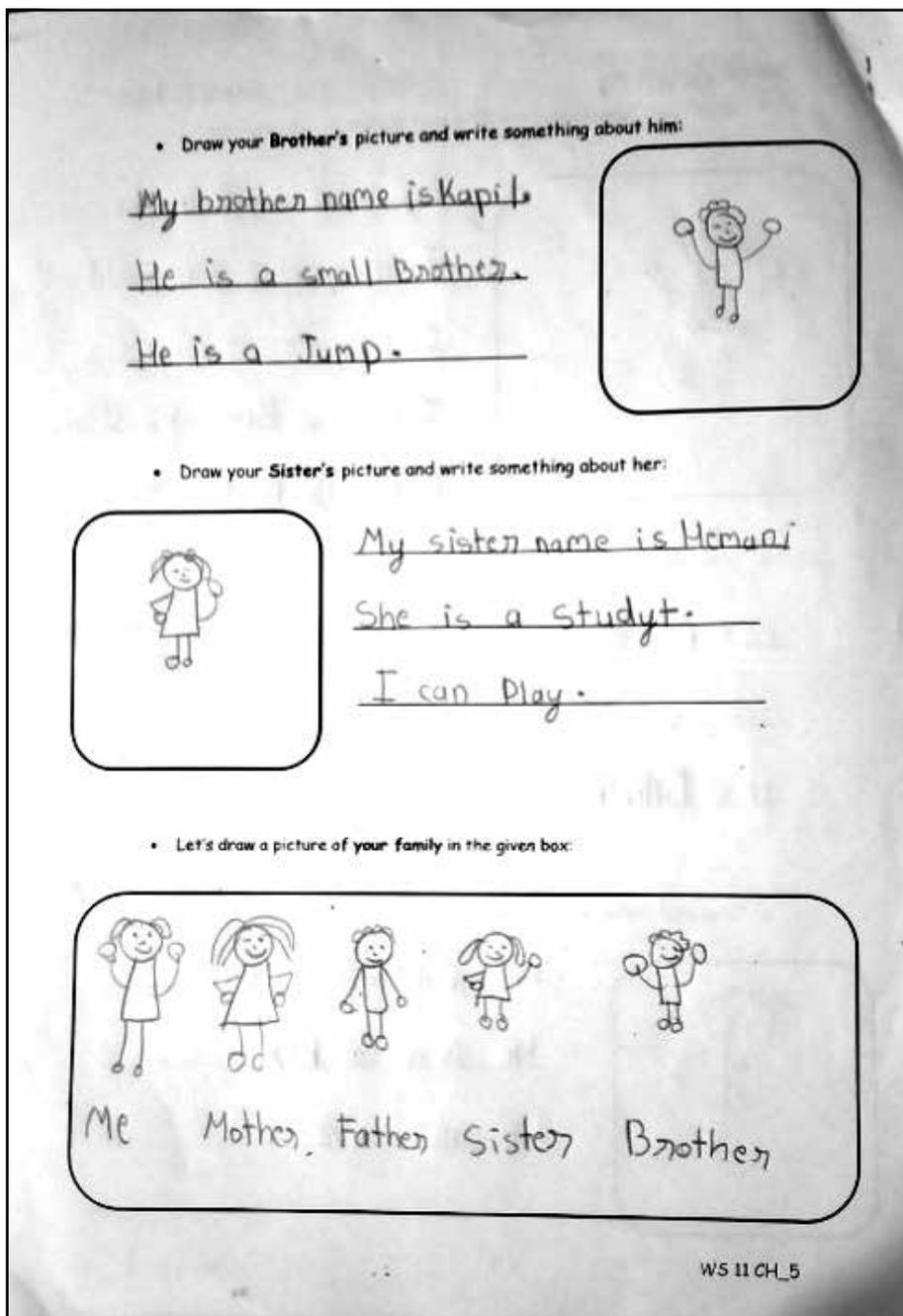


Figure 5. Introduction to self and family



Pooja Vishnoi completed her master's degree from Azim Premji University, Bengaluru in 2018 and joined the Azim Premji Foundation, Barmer. She has taught in a government school and has worked as an English teacher in the Azim Premji Foundation School. Her area of interest is understanding how the second language can be taught/learned with the help of the first language. She may be contacted at pooja.vishnoi@azimpremijfoundation.org