

Learning Corners and Follow-up Activities

Dasanna Mareddy and V Koteswara Rao

Young children learn through active exploration, play, and social interaction. The learning process includes awareness, exploration, inquiry, and utilisation of new knowledge.

The stages of children's learning are:

- Simple to complex: Children begin with fundamentals and move toward mastery of the more complex techniques
- Known to unknown/familiar to unfamiliar: Children come with prior knowledge of language and their familiar world; they build on their previous knowledge
- Concrete to abstract: Children learn best with concrete material which they can touch, feel, manipulate and later relate this to the abstract, which requires them to use their imagination

Learning Corners

In the early childhood classroom, children construct knowledge, learn new concepts, and sharpen skills through various pedagogical activities. To facilitate learning to happen best for young children, it is important for teachers to plan and provide opportunities for children to strengthen their learning. Playing in Learning Corners is one such reinforcement activity where children get opportunities to explore, evaluate and reinforce the concepts that they learn through teacher-led activities.

Learning Corners, also called Learning Centres, is a system that allows the purposeful arrangement and organisation of play materials in the classroom. Children get opportunities to explore, make things, experiment and pursue their own interests. Each Learning Corner has a different focus and allows children to participate in it in a different way. In the *anganwadi* centres of Telangana, teachers are encouraged to organise four learning corners.

Dramatic Play Corner

Scene: Children playing with a doctor set that is kept in the Dramatic Play Corner in an *anganwadi*.

Child 1: I want to be the doctor now. (This child who was playing as an assistant/nurse wants to take the doctor's role.)

Child 2: You can be the doctor later, now let me be the doctor. (This child who was playing the doctor, wants to continue.)

Child 1: I want to be the doctor. (The first child insists.)

Child 2: Let me be the doctor for two times. (The child holds up two fingers.)

This child continued to play doctor for the second time and then gave a chance to the other child to be the doctor.

In the above vignette, a clear negotiation took place between two children regarding the exchange of roles. The second child applied the 'two' number concept during the negotiation.

The idea of dramatic play among children is triggered by their understanding of social roles and real-world events. Children recreate real-life experiences beginning from their homes. Therefore, equipment and materials for pretending to be 'mommy' and 'daddy' are among the first things to be included. Teachers make different props to facilitate pretend play, such as those used by a doctor, grocery seller and firefighter, that can be rotated among the children according to their interests. While assuming a role in a play, teachers let children put themselves in the shoes of the character they are playing and bring out the emotions that the character might feel. Imitating these various roles gives room to the children to strengthen their understanding of relationships, different social roles of people and the work they do. It also provides opportunities for children to practise and acquire their social skills by playing with other children.



Figure 1. Dramatic Play Corner in an anganwadi.

Blocks corner

Playing with blocks provides children with opportunities for creative and imaginative play and to solve problems. By playing with blocks, children learn about shapes, sizes, and colours. They may compare the blocks, arrange them, or create elaborate structures and models. Blocks motivate children to think in creative ways as they build different kinds of structures. Moreover, sometimes, children build a structure cooperatively, which requires them to communicate with each other and work as a team. Puzzles (such as wooden pegs and jigsaw puzzles for preschoolers) make children explore, think, recall and experiment with various ways to solve them. This corner also provides opportunities for activities, such as matching, sorting, comparing, ordering and patterning objects.

Language and Literacy Corner

This Corner, also known as the Library Corner, is meant to promote pre-reading skills and expose children to the printed word. So, the materials in this corner are printed material: picture cards, conversation charts and books. It allows children to explore a variety of print material, expanding their imagination and sharpening their skills of prediction to form stories. Exploring books with fantasy and animal stories gives them immense pleasure at this stage. To extend the opportunity, after narrating a story or having a guided conversation with children, the teacher can keep the story or picture books/ flashcards in the Language Corner and encourage children to use them. This could help the children to explore the same book and attempt to narrate the story in their own words. Some children try to



Figure 2. Children explore books on their own in a Language and Literacy Corner.



Figure 3. Children engaged in activities in a Creative Corner.

recollect a story by looking at the book. It is also a good way to teach children how to ‘handle’ books: the front and back of a book, the direction of turning the pages while reading, etc. It is valuable also because it shows how what we speak can be represented in writing, which is a skill that children will learn later.

Creative Corner

In this corner, children get opportunities to nurture their creativity using materials, like colours, paper, brushes, crayons etc. While engaging in this activity, children get the opportunity to work with multiple appealing colours that could build their interest in creative activities. Children also gain control over their fine motor skills and by using different materials available in this corner, they can express their thoughts, feelings and imaginations. This corner strengthens creative thinking, self-expression, representation and fine motor abilities.

Teacher’s role

The teacher has a very active part to play in how these Learning Corners are used effectively. They must arrange the Learning Corners based on their teaching plans by keeping the materials that are relevant to the content and activities planned. After the initial engagement by the teacher, children continue and reinforce their learning through different Learning Corners when they are asked to ‘play’ there. Teachers can also:

- Encourage children to share ideas and experiences with their peers as well as with the teacher

- Engage children in conversation by asking open-ended questions (that require more than just *yes* or *no* answers) and scaffolding children’s experiences
- Extend children’s learning by introducing new ideas and materials
- Model pro-social behaviour by playing cooperatively with other children
- Support children’s problem-solving efforts
- Observe children’s skills, development, and interests
- Record observations to use in planning and documentation
- Make informed decisions while planning for the next day or week based on their observations

Follow-up activities

Follow-up activities are important for reinforcing the learning that the children gain through the activities. For instance, after a conversation, story or nature walk, the teacher can provide opportunities for children to extend, re-present and apply the concepts they have learnt.

After a conversation

Once teachers complete a conversation with the children, they can create opportunities for the children to explore picture cards, books, charts, and other real objects which they have used, thereby allowing the children to bring their understanding to the discussion and share their experiences. This is useful in reinforcing their understanding.

After a rhyme session

Along with singing rhymes with action, teachers can read the rhyme poster with expression and intonation. This helps children learn to relate oral language to the written text and connect it to the pictures in the poster. This strengthens comprehension as well.

After a storytelling session

After a storytelling session, teachers can ask the children to draw the characters of the story on the running blackboard. Children can try to represent the characters in drawings and recall the story and also narrate the story in their own words, which is another way of reinforcing learning.

After a nature walk

After a nature walk, children can be asked to draw what they have seen. They can also make different patterns and designs with the materials they have collected during the walk.

As mentioned in the beginning, children's learning processes involve awareness, exploration, inquiry, and utilisation (of newly-learned knowledge/concepts). Children need to get ample time and opportunities to analyse, evaluate, apply and strengthen the learning they get through the structured activities led by the teacher.



Dasanna Mareddy is Block Coordinator at Azim Premji Foundation in the Narayankhed block of the Sangareddy district of Telangana. He enjoys facilitating the learning experiences of various stakeholders of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and loves to work with young children. An engineering graduate, before pursuing his passion in education, he worked in IT with Infosys. He may be contacted at Dasanna.mareddy@azimpremjifoundation.org



V Koteswara Rao is Block Coordinator at Azim Premji Foundation in the Zaheerabad district of Telangana. He has previously worked as Coordinator for AP School Choice Study in West Godavari District Andhra Pradesh and as part of the Sangareddy ECE Initiative. He has a master's degree in social work from Osmania University, Hyderabad and a diploma in ECCE from IGNOU. He may be contacted at koteswara.rao@azimpremjifoundation.org