

FROM THE EDITOR



What exactly is reinforcing learning?

This was a question we asked ourselves before we went ahead with the theme. The vision that immediately springs to the mind when we talk about reinforcing learning is piles of homework, mostly in maths and language, which as students, we used to do without thinking very much, heads bent and intent only upon finishing, not learning or applying the mind. The textbook was central to this approach - in maths, for example, we looked at the sums that had been 'worked out' at the back of the chapter and followed the prescription to a T.

Subjects like civics fared no better - the ideal of democratic behaviour in practice was not emphasised. The priority was answering the end-of-the-chapter questions which, again, were unimaginative and theoretical. I can even recall a book prescribed for Hindi - 100 proverbs (Muhaverein aur Kahavatein) - to be learned by heart and used only to fill in the blanks in sentences for homework. The list can go on as everyone has their favourite stories to tell.

But now all that has changed. The NEP 2020 has mandated that there is to be no homework up to class II and has raised the permissible homework hours from two hours a week for classes III-V to about 10-12 hours a week for Secondary and Higher Secondary classes.

This has meant a new look at Reinforcement, which is nothing other than a reflection of teaching on the one hand and learning on the other. Reinforcement should ideally be an aid to learning the principles that constitute a concept since the basis of learning is to grasp the fundamental propositions of a topic. Thus, in maths, the four operations are the first actual use to which numbers are put, one can add or subtract, multiply or divide. A child learns the symbols of the operations and goes on to understand that a

number can be negative or positive. This sets the stage for using this idea later in graphs in maths, as well as in geography, for instance, for temperatures falling below zero. In civics, being introduced to the Preamble of the Constitution, the right reinforcement in the form of projects and discussions stress upon the ideas of social justice. Children also understand how regional history and culture are influenced by its geography and of course, the ways in which language can be reinforced are infinite, because all of the above reinforcements need language for expression. Acquiring a language is much more than learning the rules of grammar - situational exercises and experiences, which use language imaginatively and in conjunction with the home language are so much more effective.

With this in mind, when we asked for articles, the responses were swift and imaginative. We have a focus article which recounts how teachers, too, need reinforcement and looks at corrections in a different light for better learning. Another article outlines how reinforcing maths learning with understanding is the basis of logical thinking and grasping abstractions which can set children off on a lifelong journey of applying those very skills to life situations. We have tried to include reinforcement in the most important primary school subjects - so there are experiential articles in maths, language, EVS and science as well as an overview of what reinforcement could mean, if undertaken with some imagination. There is also an article on assessing reinforcement which illustrates that assessment, if done holistically, is in itself a reinforcement tool.

We look forward to your feedback.

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