

Finger Puppets and Running Blackboard as Reinforcement

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In *anganwadis*, teachers provide learning opportunities to children through different activities, like conversations, stories, rhymes, play, and creative and cognitive activities. Children learn various important concepts through these activities. Learning is a continuous process, so it is essential to strengthen learning in interesting ways. To reinforce children's learning, teachers develop and follow different methods. In this article, I describe how I use finger puppets and the running blackboard to reinforce children's learning of concepts and themes.

Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) are effective resources that help teachers to explain new concepts easily, and at the same time, reinforce learning. Besides this, TLMs encourage children to remain involved in an activity for a length of time.

Oral storytelling, with adequate facial expressions and voice modulation, helps children acquaint themselves with the characters and plot of the story. After oral storytelling, a teacher can use finger puppets to strengthen learnings from the story. Here is the process I follow.

Using finger puppets

The children and I sit in a circle so that we can all see each other. I place the finger puppets that can be used for the story in a bag and tell the

children to close their eyes and open them when I have counted to three. After counting to three, the children open their eyes, and I bring out a finger puppet by making an interesting sound like 'TATTATTOOOOY!'

Looking at the tiny colourful puppet on my finger, the children are excited and shout out the name of the puppet. Then, I ask the children relevant questions, such as if the finger puppet is a fox, the questions could be: *What is the name of this character in the story? What did the character say? What happened after the fox said that?*

I acknowledge the responses with a smile or a nod or ask another question to help them expand their communication. Then I pass on the finger puppet to the children, making sure that all children get an opportunity to put the puppet on their finger. Children giggle with joy when they place puppets on their fingers for the first time. It encourages them and sustains their excitement for the next puppet and question. This process, with finger puppets and questioning, is followed until the end of the story. This kind of reinforcing of learning also helps teachers to understand the extent to which the children have understood the story, and based on this information, they can retell the story, or go on to the next one.



Figure 1. Children with their finger puppets.

Benefits for children

In their early years, children are usually unable to spend much time engaging in any one activity. Using TLMs, like finger puppets, help children to engage in activities for longer periods. Reinforcing learning with finger puppets and asking thought-provoking questions when children are in a joyous state of mind helps children to recall the story that they have heard (and learned) and feel eager to answer. Besides, the teacher's acknowledgement of the children's responses makes them feel happy and they show more interest in the activity. This method of reinforcement also provides opportunities for them to think back about details. There is also oral language development: of speaking sentences in sequence, which improves their cognitive abilities.

Dramatic Play Corner

After the puppet exercise in the classroom, the finger puppets are placed in the Dramatic Play Corner for children to use during Free Play. Finger puppets, being small, colourful, and easy for children to hold, are attractive for them to put on their fingers and narrate a story in their own way by connecting one puppet character with another puppet. Thus, with the help of the finger puppets, children reinforce their perceptions of the story in their free time and space.

A teacher can use finger puppets for stories that have many characters or a particular theme. For example, after having a structured conversation on vegetables (with real vegetables), a teacher can use finger puppets of vegetables and reinforce children's learning on the concept of vegetables by asking questions like: *What is the name of this vegetable? What colour is it? How is it eaten/*

cooked? What is its texture? (Smooth, hard, juicy, etc)

Using a running blackboard

A running blackboard (RBB) is a physical setup in a preschool learning space where the wall is painted black to a height of one meter, starting from the floor. Usually, after completing structured conversations or after story narration, children freely draw their thoughts/experiences on RBB with chalk. Along with free drawing, the RBB also helps teachers reinforce children's learning of particular themes/concepts.

Example 1

After completing a structured conversation on 'My Family', I provided the opportunity for the children to use and draw what they had just discussed. Children sitting near the RBB came up and began drawing. I went up to each child and asked what they had drawn.

One child drew a circle-like shape (Figure 2), and the following conversation ensued:

I (pointing to shape): What is this?

Child: It is our house.

I: Who lives in your house?

Child: Me, my mom, father, *akka* (elder sister).

I: Oh good! What is this (pointing at some scribblings)?

Child: These are the buffaloes and goats at home. My grandfather gets milk from buffalo daily. I like milk.

I: That is really good. What about the goats? Do they give milk?

Child: Yes, but we do not drink goat milk. Their babies drink it.



Figure 2. A child drawing on the running blackboard.

I (pointing at a dot next to the house): What is this?

Child: This is our new bike.

I: Who uses it?

Child: My dad uses this to go to his company (work). Yesterday, my sister and dad went to a *daawat* (feast) on that bike.

I: Good, you have drawn very well about your family.

Then, I moved on to the next child and started having a similar conversation with them.

Example 2

Here is another reinforcing conversation between a child and me on another occasion. After the story narration, the RBB was used.

I (pointing at a child's scribbles: What is this?

Child: This is a Ball; he forgot his name, so he went to the Door and asked the Door to tell him his name.

I: Okay. Then, what happened? Did the Door tell him his name?

Child: No, it did not tell the name, so the Ball came here, to the Broomstick (pointing at another doodle).

I: Good! What happened next?

Child: The Broomstick also said that it did not know the (Ball's) name.

I: So sad! What did the Ball do then?

Child: The Ball went to the Bat (pointing at a line that she had drawn) and asked the Bat to tell him his name.

I: Okay, did the Bat tell the Ball his name?

Child (happily): Yes! The Bat said, 'Your name is Ball, and my name is Bat. We both are friends.'

I: Good! You drew the ball story and narrated it really well.

Benefits for children

Children use the RBB to express their ideas and experiences freely in their own ways. Some children scribble and others use the picture form. Discussing

what they have drawn encourages children to connect their art form with earlier conversations (story/ discussion themes) and speak out. In this process, children think and respond to what they have learnt in a creative way. The RBB is one of the most effective methods that a teacher can follow to reinforce a child's learning. Some children do not feel comfortable speaking out, expressing their thoughts or responding to the teacher in a large group. But in one-on-one conversations, while using RBB, they feel comfortable and speak happily about what they have drawn in answer to the teacher's questions.

The teacher's acknowledgement of the child's responses makes children feel valued and develops their self-esteem along with their drawing skills. It also deepens their trust in the teacher, allowing the teacher to use that bonding to gradually involve such children in a large group and encourage them to speak – an essential social skill.

Using the RBB is also a reinforcement activity for children to develop their fine motor skills of holding a writing tool and scribbling or drawing. It helps the children later to hold and use the writing tool with a firm grip.

Conclusion

It is essential to understand children's learning levels individually and strengthen their existing learning through reinforcement. To reinforce children's learning, methods such as finger puppet play and RBB are two methods that teachers can try and regularly use with children. Finger puppets, besides helping children to think and recall what they have learnt relevant to puppets, create excitement, while using the RBB helps children to talk freely because they draw their thoughts enabling free hand movement under no pressure. It is, therefore, easy for teachers to engage children in these activities and reinforce their learning.



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