

Organising Time in a Mixed-Ability Classroom

Satvir Singh Chauhan

I teach language and maths to classes I and II. Seven hours are allotted for working with students in the classroom, plus an additional hour for extra instruction.

I started an open library in the school last year. I reach school early and if any student arrives early, I read out to them; introduce them to new books and tell them stories. I also read for myself during this time or occasionally, spend this time organising the classroom library, creating new charts, setting up TLMs, etc.

School begins with a half-hour morning assembly on three days of the week. On the other three days, there is a discussion on students' behavioural and classroom issues and school regulations. The next half-an-hour, every day, is reading time. The class library has books appropriate for the children's reading ability, so they choose their own books and read. I sit next to those who find it difficult to read. After this, it is breakfast time from 10 to 10:15 AM.

Planning for a multi-level classroom

I spend five periods a day working with the students of classes I and II. For both classes, there are two language learning periods and an extra period on two days for language study.

Assessing learning levels

In my class 1, 11 out of 28 students are new. Therefore, for 10 to 15 days after the school started, we did activities that were typically meant for pre-primary classrooms. This included written and oral work that helped me to assess the children's learning levels.

A teacher must assess the learning levels of students in a class, form groups and then work with them. After this, it is crucial to plan how to split up the class time because the teacher must work with children at varying skill levels simultaneously.

In my class, the different levels of language learning are apparent. One group can recognise pictures, call out picture names and attempt to convey their ideas in a few words. The next level of children can identify some letters with my assistance, pronounce

the first sound of picture names, and express their opinions correctly in standard language. Children in the third level can read texts, narrate stories, and recite poems; they can also distinguish letters and *matras*.

Working with all three groups simultaneously, requires a variety of resources and action plans. I have seen that teachers seem to spend more time with students who learn fast and grasp things better, whereas those who actually require additional time are given very little of it. I believe that if all teachers consider this question, *what should I do to help these children come up to the class level so that they can start learning too?* they can focus on developing teaching-learning strategies for these children and will definitely have success in the classroom.

We learn about each student's learning style and classroom behaviour while we are working with them in class. Working with children at varying levels of learning in various groups is the primary duty of the teacher and for this, it is necessary to have:

1. Children's books from the library categorised by level
2. Photo cards
3. Word cards
4. A picture narrative
5. Letters and *matra* cards
6. Collection of poetry, stories, and charts
7. Skill of reading stories and reciting poetry
8. Understanding of material utilisation

Regarding Point 8 above, it is seen that even if there is an abundance of material available, it is frequently under-utilised or there is a lack of understanding on how it should be used. I would like to share some of my work in this regard.

Building a relationship

When children, who are just 5 or 6 years old, move to a new setting, the school and everything in it feels unfamiliar to them. I start by telling

stories and poems and talking to them about their families, their surroundings, and games. This aids in identifying children who have started feeling at ease in the classroom and we can help them to learn better and teach them something new. Some children need a longer time to adjust for various reasons, mainly because they do not come to school regularly. Through these activities, children develop complete trust in their teachers.

Reading time

I spend thirty minutes every day reading to my students. I read out stories and poems while paying extra attention to those children who struggle with reading. I try to encourage them to read by providing them with books from the *Barkha Series*ⁱ and other interesting library books. The following day, those who can read share stories with the entire group from the books they have read. Some students who can recognise letters and *matras* are given assistance with picture and word cards before they begin to learn basic letters and sounds on their own by playing with the picture cards.

A student from class II, who could only read a few simple words with assistance, was inspired by the story *Mili Ka Gubbara* from the *Barkha Series* and began reading other books as well. These days, he reads aloud in the morning assembly with such brilliance that he is now everyone's favourite narrator.

Language work

It can be difficult to work simultaneously with students at different levels. To accomplish this successfully, a teacher must have a plan. Many resources, including picture cards, alphabet cards, picture reading posters, *Barkha Series* and other library publications, story-poem charts, story strips, word cards, story cards, etc., should be available in classrooms for use with the students.

Of the 28 students in my class I, while 7 to 8 students can do some independent work, many have come to school for the first time and need practice with letter and *matra* recognition. From a linguistic perspective, I am working on speaking, listening, reading, and writing. So, there is work to be done with the class as a whole, as well as with smaller groups.

Story: Rani Bhi

Materials: Narrative cards, picture cards, letter and *matra* cards

Step 1: I read out the story to the class.

Step 2: Next, I engaged each child in conversation with questions, such as: who all are there in your family? With whom do you play? What do your younger siblings do? Would they like to accompany you to school?

The important thing is to connect the questions to the book/story read out, and to assist students in making connections. The teacher must try to get those students who do not talk much in class, to respond and encourage them if they are still hesitant. Those students who may not have understood all details and give incorrect responses must be encouraged to rethink and respond.

Step 3: One group was tasked with writing on their own, while the other group was asked to create words out of letters. Some children were given picture cards and asked to recognise a letter after identifying the first sound of the name of the object depicted in the picture.

Challenges and resolutions

Teachers face a variety of challenges in a mixed-ability classroom. Some students' actions and behaviour come in the way of their learning. As a result, the teacher spends a lot of time talking to them, which disrupts the entire class and makes the teacher's strategy for the day fail.

Some students' irregular attendance becomes a barrier to their learning, requiring the teacher to give them extra time. Many children study and learn at home in addition to school. However, some of them do not have any time or help at home and they are not able to even do their homework.

The best solution for these challenges is for the teacher to be aware of each child's background. To do this, the teacher must stay in contact with parents. It is easier to retain records of students and work with them if the teacher visits the community and meets parents to find out details, such as: *What do the child's parents do? How much time do they spend with the child? What does the child do at home? To what extent do parents assist them with their studies?*

Parents must be aware of classroom and school rules as well as children's conduct, which the teacher must share with the parents from time to time. Parents should also be informed of developments and changes in school and provided with periodic updates regarding their child's learning.

After school hours

We have an hour after school to create charts and

plan the work for the following day. In addition, school-related tasks including teacher-professional development, school culture, and monthly planning and review have to be completed. We also do some reading, writing, and other tasks. We create assessment forms and students' profiles and check their notebooks. After this, the work that is not completed during this time, I complete at home.

Endnotes

i Barkha Series: <https://ncert.nic.in/dee/barkha-series.php?ln=en>



Satvir Singh Chauhan has been teaching at the Azim Premji School, Sirohi, Rajasthan, since 2016. He has a postgraduate degree in geography and a B Ed in social science. Prior to this, he has worked for six years in various private schools, teaching both primary and higher classes. He may be contacted at Satvir.chauhan@azimpremjifoundation.org