

# Azim Premji University

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# Understanding NCF-FS

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*Learning Curve is a publication on education from the Azim Premji University for teachers, teacher educators, school heads, educational functionaries, parents and NGOs on contextual and thematic issues that have enduring relevance and value for them. It provides a platform for the expression of varied opinions, perspectives and stories of innovation; and encourages new, informed positions and thought-provoking points of view. The approach is a balance between an academic and a practitioner-oriented magazine.*

*All opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Azim Premji University.*

# FROM THE EDITOR



In a recent interview, Sonam Wangchuk, engineer, activist and educational reformer, spoke of how he did not go to school till age 9 but how much he learned of life from being with his parents, grandparents and community members during those years. He quipped that when he was working in the fields watching plants grow, other children his age were learning root-shoot-leaves from their blackboards and textbooks. So, it is very exciting to see that play and activity are the primary ways of learning and development in the National Curricular Framework for Foundation Stage (NCF-FS).

But first things first. What is NCF-FS? Who is it for? The NCF-FS is a key component of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Foundational Stage (ages 3-8 years) is the first stage in the (5+3+3+4) curricular and pedagogical restructuring envisioned in it. The NCF-FS has been created to facilitate an integrated, uniform and high-quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for 'all' children. The NCF-FS, simply put, is a detailed guidelines document that speaks directly to the teacher and other practitioners to facilitate the implementation of NEP 2020.

Every new policy document is viewed with circumspection because it comes to us surrounded by myths and preconceived notions, added to this is our cynicism towards change and whether it will eventually change anything on the ground.

So, when we attended a presentation on the approach and structure of NCF-FS, we liked it so much that we decided to bring it to you in the same plain and simple manner in which it was communicated to us. The presentation was made by Ramchandrar Krishnamurthy, Principal, Azim Premji School, Bengaluru and we enlisted his help to put this issue together. He has written a focus piece on how to read

the document and has created a 'ready reference' for teachers to access specific parts of it.

In other articles, we have one illustrating how and why play, that is at the heart of childhood, is recommended as pedagogy for this stage; and another, while establishing the criticality of foundational literacy and numeracy as the basis for all learning, has very succinctly asserted why we need a document such as this to achieve uniformity in the broader goals of learning. One author has gone behind the need of art for socio-emotional and ethical learning (SEEL) to explain how art classes need to be transacted to be effective. The emphasis on teacher autonomy in modifying learning outcomes for their contexts has been delineated very precisely in an article underscoring another focal aspect of the NEP – that children learn at their own pace.

The document has not reached all teachers and is yet to be translated into regional languages. But as we wait for this, we thought we could start to understand it and the experiences of some teachers in Azim Premji Schools and those who we work with in government schools in several states who have been implementing these in their classrooms.

Overall, it has been a very gratifying experience to understand this document in detail and see how focussed it is on transforming the school experience for our young children in the age group of 3 to 8 years.

We bring to you, from this issue onwards, a leaner version of the Learning Curve that we hope is more, and directly focussed on the work that you do in (or related to) primary school education.

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# Reading the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage

Ramchandar Krishnamurthy

The National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) was released in October 2022 by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT). This, along with the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE, August 2023), are two of the four curriculum framework documents that have been developed to implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. The NCF-FS was developed to realise the vision of education as imagined and articulated by NEP 2020, which laid emphasis on the crucial years of early childhood, ages 3 to 8 years.

This article introduces NCF-FS to the reader by highlighting some of the key aspects and design principles adopted by the drafting committee. A significant contribution of this curriculum framework is the clear articulation of the *Learning Standards* in the different domains of child development. This article explores the need and relevance of Learning Standards and then describes the structure of the document with the hope that it would act as a guide to the readers of NCF-FS.

## Key highlights of NCF-FS 2022

The NCF-FS 2022 is a 360-page document that envisions an integrated approach to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for children between ages 3-8 years. Its holistic curriculum covers all the relevant domains of development – physical, socio-emotional and ethical, language and linguistic, cognitive, aesthetic and cultural, including positive learning habits. These domains of development have been identified based on both ancient Indian knowledge of *panchakoshas*,<sup>i</sup> and the more modern scientific understanding of child development.

As mentioned before, this curriculum framework defines specific Learning Standards, which are articulated as *Curricular Goals, Competencies, and Learning Outcomes*. We will explore these in more detail in this article.

While Learning Standards define what the

desirable educational achievements are, the document gives specific and detailed guidelines on how these are to be achieved. It provides in detail pedagogical approaches, ways to organise the learning environment, principles for selection of content, and appropriate ways to assess learning at this stage. It further outlines ways in which school time can be organised through illustrative weekly schedules and daily timetables.

The NCF-FS clearly lays down the approach for developing literacy in at least two languages in the Foundational Stage. It recommends a balanced literacy approach, giving equal emphasis on word recognition and accuracy in writing words (lower-order skills) and language comprehension and expression (higher-order skills). The four-block model<sup>ii</sup> for literacy pedagogy that addresses oral language development, word recognition, reading, and writing, all simultaneously, is the means to achieve foundational literacy.

Foundational numeracy, along with literacy, forms Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), and has been given special emphasis in NEP 2020. Again, the pedagogy recommended for developing numeracy is again balanced with equal emphasis on conceptual understanding and skills practice. The four blocks for mathematics instruction<sup>iii</sup> includes oral maths talk, skills teaching, skills practice, and math games to encourage problem-solving.

## Design principles adopted in drafting NCF-FS

The authors of NCF-FS have consciously adopted a set of principles while writing the document. It is important for a reader of the document to understand the rationale behind these principles and the design choices made by the authors.

### Guide for practitioners

The NCF-FS is explicitly directed towards practitioners, namely, school teachers. Curriculum frameworks tend to be written in idealistic and abstract terms that make it difficult for practitioners to relate them to their everyday practice. So, the language used in NCF-FS document is consciously less technical and academic.

The document does not remain at the level of abstract principles and approaches. It gives specific illustrations and vignettes from real classrooms and teachers' voices to make these principles appear more concrete in the hope that these illustrations make the guidelines and recommendations more relatable and accessible to practitioners. While this makes it a long document to read, it is more relevant and effective.

### Specificity

To be relevant to practitioners, a document of this nature needs to be specific, and not lose touch with reality. In educational circles, regarding educational thought, there is often confusion between what is prescriptive and what is specific. The NCF-FS holds that being specific is useful for teachers and helps guide them in their practice, but it does not necessarily prescribe specific practices. Teachers have always had, and should always have, the autonomy to adopt and adapt practices to their own contexts.

### Pragmatism

Creating a curriculum framework is an exercise of hope and idealism. It aims at improving school education. However, if the aims are to be feasible and possible, the suggestions and recommendations should not only be specific but also emerge from current realities and practicalities. In a way, curriculum frameworks aim for social change through change in school education. Changes suggested by curriculum

frameworks, to be implementable, should be small gradual steps, rather than giant leaps.

### Establishing Learning Standards

One of the core features of NCF-FS is its articulation of Learning Standards. Simply put, these Learning Standards respond specifically to the question: *What to teach?* To be useful and implementable, it is not enough to state the broad aims and purposes of school education or even the specific aims of each school subject. The broad aims must be further refined into specific goals and competencies which are clear statements of educational achievements. There is a clear flow-down of expected learning achievement, where each set gets into finer detail but has a clear connection to the previous level. (Figure 1)

### Aims of school education

Education, in its fundamental essence, is the achievement of knowledge and capacities that are considered valuable. The purpose of education is thus normative, depending on the norms that society envisages. In the Indian context, this normative direction is our Constitution. For NCF-FS, this vision of education comes from what is articulated in NEP 2020.

Aims, Curricular Goals, Competencies, and Learning Outcomes, together form the Learning Standards. The Learning Standards is a clear and specific flow-down of curricular logic from broad aims to specific learning outcomes. Going by the principles articulated earlier, these Learning

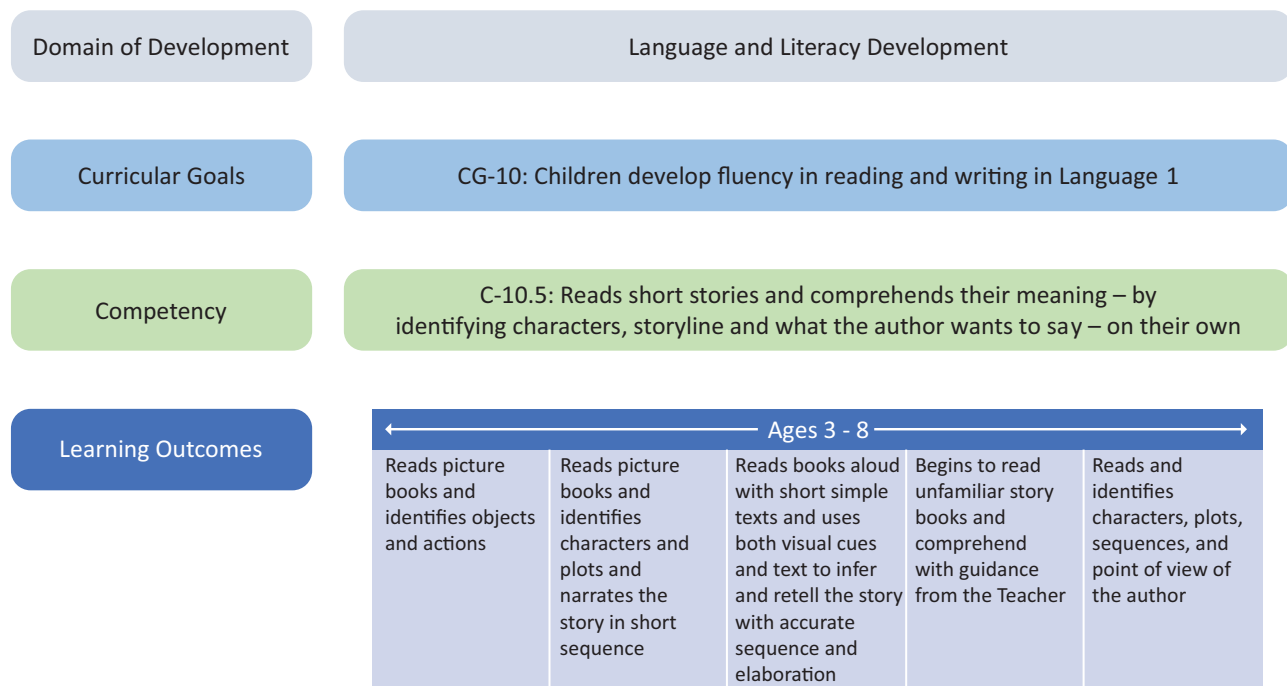


Figure 1. A flow-down of the Learning Standards.

Standards are the backbone of NCF-FS and give clear and precise direction for all practitioners to improve school education in our country. This is a seminal contribution of this NCF, and it is a clear departure for the better from previous curriculum frameworks.

### *Curricular Goals*

The Curricular Goals of NCF-FS are derived from the broad aims of education as envisaged by NEP 2020, the domains of development as imagined in *panchakoshas* as well as modern child development theories, and the focus is on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). The NCF-FS recommends thirteen curricular goals across the five domains of development, including the goal of developing positive learning habits.

### *Competencies*

For each of the 13 Curricular Goals, 68 more specific Competencies have been defined. These Competencies are observable and assessable statements of educational achievements. They are defined in NCF-FS and allow for a clear tracking of educational progress that is visible to all stakeholders including students, teachers, parents, and the community at large.

### *Learning Outcomes*

Learning Outcomes are 'interim markers' of learning achievement towards the attainment of Competencies. These Learning Outcomes also indicate the learning trajectory for achieving the particular competency at the end of the Foundational Stage. Students spend five years of schooling in the Foundational Stage. While competencies define what is to be achieved by the end of each stage, textbook developers and teachers need to have clearer ideas on what should

be the appropriate learning achievements each year so that these competencies are achieved by the end of the stage.

It must be noted that while the Curricular Goals and Competencies are fairly universal and stable, Learning Outcomes can be specific to the context in which a school operates. Thus, Learning Outcomes defined in NCF-FS are more illustrative in nature and school systems and schools can develop their own set of Learning Outcomes to realise the Competencies, based on their context.

### **A guide to reading the document**

For a Foundational Stage teacher, this document is not just a curriculum framework but can act as a handbook.

- It is important to understand the idea of Learning Standards. A thorough reading of Chapter 2 would not only enable that but will also inform the teacher of the specific goals and competencies towards which their efforts need to be directed.
- Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are directly relevant to the practice of Foundational Stage teachers. It would be helpful for teachers to refer to the specified annexures to get a concrete understanding of the principles outlined in these chapters.
- For responding to children with developmental delays and disabilities, reading Chapter 8 is critical.
- For Educational Functionaries and Administrators, Chapters 1, 2, and 10 are essential reading.

The NCF-FS is a comprehensive document that provides clear, specific, and pragmatic guidelines for all aspects of schooling in the Foundational Stage. Teachers and other practitioners would greatly benefit from a close reading of this document.

### **Endnotes**

- i The Upanishadic theory of the five sheaths of a human being.
- ii National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. 4.5.1.5 The Four-Block Approach for Literacy Instruction. p. 116
- iii National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. 4.5.2.3 Blocks of Teaching for Mathematics Instruction. p. 121



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## Structure of NCF-FS Document

NCF-FS is 360 pages long and is divided into ten chapters and four annexures.

### CHAPTERS

**Chapter 1: Preamble and Introduction** outlines the development of ECCE in India, the vision of NEP 2020, the current understanding of how children learn at the Foundational Stage and the context of schooling in India at the Foundational Stage. This sets the context and vision for the curriculum framework. (p. 13)

**Chapter 2: Aims, Curricular Goals, Competencies, and Learning Outcomes** is a critical chapter of NCF-FS and it sets the Learning Standards for all the five domains of development in the Foundational Stage. While the Curricular Goals and Competencies are the complete set, a few illustrative Learning Outcomes are outlined in this chapter. (p. 49)

A complete set of grade-level Learning Outcomes are given in Annexure 1.

**Chapter 3: Approach to Language Education and Literacy** is the chapter in which the overall approach to language education is outlined. India is richly endowed with linguistic diversity and this chapter recognises that strength and outlines when and how different languages should be introduced in the school. (p. 71)

**Chapter 4: Pedagogy** gives guidelines for specific pedagogical approaches that are appropriate for this stage of schooling. Play-based methods of engaging young children, strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy, and the role of positive relationships between teachers and children are elaborated in this chapter. (p. 81)

**Chapter 5: Choosing, Organising, and Contextualising Content for Teaching** engages with the issue of selecting and using appropriate content for achieving the Learning Standards. While pre-primary grades (ages 3-5) are largely based on concrete materials and playful experiences, textbooks can start playing a role in grades 1 and 2 (ages 6-8). Organising the physical learning environment, the classroom, is critical for this stage and the document outlines specific suggestions on how to organise the classroom. (p. 135)

**Chapter 6: Assessments for Furthering Learning Objectives** elaborates the approaches to assessments at the Foundational Stage. In the early years assessments are to be based on more qualitative observations of the child, assessments can take a variety of forms like portfolios and worksheets. The need for a Holistic Progress Card that covers all domains of development is emphasised in this chapter. (p. 169)

**Chapter 7: Organising Time** provides guidelines for organising time – annually, weekly, and daily. Illustrative timetables are provided for reference. (p. 85)

**Chapter 8: Additional Critical Areas** addresses two core concerns relevant to this stage. Early identification and addressing of developmental delays and disabilities (including learning disabilities) is crucial to provide inclusive education for all. Child safety and security is also paramount. These concerns are addressed in this chapter. (p. 191)

**Chapter 9: Linkages to the Preparatory Stage** outlines the progression from the Foundational Stage to the Preparatory Stage. School subjects as curricular areas emerge in the Preparatory Stage and the document gives suggestions on how to transition from domains of development into these school subjects. Approaches to content, pedagogy, and assessment would have both continuity and changes and these are elaborated. (p. 203)

**Chapter 10: Creating a Supportive Eco-System** engages with the necessary conditions in the overall ecosystem of schooling and talks about the preparation of teachers, school environments, the role of academic functionaries, and parents. A section on technology looks at what is the role of Information and Communication Technologies and takes a balanced view of considering both the possibilities and precautions for usage. (p. 207)

#### ANNEXURES

**Annexure 1** defines illustrative learning outcomes for all the competencies. (p. 225)

**Annexure 2** contains illustrations for different practices that includes teaching, content selection, assessments, and organising classrooms. (p. 275)

**Annexure 3** maps the competencies with those in NIPUN Bharat. (p. 325)

**Annexure 4** contains references to research on ECCE from India and across the world. (p. 335)

*Contributed by Ramchandar Krishnamurthy.*



*Azim Premji School, Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh. Photo credit: Banishree Mohapatra*

The National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) 2022 is a landmark document that provides comprehensive guidelines – goals, pedagogical ideas and learning standards that the school system in India should strive to achieve in the first five years of children’s schooling. This article focuses on - *How Children Learn, Importance of Play, Learning through Play* and the relationship of play with learning goals and standards for 3- to 8-year-old children – aspects outlined in sections 1, 2 and 4 of the curriculum framework.

## Young children and learning

*Illustration 1:* A 3-year-old child is observing a line of ants walking at the edge of the classroom. The child keenly observes that one of the bigger ants is carrying a small ant and continuing to follow the rest. A 5-year-old comes with a small transparent box, catches a few ants in it, and then quickly closes the box to preserve and observe the ants.

*Illustration 2:* A class I teacher regularly tells stories. Children watch her expressions and listen to her intently – the roaring of the lion, the squeaking of a mouse, the sound of a squirrel when it sees a snake approaching. With a regular routine of story time, many children pick up the book and read it aloud to each other; some during their free time, take animal puppets and start enacting the story.

Based on the above examples, for the following questions, we deduce these answers:

*What do these illustrations indicate about young children?*

- Children are curious.
- Children engage with nature and their environment.
- Children are observant.
- Children like to explore.
- Children imitate.
- Children express.

*What do they say about how children learn?*

- Children observe and learn from the environment.

- Children engage with material, people, feelings and things around them to learn.
- Children explore, investigate and manipulate to make meaning of the world around them.

*Would we call this playful learning?*

A child observing a line of ants as an ‘onlooker’, feels joy and wonder. Perhaps it is an enjoyable experience that can be broadly categorised as the child being involved and engrossed in play and a playful experience.

In illustration 2, the act of repeating the story, reading in their free time, narrating to each other, drawing and enacting characters from the story – all these active learning experiences also seem playful in nature. Children have fun doing this and do it by choice.

In both the illustrations, playing and learning are not two distinct entities. They go together seamlessly in the way children experience it.

## Teaching-learning in the Foundational Stage

Let us look at two situations.

*Situation A:* A classroom with 25 children, working in small groups in different parts of the room – one group is reading stories, another group is playing with blocks, beads and manipulatives, a third group is scribbling on the running blackboard and a fourth group is playing *doctor-doctor*. The teacher is moving from one group to another – asking questions on a particular story to the reading group; making a pattern of beads with the group playing beads; naming the drawings that children have made on the running blackboard and becoming a pharmacist for the group playing *doctor-doctor*.

*Situation B:* Another classroom with 25 children, where they are seated on benches with notebooks and pencils and looking studiously into their books, trying to copy-write numbers 1 to 100 for an entire period. The teacher walks to and fro in the classroom, making sure there is no noise. If a child’s writing is not legible, she erases the writing and asks the child to write again. This is the routine for most of the

day – writing from the blackboard, quietly, multiple times, except for two 15- and 30-minute recesses available to children to move around and do things of their choice.

Both are classrooms for 5- to 6-year-old children, belonging to similar socio-economic backgrounds.

What is *common* to these two situations?

1. Both are teaching-learning situations inside a classroom.
2. Both situations have a committed and concerned teacher who is interested in children's learning and completion of the syllabus.
3. Both classrooms have children of the same age group with similar developmental characteristics.

What is *different* in these two situations?

1. Children's participation, freedom, and control:
  - a. *Situation A* would be noisy with student movement, talking and sharing of toys.
  - b. *Situation B* would be quiet with an obvious sense of discipline.
2. Choice and students' role:
  - a. In *Situation A*, children are moving around, talking and trying new things and the teacher is participating in what the children have chosen to do. The pedagogy seems to be active exploration.
  - b. In *Situation B*, an adult is teaching, children are sitting and learning by copy-writing, practising, and repeating tasks designed by the teacher. Following instructions and task completion seem to be the key objectives.
3. Interaction:
  - a. In *Situation A*, interaction is high – interaction between children, children and the teacher, and children and the environment (toys and material). The environment is seen as a third teacher.
  - b. In *Situation B*, interaction is minimal between children; may be high on occasion between teacher and children; and between children and play material it may be limited to specific activities and task completion. For instance, in the above example, the bench, notebook, pen and blackboard are what children interact with the most.

Lastly, there seems to be wonder, joy and enjoyment in *Situation A*, aspects that are completely missing in *Situation B*.

Can we categorise *Situation A* as the one that would provide more active learning opportunities and, therefore, more holistic development opportunities? Playfulness in the learning environment contributes to more effective learning than passive engagement and copy-writing, which might show the volume of work done by children but does not result in real learning – learning that enables children to make sense of the world around them.

The question remains: How can the teacher in *Situation B* make the same learning experience joyful?

### **Play and playfulness as pedagogy**

The NCF-FS suggests that *play* is characterised by choice, joy and wonder. The learning environment needs to be *playful* to enable learning across all domains of development. While playing, children are active: they organise, plan, imagine, manipulate, negotiate, explore, investigate, and create while making sense of the world. (NCF-FS, pp. 38,39)

This active learning provides children with the opportunity for rich sensorial, cognitive, linguistic, physical and motor experiences, along with interactions with the people and world around them.

The NCF-FS further suggests that learning at this stage is an active and interactive process in which children learn through play and interaction with other children, and more-experienced others. Children are actively engaged in their social and cultural experiences, and they constantly adjust and use new information to make sense of their perceptions and experiences. Children's playing and playfulness can be nurtured and strengthened through experiences of active participation with others, and with natural, real-world materials that provoke and enhance learning, imagination, creativity, innovation, and problem-solving in diverse and unique ways. (p. 38)

The document, in this section on the importance of play, further outlines the various types of play, and how the degree of control and structure changes from free play to guided and structured play, to rule-based games and play. Further, it provides examples of types of play, based on the key developmental aspects the type of play fosters. (*Tables 1 and 2*)

Table 1. Types of play based on structure and control.

	Free Play	Guided Play	Structured Play
Roles	Child-led Child directed	Child-led Teacher-supported	Teacher-led Children actively participate
What do Children do?	Children decide all aspects of their play - what to play, how to play it, for how long to play, with whom to play.	Children plan and lead their own play, similarly as they do during free play.	Children actively listen, follow rules, participate in activities and games planned by Teachers.
What do Teachers do?	Teachers organise a stimulating play environment in the classroom, observe children, and help when children ask for support.	Teachers offer support and actively facilitate play. Teachers guide the children in different tasks that they are involved in, ask questions, play with the children to meet specific learning objectives.	Teachers carefully plan activities and games with specific rules to promote Competencies in a learning sequence. Language and mathematics games, nature walks, songs and rhymes are planned on a daily basis.

Source. National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. 1.4.2. Learning through Play. Table 1.4A. p. 41

These three types of play – free play, guided play and structured play – show increasing levels of control and planning by the teacher and decreasing levels of choice by the children. Often, in guided play, the

child initiates the activity (as in illustrations 1 and 2, and Situation A) and the teacher becomes an active participant and facilitator in the process.

Table 2. Types of play.

#	Types of Play	Examples
1	Dramatic Play/ Fantasy Play	Use a small stick for a horse to dramatize a story. Acting like family members, Teachers, Doctors. Dramatizing a favourite character, e.g., <i>Jhansi ki Rani</i> , <i>Rani Chennamma</i> , <i>Chota Bheem</i> , <i>Shaktimaan</i> .
2	Exploratory Play	<i>Jodo, Todo, Phir Jodo</i> - dismantling and assembling objects (e.g., clock, toilet flush, tricycle). Experiments with instruments (e.g., magnets, prisms, magnifying glass). Mixing dals <i>channa</i> , <i>rajma</i> and sorting. Sand play, Water play.
3	Environment/ Small World play	Using miniature animals, furniture, kitchen set, doctor set to recreated the real world and engage with it. Nature walk identifying trees, plants, insects, birds, animals, sounds, colours.
4	Physical Play	Exploring the body through music, movement, dramatization, outdoor play, balancing, games.
5	Games with Rules	Hopscotch ( <i>Kith Kith</i> , <i>Stapu</i> , <i>Langdi</i> ), Tag, Snakes and Ladders, <i>Chaupad</i> , Spinning Tops ( <i>Lattu</i> , <i>Buguri</i> ), Marbles ( <i>Goli</i> ), <i>Kokla Chapaki</i> , <i>Pitthu</i> , <i>Pallanguzhi</i> .

Source. National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. 1.4.2. Learning through Play. Table 1.4B. p. 42

The document provides another categorisation of play based on the type of engagement – is it imagining role plays, exploring material through manipulation, or the physical impulse to run, jump, balance, and so on? The role of curriculum in keeping a child’s learning and developmental characteristics at the core would provide opportunities to children to socialise, construct, investigate and express – natural impulses of children (Dewey, 1900, pp. 43, 44) – much of which a playful learning environment would allow.

Organising the curriculum and daily routine to meet the requirements of the curriculum and learning standards, while ensuring a rich playful learning environment for all children may seem challenging, especially in our large classrooms with a skewed pupil-teacher ratio.

What enables optimal learning among children is the teacher’s understanding of children, their contexts, and their age-specific developmental trends, curricular goals focused on holistic development, learning standards, strategies to organise time and planning of curricular experiences. Several pre-school and *anganwadi* programmes have shown that it is possible to create and sustain a playful learning environment while ensuring that the curriculum is fully transacted.

### Role of teachers

A teacher of young children would require several kinds of preparation. Their role involves planning and organising the manifold aspects of a curricular programme to achieve its objectives in their entirety.

1. *Belief in playful learning*: The first requirement would be the teacher’s own understanding of children – their characteristics and their nature to ask, inquire, talk, explore and understand; and the difference in their learning needs. Equally important are the principles of learning, and a strong belief in the potential of playful learning and in creating an environment for holistic learning. Equally critical is bringing parents on board regarding the importance of play-based learning.
2. *Children as a resource*: Children’s ideas, moods, routines, interests, questions and their energy and curiosity often provide excellent starting points for a teacher’s engagement with them. Children’s voices and interests should be actively used as resources to create the necessary learning environment.
3. *Creating the environment*: Well-designed learning

environments are the third teacher. Creating the environment includes utilising and organising the various spaces that children engage with – outdoor and indoor; providing play material, a running blackboard and spaces to express, read, use manipulatives and open-ended toys and material in a sandpit, a doll corner etc., and a routine and rhythm that children can follow.

4. *Sustaining the environment*: The teacher would need to build a network of partners – the children, parents, and the larger community – to establish the importance of play-based learning. This involves reworking the expectations from the benefits of the time spent in filling notebooks with writing, as compared to the time to actively engage with play and a playful learning environment.

*Is it possible to achieve the Learning Standards across all domains, and goals of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by the end of this stage while using play-based pedagogy?*

The NCF-FS outlines key curricular goals and competencies for all domains of development. It further outlines the learning standards to be achieved by the end of the Foundational Stage. It provides a range of developmental aspects to be achieved by children through the Foundational Stage.

Language and literacy learning standards see a progression from oral language to emergent reading and writing, and formal *akshara gyan*. Similarly, the early mathematics standards see a developmental range for all early and emergent mathematics concepts, followed by number sense, and basic arithmetic and geometry by age 8 years.

### In conclusion

In terms of the allocation of time and balance between ‘systematic teaching’ and play-based learning opportunities, NCF-FS clearly states:

Children in this Stage learn through play which includes a wide range of activities and stimulating experiences. All these activities and experiences need to be organized in a manner that children remain engaged along with being emotionally and mentally motivated to learn. Within this broad idea of play, it must be noted that children also learn by observing, doing, listening, reading, speaking, writing, thinking, and practicing. They learn new concepts, interpret them, and connect this newly introduced knowledge with

their existing knowledge. Explicit and systematic teaching, some practice and application is necessary especially once children begin literacy

and mathematics. However, all of this, must adhere to the basic requirement of children's positive engagement with strong elements of fun and play.

Source. National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. 1.4.3 Engaging Children for Play. p.44

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In the heart of a lively village, near the *anganwadi*, an evening unfolds with groups of children engaging joyfully in different forms of play. Educators delight in observing their social participation. Different types of play – with objects, such as plastic cups; symbolic play in which they make different shapes with mud; games with rules, like lagori; socio-dramatic play – a group of children pretending to take out a 'Ganesh procession'; and of course, physical play, like jumping, hopping and running – all of these showcase the richness of children's imagination and their connection to local traditions. The scene is magical (jaadui).

*Umamaheshwara Rao Jaggana, Jaadui Pitara | The Magic of Play in Early Childhood, p. 55*

# Towards Universal Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

Nimrat Khandpur

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 states that 'The highest priority of the education system will be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary schools by 2025. The rest of this Policy will become relevant for our students only if this most basic learning requirement (i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic at the foundational level) is first achieved' (Para 2.2, NEP 2020). No statement can more firmly establish the criticality of foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) in ensuring that students can benefit from the education they receive. In turn, this education prepares them to participate in society as contributing, productive members.

## Criticality of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

FLN is critical on various counts. What may seem like the concern of schools for very young students, in the long term, has implications not only for these students' future well-being but also for the well-being of the nation.

Let us begin with the individual. FLN lays the basis for all further learning throughout life. For example, a basic understanding of numbers and mathematical operations, the use of standard algorithms for addition and subtraction, spatial understanding and data-handling are at the heart of the more complex understanding of accounting, statistics, trends, cause and effect relationships, etc. This understanding also enables children's engagement with the 'language' of subjects, like physics, chemistry, econometrics, etc. The ability to understand the relationship between symbols and sounds and interpret what a set of symbols conveys, construct meaning from listening and reading, think about what they have read, and to be able to communicate what is in their minds through writing, lays the foundation for critically thinking about what they read and for putting forth arguments using logical reasoning. It allows for critical interpretation of historical and contemporary sources, for persuasive writing and advocacy, for expressing observations and results of experimentation, and so on.

There is sufficient evidence that the time from birth to 8 years is a period of tremendous development. Therefore, students are expected to acquire FLN by class III. At the same time, this period is critical for making sense of the world around, and for socio-emotional, ethical, as well as aesthetic and cultural development. Therefore, the period from 3-8 years essentially determines, to a large extent, the learning trajectory of an individual as well as their adjustment in adult life. Thus, the emphasis on the acquisition of FLN in the NEP 2020 as an 'urgent and necessary prerequisite to learning' (title of Chapter 2 of the NEP 2020).

What happens if FLN is not acquired at a grade-appropriate age? Students become more and more hampered in the acquisition of competencies of higher grades. The gap between the capacities they should have and those that they actually have keeps growing larger. Frequently, they are addressed by labels that indicate the low expectations their schools and teachers have set for them. There is sufficient evidence that this situation lowers the motivation for learning. Students either cope with rote memorisation or drop out altogether. In this way, students are penalised for what is really a lapse in the school system.

On the other hand, individuals who have received appropriate support during the early years of their education are most likely to be well-adjusted, contributing adults who are productively employed. Research shows that there is a clear linkage between early childhood education and the markers of a healthy society (example, lower population growth rate, democratisation and human rights, political stability, crime rate reduction, poverty reduction, reduced inequality, health of citizens, diffusion of technology, enhanced life expectancy, and so on). The children of such individuals are more likely to survive their infancy and complete their schooling satisfactorily.

In addition to these relatively intangible benefits



are more pragmatic considerations, namely, returns on investment in education. These returns are calculated in terms of reduced public expenditure on social welfare programmes concomitant to well-being and more civic societies, along with revenues earned through taxes. Research across the world shows that the return on investment in early years education is high compared to other stages. For example, a report published in 2014 showed an estimated annual rate of return, adjusted for inflation, of between 7 percent and 18 percent for early childhood education. Another study, that followed students from 1985 to 2012 showed that every dollar invested in early childhood education resulted in a roughly seven dollars return on investment. Such studies related to early childhood education have not been carried out in India, but we can anticipate that a similar trend will be observed.

### **Current status of FLN in our country**

The National Achievement Survey (NAS) is a large-scale assessment conducted across the country to determine the learning achievement of students of classes III, V, VIII and X studying in schools under different kinds of management across the country. It provides a clear view of the status of learning in the country. The most recent report of the NAS available is from 2021.

As a reference, a few examples of the learning outcomes assessed in NAS include:

- (i) In language – reads small texts with comprehension (identifies main ideas, details, sequence and draws conclusions) and reads printed scripts on the classroom walls (poems, posters, charts, etc)
- (ii) In mathematics – reads and writes numbers up to 999 using place value, constructs and uses the multiplication facts (up to 10) in daily life situations, reads the time correctly to the hour using a clock/watch, records data using tally marks, represents pictorially and draws conclusions, etc.

NAS 2021 shows that students' learning levels are low across classes III, V, VIII and X with an average learning level of 59 percent in class III, 49 percent in class V, 42 percent in class VIII and 36 percent in class X. Please note the drop in learning from lower grades to higher grades; this is similar to the results from the earlier NAS conducted in 2017. However, there is a decline in learning levels across all these classes for all subjects in 2021 compared to NAS 2017.

The mathematics score for class III was 57 percent while the language score was 62 percent. The score

in both language and mathematics in classes V, VIII and X was lower compared to class III.

### **How FLN goals will be achieved in the context of NEP 2020**

Numerous efforts have been made to improve the status of FLN in the country. Education policies have stressed the importance of the early years, right from the policy of 1968 and emphasised by later policies and relevant documents.

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme started in 1975 was intended to provide education to children aged 2-6 years, among other services. *Anganwadi* centres across the country were set up under this scheme.

Under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in the 1990s, efforts were made to converge primary education with ICDS by relocating the *anganwadi* centres within the primary school premises as far as possible.

In 2013, the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy was released, recommending 'inclusive, equitable and contextualised opportunities for the optimal development and active learning capacities of all children below 6 years of age.' In 2014, the Ministry of Women and Child Development brought out a National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Framework for children aged 3-6 years, followed by a Preschool Curriculum for three years of preschool education along with *Guidelines for Preschool Education* developed by NCERT in 2019.

The NEP 2020 attempts to take these efforts forward by making some fundamental changes in the structure of schooling itself. It attempts to situate the attainment of universal FLN in the larger context of the ecosystem within which the education system is located. To this end, it restructures the school stages, creating the Foundational Stage comprising three years of preschool (before class I) and classes I and II. This change is curricular and pedagogical and is not to be implemented in terms of bringing all centres providing education for students aged 3-6 years and those providing education for the first two years of the primary stage together. Its importance is that the curriculum for all students aged 3-6 years will have continuity and a similar approach.

Next, it sets forth a vision for the inclusion of students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups. For those students who have not had the benefit of education prior to class I, it attempts

to ensure, through a school-readiness module, attainment of necessary competencies. A module for this purpose, called *Vidya Pravesh* has been developed by NCERT, and various states have either contextualised or developed their own module.

To enable the transition to the new structure, the NEP 2020 also speaks of *balvatikas* or preparatory classes to be set up within primary schools where possible, wherein qualified teachers can support student learning till such time that the capacities of *anganwadi* personnel are developed.

In 2021, post the release of the NEP 2020, the Central Government launched the NIPUN (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) Bharat Mission under the aegis of the centrally-sponsored scheme of *Samagra Shiksha*. The focus of this mission is on students aged 3 to 9 years, which includes preschool to class III. At the same time, students who are in classes IV and V, who have not attained FLN, are to be provided individual teacher guidance and support, peer support and age-appropriate and supplementary graded learning materials to acquire the necessary competencies. The goals and objectives of the mission are for all schools so that universal acquisition of FLN skills can be achieved by 2026-27.

### Translation of NEP 2020 into classrooms

Policy is translated into classrooms through the syllabus and textbooks. These syllabi and textbooks are ideally rooted in the context of schools but guided by the National Curriculum Framework, so there is uniformity in the broader goals of learning.

In October 2022, the National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) was released, and in August 2023, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) was released. The NCF-SE is for all of school education, including NCF-FS that focuses on the Foundational Stage.

The NCF-FS is intended to support the development of curricula and syllabi across the country while ensuring alignment with the

intent and spirit of NEP 2020. It also aims to outline the key transitions that are critical for the attainment of the goals of NEP 2020. This is enabled through, first, articulating the curricular, pedagogical and assessment approach for the Foundational Stage. Next, it provides specific details at the level of everyday school processes and classroom practices, with clear illustrations across a variety of contexts. Most importantly, NCF-FS states learning standards, which include the broad curricular goals and competencies that are to be achieved by the end of the Foundational Stage. It also suggests illustrative learning outcomes that will lead to the attainment of the desired competencies by the end of the Foundational Stage. These learning outcomes are not linked to any specific year of schooling, in keeping with the fact that each student learns at a different pace.

The NCF-FS goes beyond the attainment of FLN goals, with more comprehensive goals beyond cognitive development, and language and literacy development. Thus, while both NIPUN Bharat and NCF take a competency-based approach, NCF-FS goes beyond NIPUN Bharat competencies. It, thus, enables the holistic development that is essential for learning across stages.

### Conclusion

The assumption of the foundational capacities of FLN as the basis for all learning aligns with the emphasis NEP 2020 and, consequently, NCF gives to 'learning to learn'. This emphasis categorically signals the idea that everything cannot be and should not be taught. But what must be learnt is the capacity to learn whatever is important or of interest to students during school or later life. Learning must be in progression – if any link is missed, it takes a long time, or even forever, to make up the loss. Thus, the onus on schools and teachers to focus on quality education across domains in the Foundational Stage.

### Acknowledgement

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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.

*Satvir Singh Chauhan, Organising Time in A Mixed-Ability Classroom, p. 42*

# The Arts and Socio-Emotional and Ethical Learning

Malavika Rajnarayan

Every month, I spend a few days observing arts classrooms in the Azim Premji Schools. I find this extremely valuable for understanding the arts-learning process and how it is connected to all other aspects of education. Having been an arts facilitator myself, I am familiar with the challenges faced by art teachers on an everyday basis. As a group comprising visual arts and music teachers from all the Azim Premji Schools, we have worked consistently for over five years to develop better classroom practices across the different stages of school education.

There is an assumption that art 'automatically' promotes Socio-Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEEL). Today, we see a growing awareness among teachers and parents about the benefits of learning the arts and how it helps in children's overall development and wellbeing. Teachers and parents also desire that their children learn to draw 'well'. This latter aspiration often narrows down the objective of arts activities to mostly focus on technical skills, which in the Foundational Stage is related to fine-motor development (hand-eye coordination and control of simple materials and tools). While this is also important, we cannot hope to address SEEL without consciously planning for it. Colouring worksheets have become the go-to activity for engaging children, and appreciation is reserved for those who fill the colours 'properly' within the outlines. But do such worksheets allow children to express their own ideas and feelings? Even if children are choosing their own colours for the worksheet, can we be sure that every child's choice of colours corresponds to the emotions and feelings that they consciously wish to express?

In one of my art classes, a child of class II, drew a picture on a slate with chalk. It showed two intersecting roads that divided the slate into four parts. Near the intersection were a bus and a two-wheeler. When I asked him what was happening in the scene, he explained that the two vehicles had crashed into each other, the people were injured, and an ambulance was called, and they were taken to the hospital. He drew this repeatedly a few times over a couple of classes. A little concerned,

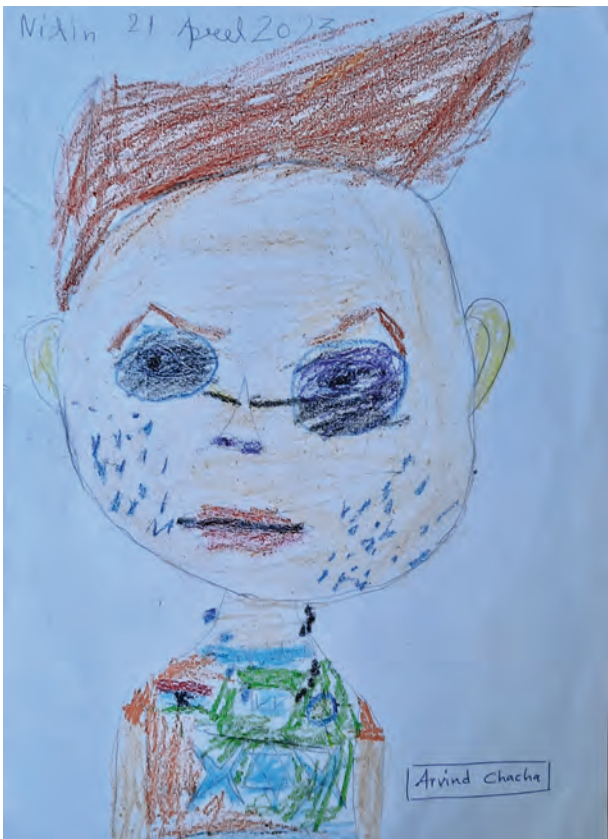
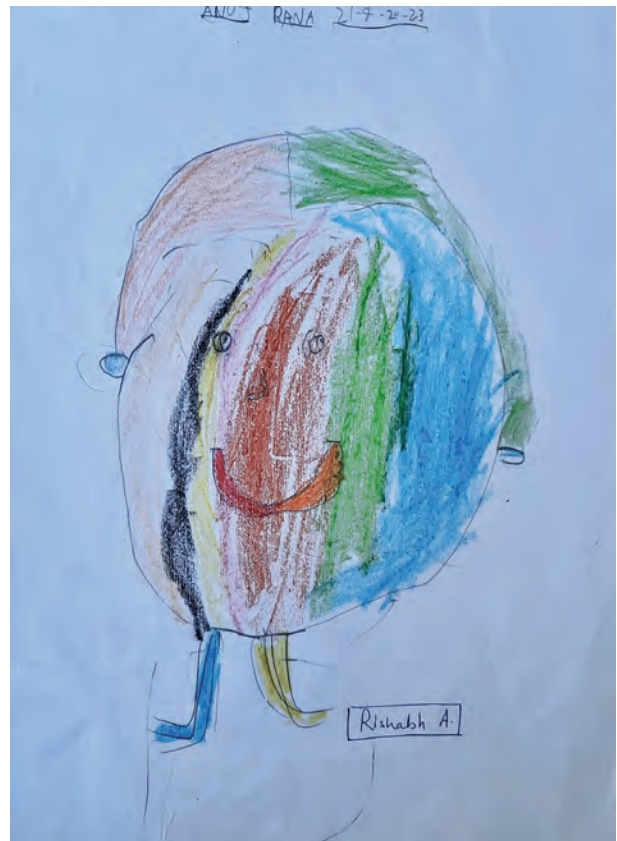
I mentioned it to the class teacher who, in turn, enquired from the child's caregivers if the child had witnessed a road accident and was affected by it. The family assured us that no such incident had occurred, and the child might have got this idea from watching TV! Open-ended art activities allow children to express a multitude of ideas and experiences that they are exposed to. Their emotional expression can be inferred through both their artwork and the conversations we have with them. Colouring worksheets with ready-made fish, flowers or butterflies may not have scope for personal and emotional narratives.

Let us look at a few ideas mentioned in NCF and its classroom implications.

## Positive self-concept

When very young children show us their scribbles and receive positive responses, they feel understood. They sometimes construct their own stories around these scribbles. Once they begin to draw faces or stick figures, I ask them: *Who is this person?* In cases where there are more images with people and objects, I ask: *Where are you in this picture? Who are the other people in this picture? Is this your home/dog/object?* These queries usually get them to talk about their families and immediate environment.

I have observed other art teachers talk to children while they are drawing: *What clothes does this person wear? Can you show me? Look at your own clothes... it has a collar, buttons, sleeves... is the person in your drawing wearing something like this? Is it a child or an older person?* After these prompts, the children not only look at their own selves and belongings but also observe little details of their friends sitting next to them. They record these intimate observations in their own way. These may not appear realistic, but a world of details opens up as they point out chappals, bindis, bangles, buttons, hairstyles, bags, teeth and even tears rolling down a face. They feel confident and encouraged to develop their own ideas and expressions when these are discussed, displayed and viewed by all in the classroom.



Artwork portraying self, friends/family created by class II students of Azim Premji School, Uttarkashi.

In the class I music room, I observed a teacher teach children simple sound patterns using claps, finger snaps, tapping on the thigh and tongue-

clicking sounds. This was played in a 'follow the leader' format, where each child got their turn, and each was given the freedom to put these sounds

together in their own way – tempo and pattern – the rest of the children followed this. Here again, children were given the opportunity to develop a positive idea about themselves since each of their ideas was validated and repeated by the whole group.

### Emotional awareness and regulation

I was accompanying an art teacher to class I. The children were excited about getting their own sheet of paper to create something. In the meanwhile, two children had got into a scuffle. One of them got really angry and hit the other child. The teacher intervened and asked them to settle back in their places. However, the issue was not settled. The child who got angry was still angry and upset. Carrying on with the day's task did not seem to be a reasonable option for him. Others in the class were also restless to begin their work and the teacher had got busy distributing materials.

I had been watching the child who was upset and decided to talk to him. I asked him to tell me what happened. He complained that the other child had said something mean to him. I asked him 'Did that make you angry?' He nodded. 'Is that why you hit him?' I asked gently and he nodded again. I told him I understood that he felt angry and that I also get very angry and upset when people are rude. He started to cry. He was probably relieved that he was not chided, and that someone else understood his frustration. We talked about the other options he could try when he gets angry instead of resorting to hitting someone. One option was to use words to tell the other person that we feel bad or hurt when they say mean things. Another option was to walk away from that place and sit somewhere else.

I encouraged both the children involved in the scuffle to spend time thinking about what happened as they made their drawings that day. Their pictures did not show anything that had happened but giving them time to draw and colour helped them calm down, refocus, and feel understood. It is a challenge for teachers to single-handedly manage the needs and issues of every child in a

classroom. It helps to have a few strategies handy. Acknowledging children's emotions and helping them find words or pictures to show how they feel could be one such strategy.

### Social development

The arts create many opportunities for children to work together and share materials. I was observing a group of class I students as they worked on a large drawing together. A few took the lead and marked out different areas in the drawing sheet and assigned portions to each group member. I noticed one child who sat without participating. When I asked him why he was not doing anything, he said. 'I don't know how to draw.' This was immediately echoed by a couple of others in the group, '*Didi, isko nahi aata hai.*' (Didi, he does not know how to draw.) Perturbed by this, I asked them to keep a little space for him also on the drawing sheet. Then, I asked the student if he knew how to hold a pencil. He said, he did. I asked him if he could touch it to the paper and move his hand; he said, he could. I told him that is how we all draw and if he knew how to do that, he could draw too. I gave him the pencil and asked him to show me how he moves it on the paper. He drew a little house with a door and a window. I asked the others to see his drawing and asked them if he could draw or not. They all smiled and agreed that he could.

Many art teachers regularly make time for presenting and talking about artwork in the classroom. In this process, children listen and pay attention to how others are thinking and feeling. They learn to appreciate a variety of expressions. The teacher's role is crucial in developing positive relationships with all the children, particularly those who are shy, or have low self-esteem. Many of these issues can be resolved if teachers are observant, alert and sensitive to the interpersonal dynamics in the classroom. The key factors that contribute to SEEL development in an arts classroom are pedagogy and classroom facilitation, and not simply any attractive arts activity.



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# Teaching of Foundational Numeracy

Ankit Shukla

The National Curriculum Framework - Foundational Stage 2022 (NCF-FS) was created with the reforms suggested in the National Educational Policy 2020 (NEP). Following this, the changed teaching techniques used in the classroom for early numeracy are described in this article along with suggested classroom procedures.

Overall, for the teaching of maths, NCF-FS document states, 'Children bring various mathematical skills from their surroundings and culture into the classroom, which must be the basis of learning mathematics.' While keeping this as the basis, how a teacher should proceed with the classroom instruction is illustrated in this article.

To become mathematically proficient, children need to build conceptual understanding, procedural understanding, strategies competence/application, communication and reasoning, and a positive attitude towards mathematics.

All these strands of mathematical proficiency can be designed in the following four blocks for the daily classroom process. A mathematical

approach/process must be the basis of and based on the nature of the task.

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. p. 121

## Blocks of teaching for classroom instruction

The teacher can begin a maths class with a brief conversation with the students that can include mental calculations, poems relating to maths (examples are given at the end), or something connected to their everyday lives, because before getting into formal teaching, these discussions work as a warm-up.

Following this, students can be engaged in activities tailored to the maths concept the teacher is about to teach. The teacher must make sure that the activities are aligned to the various learning outcomes associated with the concept. The objective of these activities could be to gain proficiency in the skills of numeracy. Proficiency is the stage where a student can understand the problem, can solve the problem, develop different strategies to solve the same problem and has a positive attitude towards numeracy.

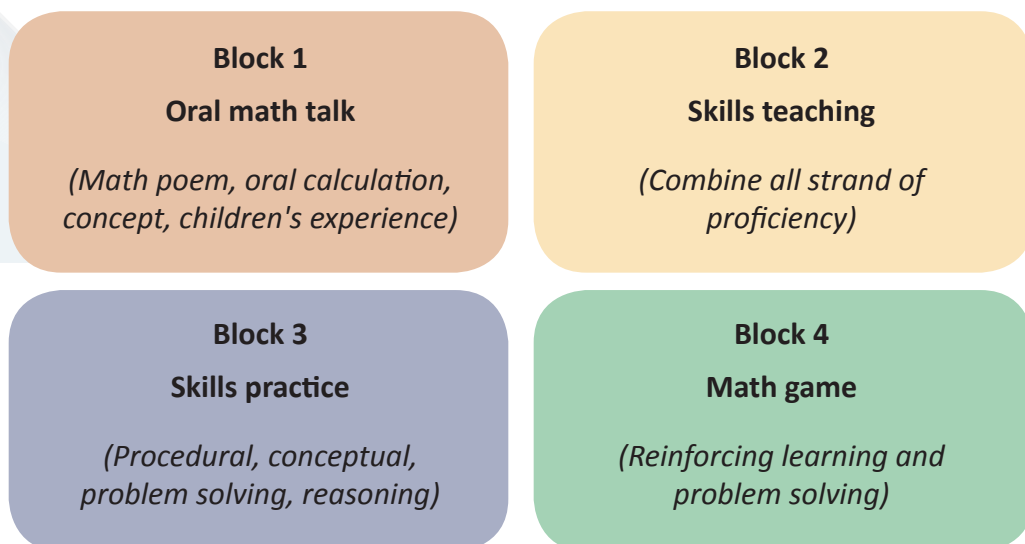


Figure 1. Four Blocks Model – Mathematics.

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. 4.5.2.3 Blocks of Teaching for Mathematics Instruction. p. 121

Giving students an opportunity to practise the concept is the intended goal of the third block. Students can practise these conceptual skills with the help of a workbook or exercises given in the textbook. With this practice, they would be able to develop procedural and conceptual understanding of the concept dealt with in the classroom. With adequate practice of the concept, they develop reasoning for their answers.

As children love anything to do with play, in the final segment, children can be made to play a game that relates to the skill they have just acquired. It would reinforce the learning of numerical skills and would be targeted to develop problem-solving skills of the students.

### **My experience with this process**

I describe below my first-hand experience of observing this process being implemented at the Khapri Primary School in the Anjora cluster of the Durg District. In class I, there were 34 students present.

#### *Block 1 Oral maths talk*

The teacher was teaching numbers from 10-50. She began her lesson and the following conversation ensued:

Teacher: Okay, tell me how many eyes do we have?

All the children showed two fingers and said: Two!

Taking the name of a child, the teacher asked: Okay Neelam, tell me how many noses you have?

Neelam: Only one, madam.

Teacher: Okay Malti, now you tell me how many teeth do you have?

Malti: 24, madam.

Teacher: You counted so quickly? Wow. Tikesh, how many hairs do you have on your head?

Tikesh: Many, madam. It would take a lot of time to count.

Teacher: Yes. You are right. Now, let us do an activity.

#### *Block 2 Skills teaching: Place value*

The teacher was going to teach the concept of place value. She had already explained the concepts and meanings of open and bundled units of numbers.

The teacher handed each student some matchsticks. Then, she asked them to count and tell how many matchsticks each one had. The students counted the matchsticks they were given. One student had seventeen, and another had twenty-two. The teacher asked, 'How many matchsticks do you have in open and in bundled form?' All students began to make bundles of ten matchsticks with the sticks they had. The student who had seventeen matchsticks, was now holding seven loose matchsticks in addition to one bundle. Another student who had twenty-two matchsticks had made two bundles and was left with two more matchsticks. The students started calling out the number of open and bundled sticks while showing them to the teacher.

#### *Block 3 Skills practice*

Next, it was time to practise the concept by doing the exercises given at the end of the chapter in the textbook. The teacher explained all the questions one by one, and all the children began solving the questions as per the instructions. The teacher kept track of how they were progressing and helped students who were facing problems.



Figure 2. A student practising in the workbook.





Figure 3. The teacher and students playing the maths game.

#### *Block 4 Maths game*

After the students completed the exercise, the teacher asked them if they would like to play a game and the students unanimously answered with a yes. The teacher brought some cards and scattered them in front of the class. There were two types of cards – some with numbers (digits) written on them and some with only dots for various numbers. The teacher asked each student to pick one card.

When the teacher called out a number, the student who had the card with that digit and the one who had the card with the same number of dots had to come forward and form a pair. The teacher called out all numbers from one to ten and the students matched the digits with the dots on their cards and formed pairs.

#### **Assessment**

I also had the opportunity to observe a weekly assessment activity by a class II teacher. I took a seat with the students at the rear of the classroom. After the teacher gave directions, the students opened a workbook page. The teacher then read out each problem and explained what they should do. As the students began working on the problems, the teacher went around checking their work, answering their questions and clearing their doubts.

Next, the teacher wrote questions on the blackboard for some more practice. Students started solving those questions. While this was going on, the teacher went around and checked the students' exercise books and gave them marks. If the teacher forgot to give marks to some children, the children reminded him. In the end, the teacher formed a group of those who had scored less and worked with them separately.

#### **Conclusion**

If we examine the four-block model, it is clear that the teacher had positive outcomes from implementing it. The teacher mentioned that this approach is helping students learn better and that some of the students who used to miss school a lot have started coming on a regular basis. Throughout this four-block process, students pick up a lot of knowledge on their own. Those who fall behind, or need more time or help to understand, are grouped together and work is completed individually with them. As a result, all the students feel included in the process.

From these teachers' experiences, it seems that if we follow this model in our regular teaching process and teachers have adequate material, then children's learning is assured.

एक-एक-एक,  
नाक हमारी एक।  
दो-दो-दो,  
हाथ हमारे दो।  
तीन-तीन-तीन,  
रिक्शा के पहिये तीन।  
चार-चार-चार,  
कार के पहिये चार।  
पाँच-पाँच-पाँच,  
हर हाथ में अँगुली पाँच।  
छह-छह-छह  
चींटी की टाँगे छः।  
सात-सात-सात,  
हफ्ते में दिन सात।  
आठ-आठ-आठ,  
मकड़ी की टाँगे आठ।  
नौ-नौ-नौ,  
मेरे पास रुपये नौ।  
दस-दस-दस,  
हो गई गिनती बस।

एक राजा की बेटी,  
दो दिन से बिस्तर पर लेटी।  
तीन डॉक्टर देखने आए,  
चार दवा की पुड़िया लाए।  
पाँच घंटे में घोली दवाई,  
छः घंटे के बाद पिलाई।  
सात बजे जब आँखें खोली,  
आठ बजे वह माँ से बोली।  
नौ बजे पी दूध-मलाई,  
दस बजे ही दौड़ लगाई।



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# Organising Time for Integrated Learning

Banishree Mohapatra

In my class, I provide ample opportunities for listening, discussion, sharing views, exploration, play, drawing, reading and writing to facilitate children’s learning. The approach of teaching that I follow is thematic and I try to integrate as many domains of learning<sup>1</sup> as possible. To make classes more interesting and to engage and ensure better participation of students, I use audio-visuals, activities, drawings, and TLMs. I also make sure to have a music/art and physical education (PE) class every day.

The day needs to be carefully organised so that all domains of development receive adequate time and attention. While activities of each domain of development are connected with other domains (e.g., a good story will help language development as well as socio-emotional and ethical development), the routine must ensure that children get ample opportunity for a range of experiences in every domain.

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. Section 7.1. Organising the Day. p. 187

Here are some important aspects of our approach to integrated learning at the Foundational Stage.

## Timetable

The daily schedule includes a balanced combination of music, art, and physical education, along with maths, Hindi, English, morning assembly and club activities, contributing to the overall growth of the child. In the early grades, we allocate two hours each for language studies, one hour for maths, and 30 minutes for physical education, art, and music on average, per day. Language classes are seamlessly integrated with art and music, and in English language studies, we incorporate Environmental Studies (EVS).

## Planning the day

As a teacher, I plan my classes meticulously, based on students' previous knowledge and social context. Emphasis is given to listening and speaking through audio-visual aids and activities. A dedicated space for watching videos helps students relate to the content. Classes begin with engaging warm-up activities, followed by phonemic exercises, related videos, discussions, and writing activities. Various activities, such as *Show and Tell*, role play and recitation are incorporated to develop listening, speaking skills, and grammar.

Class 2											
DAY/ TIME	09:15 am - 9:55 am	10:00 am - 10:45 am	10:45 am - 11:30 am	11:30 am - 11:35 am	11:35 am - 12:20 pm	12:20 pm - 1:05 pm	1:05 pm - 1:50 Pm	1:50 pm - 2:35 pm	2:35 pm - 3:20 pm	3:20 pm - 3:25 pm	3:25 pm - 4:10 pm
MON	Morning Assembly	Hindi Gajendra	Hindi Gajendra	Short Break	PE Devendra	Lunch Break	Maths Gautam	Music Khilendra	English Banishree	Short Break	Art Gautam
TUE	Morning Assembly	Art Gautam	Hindi Gajendra	Short Break	Hindi Gajendra	Lunch Break	Maths Gautam	PE Devendra	English Banishree	Short Break	Library Gautam
WED	Morning Assembly	Hindi Gajendra	Maths Gautam	Short Break	English Mokhtar	Lunch Break	Maths Gautam	Music Khilendra	English Banishree	Short Break	English Banishree
THU	Morning Assembly	English Mokhtar	Maths Gautam	Short Break	Hindi Gajendra	Lunch Break	Art Gautam	Hindi Gajendra	English Banishree	Short Break	Hindi Gajendra
FRI	Morning Assembly	PE Devendra	Library Gautam	Short Break	Maths Gautam	Lunch Break	Hindi Gajendra	English Mokhtar	English Banishree	Short Break	Maths Gautam
SAT	Morning Assembly	Activity Class	Activity Class	Short Break	Activity Class	Lunch Break	Activity Class				

Figure 1. Timetable of class II.

ECE (MON - FRI)								
09:15 am to 9:35 am	9:35 am to 10:15 am	10:15 am to 10:45 am	10:45 am to 10:55 am	10:55 am to 11:35 am	11:35 am to 12:10 pm	12:10 pm to 1:00 pm	1:00 pm to 1:45 pm	1:45 pm to 2:30 pm
Breakfast	Circle Time (theme based)	English Language, Socio-emotional  Story Telling, Reading, Writing	Short Break	Cognitive:  Pre-number, number and EVS	Hindi Language:  Story, Poems, Reading-Writing	Lunch Break	Motor Development  (Outdoor play and Indoor play)	Summary, Revision, Assessment

Figure 2. Timetable of pre-primary.

I structure my 45-minute class into four main sections for effective learning:

1. 5 minutes: Begin with warm-up activities and recapitulation to set the tone for the lesson.
2. 15 minutes: Engage in listening and speaking activities, such as poem recitation, video watching, and story narration.
3. 15-20 minutes: Focus on reading and writing exercises related to the topic.
4. 5-10 minutes: Conclude with summarising key points.

Here is a detailed plan for the poem, *Come Back Soon*:

<p>Take a bus Or take a train, Take a boat Or take a plane, Take a taxi, Take a car, Maybe near Or maybe far, Take a rocket To the moon, But be sure To come back soon.</p>
---

Source: NCERT Class 2 English Mridang. Chapter 5. Come Back Soon. p. 38

Lesson: Come Back Soon (poem)

Learning Outcomes

- General: Develop skills in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW)
- Specific: Understand various modes of transportation

Vocabulary

- Learn names of different modes of transportation, and grasp concepts, like far, near, soon, sure, and moon.

Activities

1. Creating displays: Divide the class into three groups (Air, Water, and Land) to create charts depicting various vehicles associated with each mode of transportation.
2. Show and tell: Utilise a 'Magic bag' containing flashcards of different vehicles, encouraging each child to pick a card and speak about it.
3. Riddle creation: Pair up students and task them with creating riddles related to different vehicles.
4. Origami: Engage in outdoor activities by creating paper rockets and boats, enhancing the learning experience.

Multimedia integration

- Videos: Incorporate educational songs, such as 'Wheels on the Bus,' 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat,' and informative videos on modes of transport.
- Books: The book 'Let's Go' by (Tulika Books) is useful in enhancing reading skills.

Socio-emotional component

- Conclude with a drama activity focusing on the importance of helping others in public transport and adhering to traffic rules.

This approach ensures a comprehensive and interactive learning experience for students, covering various aspects of language development and subject-specific knowledge.

**Curriculum planning**

Our classes are designed to be activity-based and enjoyable, incorporating numerous engaging tasks into our teaching approach. Although EVS

is not formally included in the curriculum, in the English language classes, we incorporate EVS themes, such as body parts, family, plants, animals, transportation, etc. This not only enriches the vocabulary of the students but also fosters a connection with their immediate environment.

Art, music, and PE classes are no exception when it comes to integrating language into the learning experience. In these classes, teachers provide instructions in English, contributing to language development. In music sessions, students learn both Hindi and English songs. Art classes are not just about creativity; they also involve drawing animals using numbers and alphabets. Activities, like mask-making and origami add a creative and hands-on dimension to the learning.

Students actively participate in a variety of indoor and outdoor games, fostering physical fitness and enhancing their mental agility. Additionally, incorporating yoga and *asanas* into the curriculum further contributes to their holistic development.

### Classroom planning

#### *Print-rich classroom*

Foundational Stage classrooms are enhanced with printed materials, such as charts, stories, poems, and picture cards. The print-rich environment inside and outside the classroom engages students in emergent literacy. Creating a print-rich environment fosters the reading habit. Displaying charts based on class topics and labelling objects in the class contribute to this. Playing with cards, including letter cards, picture cards, and story cards helps students understand word-object associations and enhances their reading abilities. Collaboration between the students and teachers in creating some of these printed materials fosters creativity.

#### *Children's Corner*

A *Children's Corner* showcasing students' creations, such as drawings, in the classroom motivates them to learn from each other.

#### *Running blackboard*

Running blackboards in the classroom allow students to freely express their thoughts through drawing and writing. Sometimes, students surprise us by writing birthday wishes, unfamiliar words, and drawing pictures related to a story heard in class.

### Seating

Seating arrangements are modified based on the work the students will do; we sit in a 'U' shape for all group activities.



Figure 4. Students creating displays for the classroom

### Class library

Organised with level-wise books of *Pratham*, *Barkha*, and *Tulika* publications, the class library includes *Big Books*. Initially, students engage in 'pretend' reading, later attempting to identify familiar words and creating their own stories based on pictures. For students of class II, we issue level-1 books from the *Barkha* and *Tulika* series to encourage reading at home.

### Co-teacher

In a multi-level class, maintaining equity in learning for each child is challenging. To address this, the role of co-teachers is important. The main teacher collaborates with the co-teacher, who initially provides individual attention to those who need it. Various TLMs, like spinner, alphabet and flash cards and worksheets, are used to support learning and positive results are witnessed in a few weeks, leading to the integration of all students into the same class.



Figure 5. Students learning through flashcards

### Involvement of parents

Collaboration among parents, the school, and teachers is crucial for a child's overall development. Orientation programmes, parent-teacher meetings (PTMs), regular calls, and sharing of instructional videos on *WhatsApp* are some of the strategies we employ to keep parents involved. Encouraging parents to record videos of their students' activities also promotes engagement and understanding of the children's learning process.

### Conclusion

Our carefully planned activities and the collaborative efforts of teachers, parents, and the community form the backbone of a child's educational journey, ensuring that every child receives the attention and support they need for their holistic growth. We remain committed to ongoing research and exploration, consistently seeking innovative methods and pedagogies to foster the continuous growth and development of students.

### Endnotes

- i NCF-FS specifies five domains of development: physical development, socio-emotional and ethical development, cognitive development, aesthetic and cultural development.



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# Portfolio Use in Sangareddy Anganwadis

Dasanna Mareddy and Sujatha Raavi

The two broad methods of assessment that are appropriate for the Foundational Stage are **observations of the child and analysing artefacts** that the child has produced as part of their learning experience.

An artefact in an early childhood classroom refers to an object created by a child during the teaching-learning process. Artefacts could be used by looking at the child's work and seeing how their level of understanding of a particular Learning Outcome affected what they were able to produce. Artefacts provide a rich source of information about a child's strengths and abilities.

A portfolio is an intentional collection of significant work samples and records of children that allow for assessment by providing evidence of effort and accomplishment related to specific Learning Outcomes. The Teacher should analyse the portfolio of the child with regard to specific outcomes and mark the child's progress against competencies. The organization of a child's portfolio should clearly indicate outcomes to be achieved. Each child should have a dedicated folder to store their relevant artefacts.

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage 2022. Section 6.2 Methods and Tools of Assessment. p. 173, pp. 177-78.

In the context of the Sangareddy *anganwadis*, teachers maintain portfolios, which contain complete information about a child – their work, developmental checklist, information from parents, and teacher narratives and observations.

At the beginning of the year, teachers create a folder/bag for each child with the child's details labelled on it so that it can be easily identified. This is used to hold the child's drawings and craft work, teacher observations, narrative summary and workbooks of the child in chronological order. At the end of each quarter, based on each child's portfolio, the teacher fills out their assessment card provided by the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) and keeps it in the child's portfolio.

In this article, we present two case studies of teachers' use of portfolios to understand children's progress and provide opportunities, and also how these are used to explain the process of their child's progress to parents.

## Case study 1: Organising and maintaining portfolios

*Malleswari, anganwadi teacher, Nagasanpalli, Sadashivapet project, Sangareddy district, Telangana*

Malleswari joined as an *anganwadi* teacher in 2002 in a village in the Sadashivapet Block of Sangareddy district, Telangana. She has completed class X.

Currently, 13 children in the age group of 3-6 years attend her *anganwadi*.

However, she started organising the portfolios only in 2015. Initially, she used the portfolios as part of the classroom display. So, she arranged small bags labelled with the respective child's name and basic information (date of birth, gender, parents names and contact number). What to keep in the bags, or how the contents could be used as records of the children's development was learned only over a period, through capacity-building programmes, learning from peers and personal experiences. Gradually, she developed an understanding of the benefits of children's portfolios and their importance in assessing children's development.

She started keeping children's artwork and workbooks in the portfolios. When her supervisor visited the centre and suggested that she add dates to the children's work as soon as it was completed, she began to follow this practice. It helped her in sharing the progress made in children's work with their parents at the parent-teacher meets. Her next challenge was that when parents asked about a particular work done by their child, she could not recall all the details. So, she started adding a brief description of each work along with the date. In subsequent meetings, she could describe the child's work to the parents. Parents were very happy because they could see their child's development over a period of time.

Maintaining portfolios helped Malleswari in using them to plan and provide more learning opportunities where required. She also realised that keeping a portfolio of work for each child helped her fill their assessment cards more accurately – until this time she had thought that the only way to understand children’s development was through observation.

It also helped her in focusing on each child’s needs and providing support to them in their day-to-day activities. Added to this, it allowed the children to see their portfolio bags and work, which is not only exciting but also encourages them to talk about and describe various aspects of their work. Malleswari also encourages children to look at and talk about each other’s work, which helps them develop social interaction skills and appreciation of others’ work.

Malleswari shares the portfolios with government primary school teachers at the end of the year when the children are ready to move to primary school. For those joining private schools, the portfolios are given to their parents so they can share these with the children’s new teachers. This enables these teachers to understand the children’s progress

and use these as a baseline for the academic year ahead.

### Case study 2: Analysing artefacts

*J Indira, anganwadi teacher, Lingapur, Narayankhed project, Sangareddy district, Telangana*

Indira has been actively conducting preschool programmes and providing developmentally appropriate opportunities to children for their holistic development since 2018. Additionally, for the last three years, she has been maintaining portfolios and written observations for a better understanding of children’s development.

In one of the capacity-building workshops for *anganwadi* teachers, she brought the portfolio bag of a child and explained to other teachers how she had been using it. In that session, she took samples of filling colours (within a space) and explained how the child’s fine motor precision and control improved over the months due to continued practice. The improvement in the skill of colouring can be seen clearly from the work sample of colouring a ball within an outline done in September 2022 when compared to colouring a flower and leaf in October 2023. (Figures 1&2)



Figures 1 & 2. The improvement in the child’s colouring skill is evident.



In one of the parent-teacher meetings (ECCE Day in the context of *anganwadis*) Indira showed a child's portfolio to her parent, who had taken the child out of the *anganwadi* and enrolled her in a private preschool, and explained how she had maintained the child's work and progress. The parent was so overwhelmed and happy that she sent her child back to the *anganwadi*, which the child is now attending.

### Conclusion

The significance of the portfolio as a record of a child's progress is now clearly understood by many *anganwadi* teachers in Sangareddy, who maintain and utilise portfolios effectively to understand children's developmental progress.

This practice has resulted in a positive shift in the parents' and community's perception of *anganwadis* – from being just feeding centres to becoming learning centres. Consequently, parents send their children to *anganwadis* more regularly and spend more time with them at home listening and playing with them, telling stories, etc. The community also supports the *anganwadi* in various ways – from providing necessary play and teaching-learning materials, to offering rent-free spaces to run the centre or help with clearing, cleaning and levelling open areas around the centre for use by the children etc.



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For the past few years, I have had the chance to engage with classes I and II for Hindi language teaching-learning. Language has a special role to play in the formation of children's behaviour and in the development of their abilities. Because the relationship between children and their language depends on their experiences, this relationship depends on the things that they come in contact with. In my class, I try to include children's experiences and connect these to the classroom processes.

Many kinds of activities can be included in the process of language education. But the reason for implementing an activity must be thought through. I have attempted to use materials from many innovative methods, and this is a continuing effort. Activities, like verbal expression and news (Azim Premji School news), excursions, storytelling, poem recitation, shared reading, guided reading, writing about experiences, language-games, bilingual conversations, and many more, were tried

out according to a plan in a phased manner in my class. Doing these, I got the opportunity to ponder over several challenges and on sharing these with colleagues, I got the chance to plan more activities. During language education, my primary objective is to motivate children to think about the importance of what they are doing – the opportunities for dialogue should be made meaningful.

I would like to share four practices that are part of my classroom teaching:

## 1. Diary House

Children have many experiences. They want to share all that is in their minds with everyone with the same enthusiasm that they feel. There are 30 students in class II, so, we decided that each day, five students would share their experiences with the entire class. After this, the rest of the students would share their experiences with each other in pairs. Then, these experiences would be written down cooperatively and kept in a *Diary House*.

We set up a Diary House in the classroom. This was decorated by pasting bits of coloured paper on it. Each day, the students would write about their experiences on a piece of paper in class or bring something written at home and keep in it.



Figure 1. The Diary House.



Figure 2. A child's work for the Diary House.

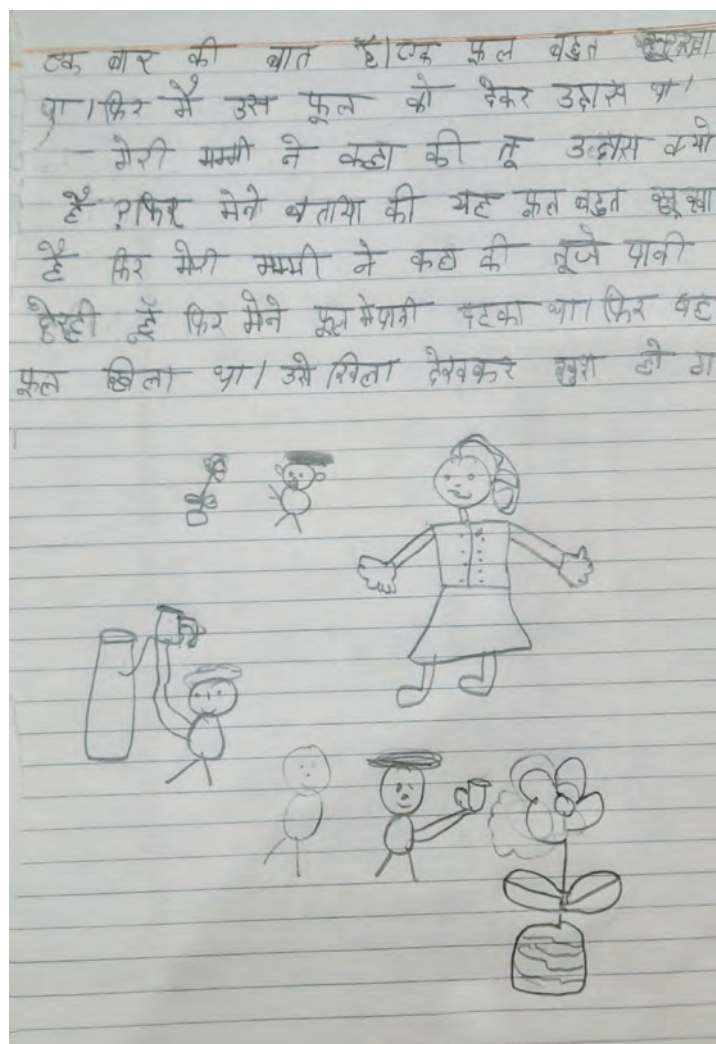


Figure 3. Another child's work for the Diary House.

They would draw and colour pictures and after showing it to others, keep these in the Diary House. This writing of experiences in class II can inspire students to keep a diary later. Opportunities to work on expressing their experiences orally and in writing are seen as their ability to present themselves spontaneously.

## 2. Story writing and forming questions

The primary objective of this activity was to help children read stories with understanding and then form questions. This includes their ability to answer *when, why, where, how, who*, type of questions and make up similar questions. Along with this, they were also given chances to make their own stories in the class – they invent stories with the help of pictures, listen to each other's stories and also write these down.

After inventing a story, they also made-up questions related to the story. Some observations came to the fore during this activity of making questions, such

as 21 out of the 30 students were able to make questions with correct sentence construction, while the correct placement of the interrogative word in the question had to be discussed with the rest (the children were writing the interrogative word in the beginning of the sentence).

After this, I would prepare reading materials for all from their writings. In doing this, we could create reading material appropriate for the students' level. All the children were given their own stories (modified slightly by me) as worksheets for reading comprehension.

## 3. Tree of books

To help them discover the joy of reading, the students of class II were introduced to story-time. They were read out stories from three- and four-line books from the *Barkha* series. Gradually, we moved to stories from *Pratham, Eklavya, Katha, Tulika* and other publications. Alongside this, we also worked on poem recitations using the big

charts from *Ektara*, and the children read these together enthusiastically in their free time.

A suggestion from the children that they enjoy reading under a tree, made me think about creating a *Tree of Books* in the classroom. A Tree of Books is made up of dry branches and resembles a tree; placed in one corner of the class with books hung from it, it attracts children to find and read new books. The children also made a *Book Hospital* for better maintenance of books – torn pages were pasted and repaired, and books kept in good condition.

The children were also exposed to level-appropriate literature in the library. After they chose the books that they were interested in reading, the books were taken to the classroom and hung carefully on the Tree of Books. The children read their favourite books from the Tree of Books daily.

Now the situation is such that even if there are just five minutes remaining for the class to end, they eagerly ask: Didi, can we read books? Can we take books from the tree?

#### 4. Saturday special

Newness is introduced into the activities regularly by giving different kinds of exposure and opportunities to students to upgrade their language skills by themselves. The teachers of classes I and II get together on two Saturdays of each month to conduct activities in which along with language, other subjects are also included.

##### *Farming families and agriculture – Conversations*

During the period when we were working on a poem on a farmer, willing members of families which were involved in farming were invited. The grandfather of one of the students answered the questions that the children had. He had brought along different seeds with him to show and talked about preparing the field for sowing seeds. Children asked a lot of questions based on the poem they had read, and this made the discussion meaningful. The natural curiosity of the children was shining through.



Figure 4. The Tree of Books in the classroom.



Figure 5. Students interact with farming families.

### *Khana-khazana: Project work*

During the reading of the story 'Aaloo ki sadak' (road of potatoes) in class I and 'Mooli' (radish) in class II, we talked about making recipes. The ingredients used for making potato and radish parathas were discussed and the method of making them was tried out practically. The children made some very good attempts. Then this was given as written work in the classroom by including other ingredients and items and the recipe was written by the students.

### *Reading campaign*

The students of classes I and II were split into three groups. Using books from the library and based on the ability (level) of the group and their interests, activities, like reading together, helping with reading, gaining clarity in the use of *matras*, were included. After reading a story, children practised

telling it with suitable actions and expressions. Hearing their voices coming from all the four directions, none of us, teachers could help smiling -- sounds made by elephants were coming from one side and from another, the sounds made by goats. That day, we got together and displayed books in one part of the school. Children presented stories and read from the big display charts (we have charts by *Ektara* in which short stories and rhymes are shown using pictures and big fonts) with great enthusiasm.

It has been pointed out in NCF-FS that children enjoy learning through the medium of dialogues (talk), stories and poems. These help in the development of their natural curiosity and deeper thinking skills and values, especially when they are encouraged to contemplate, predict, ask questions and hypothesise.



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*'Tara does not speak all day. She does not utter a single word except when she is playing with her friend Riya. If the teacher speaks to her, she responds with actions. Her home language is Hindi, so she does not seem to understand if spoken to in Kannada.'*

*'Gowri runs around and does not show any interest in her work. She needs repeated instructions and does not seem to understand classroom discussions.'*

These are some observations shared by teachers about two children in our pre-school classroom. In both instances, there was confusion regarding the behaviour of children and what strategies need to be used to scaffold their learning.

Then one day, something changed, and both Tara and Gowri started responding in ways they had never done before. What caused this change? And how was this supported by the teachers in the classroom?

### Using SEEL for change

We often talk about understanding children, but it is very hard to put into words what this really means. The NCF-FS emphasises the role of Social, Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEEL) in children and broadly categorises the concept into positive self-concept, emotional awareness and regulation and social development. All of these are interconnected and have been broken down into Learning Outcomes (LOs) and indicators which can be used to integrate SEEL into our teaching practice. This has helped us in our school to consciously plan and integrate SEEL into different domains and is also used as a guideline to make our interactions with children more meaningful.

Fostering emotional well-being in the classroom starts with a strong teacher-child relationship. It is important for children to feel accepted and acknowledged. To understand the likes and dislikes of both Tara and Gowri, I took the time to get to know them by observing the way they engaged with others, the games they played, and the work they chose to do. Through this, I was able to build a connection over time. I spoke to Tara in her home language and noticed that she liked vehicles, so I gave her activities on vehicles. One day, Tara came to me and asked me to draw a train and from then

on, the conversations never stopped, and I sought out instances to acknowledge her growth through moments where she took initiative, as for instance, when she made objects with clay, named them and spoke to me about them. Every time she did this, I would give her a high-five to show her I was excited about what she was doing and asked her questions about it. Slowly, this encouraged her to engage and interact more.



Figure 1. Clay work by Tara.

Gowri had a lot of energy, and she would frequently switch activities. It was difficult to get her to engage without distractions or to even follow the norms

of the class. So, I started joining her imaginative role-play and extended the time slowly, each day. Through this, our conversations also increased, and I was able to understand the gestures to which she responded best. From then on, the change in her was apparent. She became comfortable around me and would seek me out and engage with me. She soon began to want to do the work the other children were given.

At an individual level, this teacher-student relationship forms the foundation for the educational experience of the child. Along with this, we use several strategies to build SEEL skills and we model the same. Given here are some of the strategies I have used.

### Some strategies

#### *Expressing emotions*

Our themes involve topics such as *me, my family*, and *my neighbourhood* (this centres around identifying oneself as a member of society), and *my likes and dislikes*. Activities are conducted in which children can share the experiences they have outside of school. This helps children know more about each other. Emotional literacy is fostered through activities that focus on identifying the emotions they feel and those that are expressed by others. Through activities in art, physical education, and language, we look at stories that centre on emotions, discuss them, enact them through facial

expressions and perform body movements to show how we feel when we feel different emotions.

Emotion cards are kept in the classroom and at the end of the day, we choose these cards to tell each other how we feel. Children are encouraged to talk about moments in the day when they felt happy, what made them happy, what made them angry etc., using the emotion cards. These cards are also useful when children are hesitant to talk. At the end of the day, everyone sits together in the circle and talks about how they have helped or have been helped by others that day. Activities like this shape the culture of the classroom and strengthen positive behaviours. Visual art, dance, and acting are used to help children express themselves creatively and their creation is shared with everyone.

Each day starts with a silent game where we play zen music and conduct breathing exercises. This helps draw the children's attention to their breathing – how their bodies contract and expand while inhaling and exhaling. Simple yoga exercises are conducted which help children stretch and release the stiffness felt in various parts of their bodies. I have also observed that when teachers do these exercises with children, it makes the environment lighter and more comfortable for everyone to open up. This further enhances the students' relationship with the teacher. Even during sessions which are content-heavy, these yoga stretches are conducted between activities to pause and focus better.



Figures 2 & 3. Children's drawings.

### *Routine*

A familiar routine provides a sense of security to preschoolers, so a predictable routine is followed, and changes are communicated beforehand. Diversity is accepted by encouraging the different languages spoken by children and the different experiences they have at home are valued and discussed. Since we have a mixed-age group classroom with all three classes together – Pre-KG, LKG and UKG – we make pairs with children who can regulate their emotions and communicate and those who are learning to do so. It aids children to learn from each other and we often find instances where children help their partners respond better to situations. Communicating with parents to share and gain insights about their children is crucial to support the emotional development of children.

### *Peace Corner*

A corner in the classroom, labelled 'Peace Corner', is set apart for resting and spending some quiet time with books so that children who want some space can take some time out and lie down, rest or read quietly. During the day, several children come up with a request to lie down on the bean bag for some time when they are feeling sad, want to read books or colour quietly by themselves.

*\*Names have been changed to protect children's identities.*

### *Setting boundaries*

Understanding and following the norms of the classroom is important. At the start of the year, norms are decided in conversations with children, posters are made, and role plays are conducted to demonstrate how these norms can be followed in the class. If norms are broken, it is discussed and used as *teaching moments* where we demonstrate how to solve our problems productively. Being firm when required is necessary, but I believe that a common rule does not work. Rather, the foundation based on the relationship between the teacher and the child on the one hand, and the interaction between peers on the other, is crucial in curtailing unhelpful behaviours and in building a positive learning environment.

### **In closing**

Enabling learning without catering to the emotional needs of children is setting them up for failure. The NCF-FS SEEL outcomes have made it possible for teachers to consciously integrate practices that help in cultivating socio-emotional well-being and, thereby, creating an enriching learning environment.



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# Music for Socio-Emotional and Ethical Learning

Santhosh Raj K

The use of physical movements and gestures to develop musical abilities is beneficial at all stages but is most effective with students in the Foundational Stage (FS). Young students have a strong inclination for singing songs and poems, and dancing and moving to music. Musical activities that involve physical movements allow teachers to bring many variables into the classroom, such as:

- Tempo variations that demand uninterrupted focus from students
- Frequent collaboration with students in smaller and larger groups
- Realtime problem solving as students analyse the given activity and work out the *dos and don'ts* based on rules and instructions

Since the learning outcomes (LOs) associated with FS students address the development of Socio-Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEEL), exploring the LOs as part of the students' early musical journey is valuable. It can be done through activities that help students identify cues and practice a range of behavioural aspects and social demands while participating with their peers. When these activities are employed consistently as part of the designed

classroom plan, students can learn these values at an accelerated pace.

These activities help students develop various aspects of SEEL, such as social awareness and communication; relationship, cognitive, problem-solving, and decision-making skills; and self-management. Here are some suggested activities.

### *Activity 1: Pass the ball on beat-one*

TLM: 3-4 footballs/large balls

Instructions:

1. Have the students sit or stand in one big circle or in smaller circles depending on the number of students.
2. If there are multiple groups, assign one student for each group to keep the scores, otherwise the facilitator/teacher can do it. The scores of different groups can be written on the blackboard.
3. To start the game, play a simple four-beat rhythm on a rhythm instrument, such as a drum or a tambourine. Ask each group of students to repeat, 'One, two, three, four,' with the rhythm played and pass the ball to the next person when

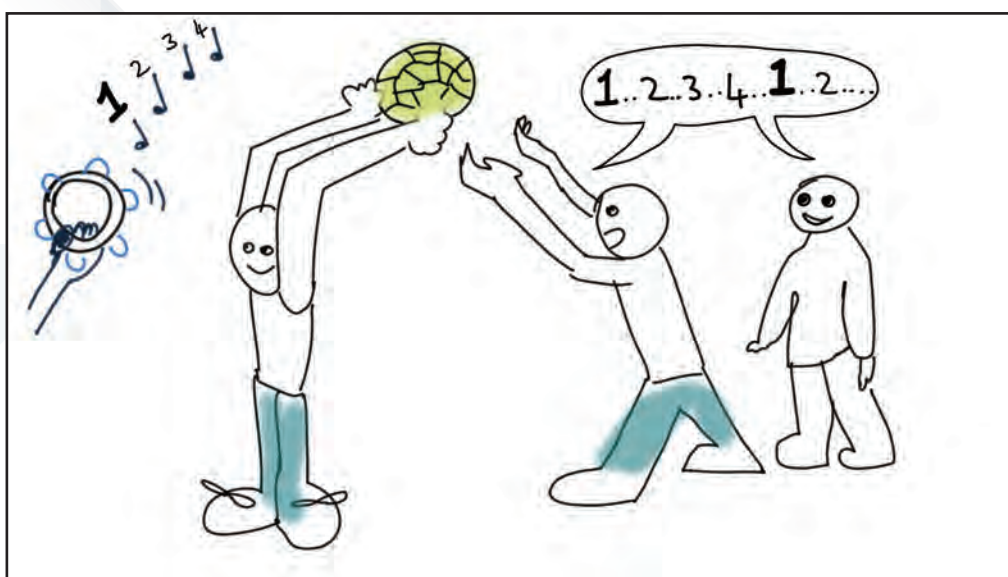


Figure 1. Author's illustration of 'pass the ball on beat-one' activity.

they get to the number/beat one. The score can be counted if a group drops the ball or misses passing it on beat one.

4. One round of the game can be played for a set time limit or when a group misses/drops the ball 10 times.
5. If the activity is done with a large group of students, there can be 6-7 rounds with an increased tempo of the beats, so that students get more chances to play and acquire the required skills.

Outcomes:

- Students develop patience by waiting their turn for the ball to come to them.
- They listen attentively to the facilitator's voice/ beats or for other cues throughout the activity which enhances their capacity to concentrate.
- Students sing/count a simple rhythm pattern repeatedly, such as 'One, two, three, four...' and stay alert for the right beat to pass the ball. This develops the students' sense of rhythm.
- Students develop a sense of anticipation, whether it is responding to a beat pattern or the movement of their peers.
- Gradually increasing the complexity of the beat pattern enables students to focus, predict, anticipate, and react, exercising their capacity for quick decision-making.
- The students who keep score learn to make quick and impartial decisions based on continuous observation.
- As students learn to enjoy the game, they overlook the mistakes of their peers, encourage and help one another play together.

*Activity-2: Storytelling and music visualisation*

TLM: A short story that the teacher can memorise and narrate and a musical instrument

Instructions:

1. Start by giving the students an overview of the story. Then ask them to get in position for the first act of the story, for example, a story may begin with '*The children wake up*' so, the students pretend to sleep and then wake up.
2. Narrate the story with vocal dynamics and play improvised music on the musical instrument.
3. Give students cues on when to move as the music is played. They can move as they like but with the rhythm/tempo of the music that is being played.
4. The music can complement the pace of the story, for example, slow music for slower parts of the story, such as walking, talking, etc.; fast-paced music for the more exciting actions, such as jumping or running; and sad/happy music for the corresponding emotions in the story. This suggests clues to the students on what actions they can perform, pushing them to be creative with their movements.

Outcomes:

1. The students listen keenly to the narration and respond thoughtfully without shouting or disturbing others.
2. They learn to respect others and give others a chance.
3. Children find it easier to understand the underlying meaning of some stories when they are set to music.

C-4.1 Starts recognising 'self' as an individual belonging to a family and community

C-4.3 Interacts comfortably with other children and adults

C-4.4 Shows cooperative behaviour with other children

C-4.6 Shows kindness and helpfulness to others (including animals, plants) when they are in need

CG-6 Children develop a positive regard for the natural environment around them

C-6.1 Shows care for and joy in engaging with all life forms

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. 2.4.2 Domain: Socio-Emotional and Ethical Development. p. 60

### Musical activities promote inclusion

With each subject demanding a certain set of large cognitive skills and a subset of those to be exhibited in smaller tasks, classroom transactions can sometimes overwhelm students with any kind of learning disability. But with the right set of activities carried out in the Music Room, students can express and explore their abilities. For example, in an activity like 'Listen and Clap', children listen to the rhythmic pattern the teacher plays and repeat the same pattern by clapping. While requiring no verbal response, such activity develops students' musical skills, encourages them to focus and participate freely and feel included among their peers.

### Conclusion

I give students of class II short poems from their textbooks or magazines, like *Champak*, set them to music and encourage them to sing these, one after the other, in an uninterrupted sequence. We start with three songs and then add more. There are, in

the end, a total of eight songs that the students are able to sing without any reference to the text.

This choice of using short poems of four to five lines with printed TLMs lead to two favourable results:

Firstly, it directly corresponds to NCF competencies/ learning outcomes:

- Listens to and appreciates simple songs, rhymes, and poems
- Sings/recites songs/poems with two to three stanzas

Secondly, it allows me to engage frequently-distracted or disruptive students in a constructive way by giving them writing activities on the same songs through printed TLMs or textbooks. It helps them to focus their attention on one activity of their own along with the group-singing sessions. This takes care of the frequent challenges of FS classroom management, especially with certain students. This willingness to connect with other students in the classroom, slowly brings in aspects of SEEL, such as:

C-4.2 Recognises different emotions and makes deliberate efforts to regulate them appropriately

C-4.4 Shows cooperative behaviour with other children

C-4.7 Understands and responds positively to different thoughts, preferences, and emotional needs of other children

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. 2.4.2 Domain: Socio-Emotional and Ethical Development. p. 60

There are several opportunities in the music class for many domains of FS to be explored. By bringing in ideas from the larger domains of both visual and performing arts, such as dance and theatre rather than just music, students can develop a cohesive un-compartmentalised and complete school experience through fun and inclusive activities

that enable cooperation. These interactions bring forth spontaneous participation, offer students the opportunity to refine their emotions through social interactions and towards a better recognition of 'self' amongst their peers, all of which support their development and awareness towards, 'doing what is right' in due time.

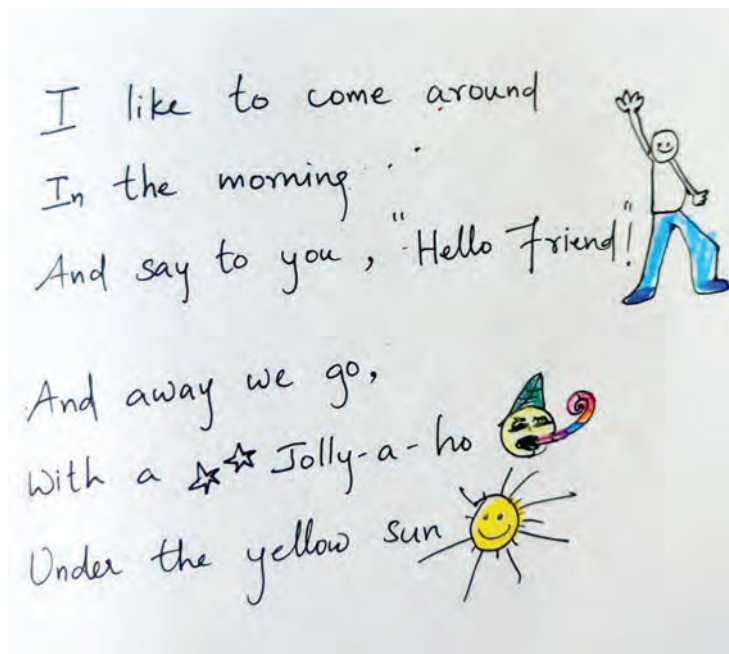
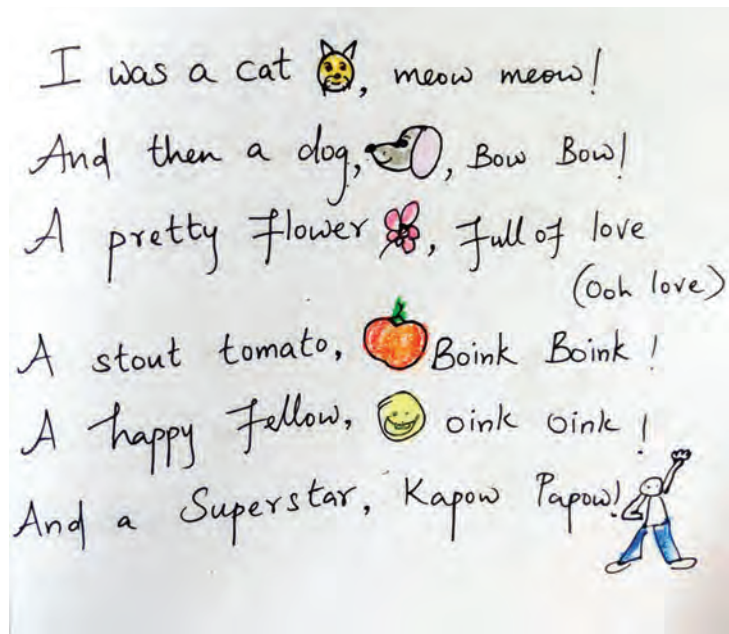
For more, you can watch this short video on music teaching at Azim Premji School, Barmer, Rajasthan:

<https://youtu.be/evuF-qhUfhM>

Scan to watch



Some songs that focus on SEEL competencies that can be used in the classroom:



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# 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*<sup>i</sup> 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>



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Art education holds a distinctive position in contributing to the holistic growth of students. Beyond fostering creativity, art activities provide a platform to nurture social and emotional development. The National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) has outlined clear curricular goals and competencies under the Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning (SEEL) domain. However, unlike traditional subjects, the socio-emotional development domain is not compartmentalised into a separate class. Instead, it is integrated into various subjects, offering a unique challenge and opportunity.

This article delves into the interconnection between specific activities aimed at attaining art competencies and their correlation with the development of SEEL competencies in students. The activities target the following competencies:

C-12.1 Explores and plays with a variety of materials and tools to create two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks in varying sizes.

C-12.2 Explores and plays with own voice, body, spaces, and a variety of objects to create music, role-play, dance and movement.

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. 2.4.5 Domain: Aesthetic and Cultural Development. p. 63

### Activities

Here are some activities included during art classes for the students of classes I and II to achieve the above-mentioned SEEL competencies.

#### *Creating a self-portrait*

The students are asked to look at themselves in a full-length mirror in the classroom and create self-portraits. They are encouraged to include in their drawings details, like hair length and colour, and the clothes that they are wearing. The drawings are displayed at their eye level. After all of them have looked at all the drawings, we discuss the unique qualities that make each student different as well as the common features among all. This activity

helps them to reflect on not only their physical appearance but also promotes self-awareness, identity formation, and a sense of belonging.

#### *Family collage*

Each child is given a sheet of paper, an old magazine, scissors and glue and asked to cut out pictures that resemble their family members to create a collage. Each student then shares the collage with the class and points at each picture and who it represents – their names, relationship and other details, such as what they do. If they do not find appropriate pictures in their magazines, they can ask their classmates to share pictures from their magazines.

When we did this activity, students also wrote a few words or a sentence about each family member of their family and added pets and their favourite spots in their homes. Interestingly, a few of the class I students were unaware of their father's occupations. They were encouraged to ask their parents and share the information. Initially, some class II students were reluctant to disclose professions, like housekeeping, gardening, and domestic help. So, a discussion took place about the importance of each profession and how each person's work contributes to their families. Although the students eventually shared the details, it took multiple similar activities and discussions for them to truly appreciate their family members' professions. Overall, this activity played a role in cultivating in the students a sense of connection with their families.

#### *Home, school and neighbourhood*

The teacher shows a map of their own locality – their house and neighbourhood and shows how they go past important landmarks to reach the school. The teacher also talks about the importance of knowing the address and phone number of parents and other family members. Students are asked to talk to their parents and get these details. The teacher asks each student to draw a similar map of their neighbourhood with important landmarks in their drawing book and explain it to the rest of the students.



Students take time to complete this activity; they need practice and repetition to remember addresses and phone numbers and help with directions to draw the map.

Our students participated in this activity enthusiastically. Class II students extended the activity by creating and enacting a situation of a child getting lost and coming back to their parents because the child knew the correct address. This activity helped promote awareness of their surroundings and a sense of belonging to the community.

#### *Emotion charades*

The teacher writes different emotions on small cards (happy, sad, angry, surprised, etc) and each student picks up a card and acts out the emotion mentioned on it without speaking, while others guess the emotion. They discuss situations that might evoke particular emotions and how certain facial expressions or body language convey specific emotions.

Our students shared some funny incidents from the classroom and home. Some of them cried while sharing sad incidents. When one student seemed hesitant to share anything that made her sad, she was encouraged to share any simple incident, like a fight with her sibling. She started with that and

went on to share how her grandmother's death has affected her and how much she misses her. She started crying and the other children began to console her. This also led to a number of other students sharing incidents that made them sad or fearful.

#### *Storytelling and enacting*

Simple, contextual stories with interesting characters are narrated with appropriate voice modulation, facial expression, and intonation. The stories are retold/reread by the teacher and some students to make sure all the students understand. The students are then divided into groups. Each group is asked to create dialogues, assign characters, and practice acting. They are provided with props or use available resources.

Each group has to act out their story in front of the class and the students are asked to give feedback on their expressions, dialogue delivery, props and the sequence – what they liked and what needed to be improved.

This activity is regularly done in our classrooms and has proved to be an excellent activity for students' social and emotional development. A lot of disagreement and negotiations happen within a group on assigning characters and roles of the story and the students are able to resolve their conflicts,

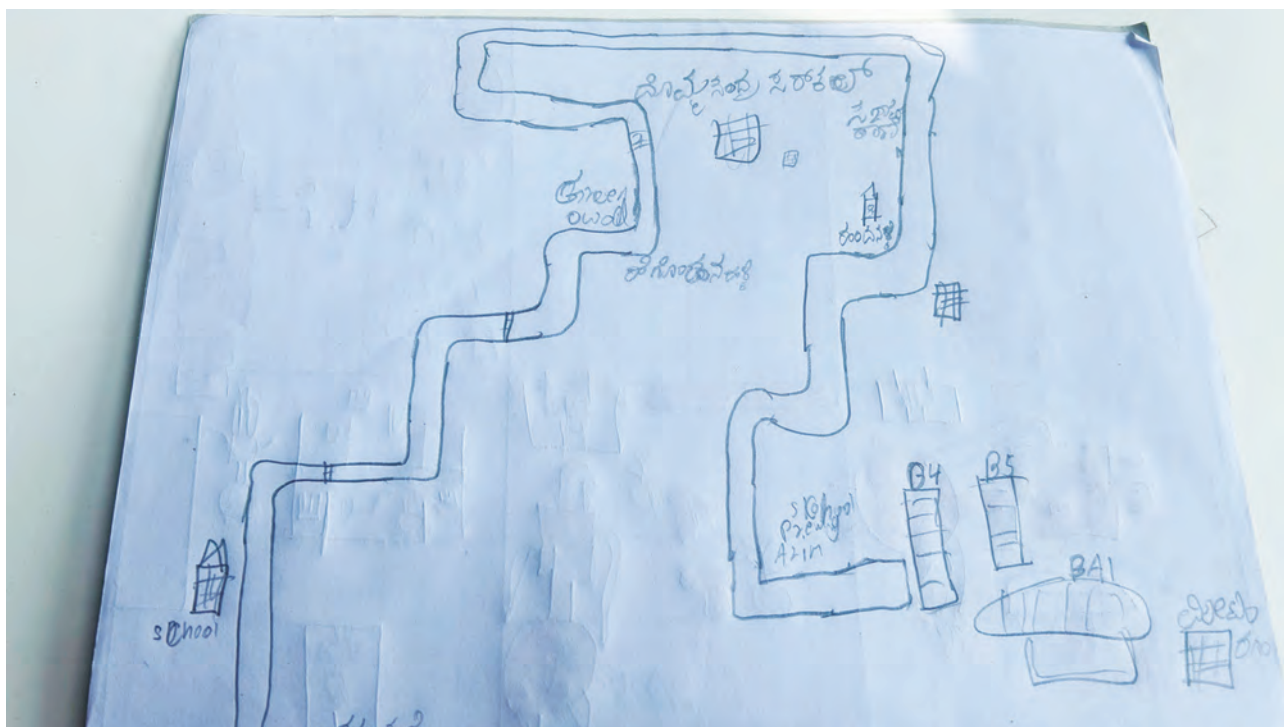


Figure 1. Students' map of their locality.

sometimes with a little help from the teachers. Their feedback progresses from general, such as, 'I liked her performance because she is my friend', to concrete observations on expressions and acting skills, like 'He should not be smiling while enacting a sad situation'.

### In summary

Along with achieving art competencies, students achieve the following SEEL competencies through these activities:

C-4.1 Starts recognising 'self' as an individual belonging to a family and community

C-4.2 Recognises different emotions and makes deliberate efforts to regulate them appropriately

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. 2.4.5 Domain: Aesthetic and Cultural Development. p. 60

The teacher should consider both art and SEEL competencies while assessing students' learning from these activities. For example, during the

role-play, the teacher should observe how they are exploring their voice, body, space, and props as an art competency and, at the same time, how they work collaboratively with their peers as a SEEL competency.

The activities mentioned above represent just a handful of examples. While transacting the art curriculum, it is imperative to regularly consult the competencies and learning indicators of SEEL and change our strategies appropriately. Equally important are other aspects, such as allowing students to express themselves in their preferred language, establishing meaningful connections with students, creating a positive atmosphere, and maintaining a consistent schedule and structured environment to make them comfortable in sharing their emotions and building healthy relationships.

Embracing inclusivity, our school welcomes students from diverse economic, social, and cultural backgrounds, as well as varying physical and mental abilities. This diversity fosters an environment where the students are learning to be tolerant, cooperative and supportive of one another.



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# Teacher Autonomy in Modifying Learning Outcomes

Rima Kaur

The NCF-FS aims to transform the learning experiences of children in the Foundational Stage by defining clear standards of learning. The approach to Learning Outcomes (LOs) is that children progress

towards the attainment of competencies at their own pace. This is a major shift from all the earlier policies of a pre-determined, class-/grade-wise pace of learning.

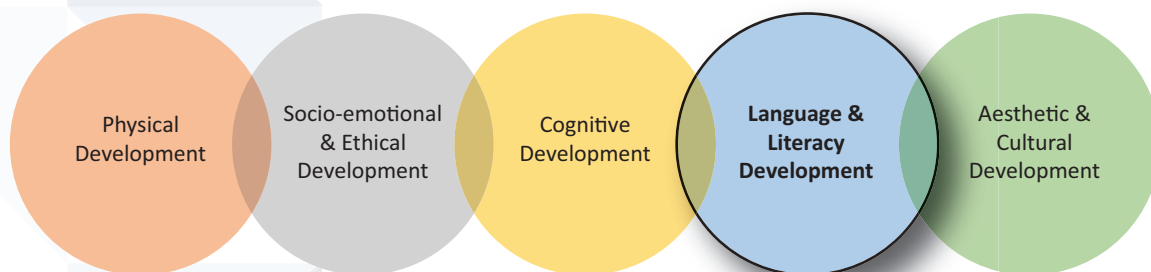


Figure 1. The five domains of development.

Let us understand this with the help of an example from the domain of language and literacy development with the following curriculum goal and LOs.

## CG-10: Children develop fluency in reading and writing in Language 1

While oral language development happens naturally through a process of socialisation and immersion in a language environment, written language is a cultural artefact and there is not[hing] natural about it. Children need explicit instruction in making connection between the oral language they have acquired with the writing system (the script) for that language. This begins with recognising that we use words that contain meaning and these words are further split into sounds that are represented as symbols in the script. While the script reading and writing requires explicit instruction, meaning-making should not be postponed till end of learning all aksharas (letters) of the script.

### C-10.1: Learning Outcomes

	A	B	C	D	E
	<b>C-10.1: Develops phonological awareness and blends phonemes/ syllables into words and segment words into phonemes/ syllables in L1</b>				
	<b>← Ages 3 - 8 →</b>				
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sings rhymes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies rhyming words and alliterations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces rhyming words and alliterations</li> </ul>		
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mimics and reproduces syllabic sounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies the beginning and end syllables in words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breaks down syllables into their consonant and vowel sounds</li> </ul>		
3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combines 2-3 syllables to form simple words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combines sounds (vowel and consonant) to form the most familiar words</li> </ul>		

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. Section 1.1.4 Language and Literacy Development. pp. 260-261

Note: As per NCF-FS, L1 is the home language/ mother tongue/ familiar language (p. 62). The NCF-FS recommended that L1 should be preferred as the medium of instruction. In case L1 is not the medium of instruction, it must be used in the oral domain as far as possible and for smooth transition to other languages. To know more, refer to NCF-FS's approach to language education and literacy in the Foundational Stage (pp. 76-79).

This example represents the five stages of development (from A to E) possible for the attainment of this competency. The LOs for all competencies are represented in this way.

### Teacher's autonomy and classroom context

The NCF-FS clearly states that curriculum developers and teachers must have the autonomy to design LOs keeping in mind the classroom contexts, so long as these map to the Competencies (NCF-FS 2022, p. 51). State educational institutions, like SCERTs, which are engaged in curriculum development are focusing more on working at the level of LOs.

This means that a teacher has the freedom to modify the LOs for the above-mentioned competency on phonological awareness based on her classroom context. Let us take the example of Dipika, who teaches in a disadvantaged neighbourhood and

has a mixed-grade classroom of children who are 3-6 years old, where English is the medium of instruction.

Dipika reimagines these LOs related to the competency of phonological awareness for her children by considering the following factors:

- The interest exhibited earlier by children in noticing and playing with a variety of environmental sounds.
- Integrating few LOs from another competency that belongs to the domain of cognitive development (C-2.3: Differentiates sounds by their pitch, volume and sound patterns by their pitch, volume, and tempo).
- The specific steps that children may need to take to attain the ability to break words into syllables, considering that her children need additional support for attainment of competencies related to language and literacy.
- Dipika's own recent familiarity with additional phonological awareness activities that were demonstrated by Resource Persons at a district-level workshop on foundational literacy.

Table 1. Dipika's modification of LOs for her class.

	A	B	C	D	E
	<b>C-10.1: Develops phonological awareness and blends phonemes/syllables into words and segment words into phonemes/syllables in L1</b>				
	← Ages 3 - 8 →				
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notices environmental sounds (e.g., sounds of different animals and birds)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notices and produces environmental sounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces variations of environmental sounds in different contexts (e.g., gentle breeze, strong winds, stormy clouds)</li> </ul>		
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoys the rhythm of rhymes and songs and their rhyming words</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces rhyming words (includes nonsense words)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces short rhymes (2-3 lines) with support</li> </ul>	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises individual words in a sentence through actions (e.g., clapping, jumping, and banging the desk)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breaks spoken two-syllable words into syllables (e.g., their name, table, dustbin, etc.) through actions (e.g., clapping, jumping, and banging the desk)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breaks spoken 2-3 syllable words into syllables (e.g., their name, bottle, computer, butterfly, etc.) through actions (e.g., clapping, jumping, and banging the desk)</li> </ul>	

- Interest expressed by a few community members (primarily college students) in supporting Dipika in the classroom by singing rhymes and songs in the local language(s) and playing musical instruments.
- As the competency presents the option of working at the syllable level and not at the phoneme<sup>i</sup> level, Dipika decides to introduce phonemes to her children at a later stage, perhaps after tracking their progress when it comes to words and syllables.

### Rethinking pedagogy and assessment

Continuing with the example shared above, Dipika plans specific learning experiences or activities

for her children. She understands that all children cannot progress along a fixed sequence of activities, so she takes a more differentiated approach – some activities where the whole class can be involved and some where the specific needs of children are kept in mind without labelling or segregating them.

In the 7-8 minutes Dipika allots for phonological awareness activities every day, she develops a rough plan as follows, involving a few of the LOs mentioned above and more from other domains, such as following instructions, sensorial development, helping each other, and taking turns, etc.

Earlier, Dipika informally included the local language(s) for either fun through rhymes and songs

Table 2. Dipika’s plan for activities in her class.

Whole class/ small groups	Nature of the learning experience/ activity	How Dipika tracks children’s involvement and progress
Whole class	<p>Warm-up games related to noticing and producing environmental sounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close your eyes and notice the sounds in the environment</li> <li>• (Blindfolded) identify/recognise the sources of different environmental sounds</li> <li>• Imagine sounds in different scenarios, e.g., flying like a bird in the sky, caught in heavy rain, or underwater</li> <li>• Reproduce the sounds heard using own voice or objects in the surroundings</li> </ul>	<p>All the children in Dipika’s class have attained the LOs related to noticing and producing environmental sounds, so her purpose of retaining the activities for the same are to warm-up children to more challenging phonological awareness activities.</p> <p>Dipika does not record anything unless there is a specific incident involving a child or a few children which she would like to put down as an anecdotal record.</p>
Whole class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Singing of rhymes and songs in the local language(s) and English</li> <li>• Word play: Listening to and repeating tongue twisters in the local language(s)</li> </ul>	<p>The complexity of the rhymes and songs are such that all children can sing them. Dipika takes the associated LOs and breaks them down further to design a checklist, where she tracks the progress of all children by observing a few of them every week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sings along with familiar rhymes/songs. (Yes/No)</li> <li>• Demonstrates some understanding of rhythm through body movement/ singing rhythmically. (Yes/No)</li> <li>• Expresses a preference for certain rhymes/ songs, e.g., makes suggestions or expresses agreement/disagreement when a rhyme/song is chosen. (Yes/No)</li> <li>• Displays signs of joy while participating, e.g., stands with others even when not singing, sings along, looks intently, moves body etc. (Yes/No)</li> </ul>
Small groups (not segregated)	<p>Language games related to breaking familiar words from the local language(s) and English into syllables (may or may not be borrowed from the rhymes/ songs above). For example, by listening to the word or seeing its picture.</p> <p>Children who do it independently are given 2-3 syllable words and children who need more support are given two-syllable words only – they also repeat what another child or the teacher demonstrate.</p>	<p>Dipika does not create any separate assessment tool for tracking the progress of children regarding breaking words into syllables. She uses the modified table of LOs as a rubric, marking the names of children against the LOs they achieve.</p>

or for explanation. She felt compelled to only use English for formal teaching, as it is the medium of instruction in her school. With the help of the new learning standards, she realises the significance of formally including children's language(s), at least in the oral domain. Dipika plans to formally include more rhymes, songs, tongue-twisters, and words from the local language(s) to not only develop her students' phonological awareness but also other aspects of language and literacy.<sup>ii</sup> Children are involved in more language games where they help and support each other in heterogenous/mixed groups instead of being isolated from the rest of the class. The LOs from the domain of language and literacy are integrated with those from other domains for holistic development. In terms of assessment, no separate tests are required; Dipika

uses a variety of tools and techniques to record the progress of her children.

### Summary

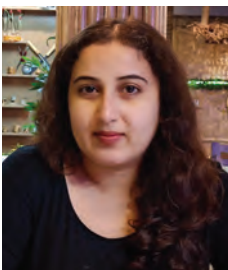
It is important to establish clear learning standards for the Foundational Stage so that teachers, parents, and school leaders understand how children in this age group develop and learn. This approach focuses on developing broad competencies that children should achieve by the end of the Foundational Stage, providing a framework for a holistic and individualised learning experience. While the example of Dipika illustrates how individual teachers can effectively implement the learning standards in their classrooms, state educational institutions are encouraged to design curricular material that accommodate the learning standards to facilitate implementation on the ground.

### Endnotes

- i Phonemes are the smallest units of sounds in speech. For example, the words 'cat', 'kite', and 'duck' contain the phoneme /k/. Understanding the correspondence between phonemes and graphemes (the smallest unit in a writing system, e.g., letters/*aksharas*) is known as 'decoding', an essential literacy skill for reading whole words.
- ii Whenever children's L1 are not used officially as the language for teaching other subjects, they should still be used formally, at least in the oral domain, and at the initial stages of learning to read and write and serve as a bridge to the language used for teaching other subjects. (NCF-FS 2023, p. 77). Read more in Section 3.2 NCF's Approach to Language Education and Literacy in the Foundational Stage (pp. 76-80).

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# Assessment Using Children's Portfolios

Sreenivasa Rao M

The two broad methods of assessment that are appropriate for the Foundational Stage are **observations of the child and analysing artefacts** that the child has produced as part of their learning experience.

*Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. Section 6.2 Methods and Tools of Assessment. p. 173*

In this article, as part of 'analysing artefacts', I describe how 'children's portfolios' can be created and used for assessment.

In the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE), a portfolio refers to a collection of documented evidence and materials that showcase a child's growth, development and learning over a specific period. The primary purpose of it is assessment. It helps determine the child's status and progress, inform instruction, and provide information for reporting and communication. Additionally, it helps in identifying children who might need special help. Portfolios also provide insights into children's abilities, interests, and needs.

The Teacher should analyse the portfolio of the child with regard to specific outcomes and mark the child's progress against competencies. The organisation of a child's portfolio should clearly indicate outcomes to be achieved. Each child should have a dedicated folder to store their relevant artefacts.

*Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. Section 6.2 Methods and Tools of Assessment. p. 178*

## Key elements of children's portfolios

Portfolio items vary with the age and development of children, and the goals of the programmes and curriculum. The items need to be informative, easy to collect and representative of meaningful classroom activities. Below are the suggested items that can be kept in portfolios.

1. Basic and general individual information: The basic details, like the child's name and date of birth, parents' names and background information, the

child's older/younger siblings, likes and dislikes, cultural background, etc.

2. Health-related information: A snapshot of the child's health and well-being with respect to key health indicators, like height, weight, growth, immunisation, etc.
3. Activity books and work samples: Activity books and worksheets in progression. The child's class work, such as drawing, painting, pasting, collage work and activity photos, in a file or scrapbook.
4. Assessment tools: Observation records, checklists, anecdotal records, time and event samples.
5. Digital resources: Photos and videos of the child involved in significant work or play.
6. Teacher reflections: Teacher's reflection on the information gathered about the child over time, which helps in planning the future growth and learning opportunities.
7. Holistic Progress Card (HPC): NEP 2020 suggests that HPC is a 'multidimensional report that reflects in great detail the progress as well as the uniqueness of each learner in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.' (para 4.35).<sup>i</sup> It may contain not just the assessments done by the teacher but also comments and observations by the parents and simple self-assessments by the children themselves.

## Organisation of children's portfolios

The items and work samples need to cover all the domains – language, cognitive, socio-emotional, creative, physical, and physical well-being. It is important to organise the work samples domain-wise and in chronological order. The teacher needs to maintain the date and child's narrations about their work. Below are some sample prompts/ questions that the teacher can ask to enable the child to reflect upon and talk about the work that they have done.

1. Tell me what you have done here.
2. Tell/show me how you did this?
3. Why did you decide to draw/write/make ...?
4. What were you thinking when you drew/wrote/ made ...?

### 5. What do you like about this?

From time to time, the teacher can go back to a previous work of the child and ask them to improve or do it differently by asking:

1. Do you want to change anything in this?
2. What would you do differently if you were to do this again?

### Use of portfolios

Once a child's portfolio is organised, the teacher can evaluate the child's achievements. Appropriate evaluation compares the child's current work to their earlier work. This evaluation should indicate the child's progress toward a performance standard consistent with the curriculum and appropriate developmental expectations. For example, a teacher identified the lack of fine motor skills (grip and control) in a child based on the observation of the child's artwork. This helped the teacher set up a goal for the child and the child was provided with more opportunities to improve by way of free drawing more often on the running blackboard and colouring a shape either on paper or the floor with the teacher placing small seeds on the outline of the shape. The child's fine motor skills have improved as seen in the same kind of artwork over a period of time.

Portfolios are not meant to be used for comparing children with each other. They document an individual child's progress over time. The teacher's conclusions about a child's achievement, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and needs should be based on the full range of the child's development, as documented by the data in the portfolio, and based on the teacher's knowledge of curriculum and stages of development. The portfolio helps the teacher identify each child's unique characteristics and ways of learning and using this to support the child's learning in the classroom.

With the portfolio as the basis for discussion during parent-teacher meetings, the teacher and parents can review concrete examples of the child's work rather than trying to discuss the child's progress in an abstract way.

1. The portfolio allows the sharing of valuable information about the child's achievements with parents, other family members and, in the future, with primary school teachers.
2. The portfolio supports smooth transition from preschool to primary school. It is a valuable tool in ECE as it provides a holistic view of a child's development and helps ensure that educational

and care practices are tailored to each child's unique needs.

3. The portfolio is a positive statement of the child's achievements in the *anganwadi* centre/ preschool, at home and in the community.
4. Children's portfolios can serve as a meaningful way to involve parents in their child's education and development.



Figure 1. Children's portfolio bags in a classroom.

### Role of the teacher

The teacher should have the autonomy to judiciously choose the appropriate tool for assessment and the periodicity of assessment-related record keeping. While such autonomy is important, systematic record-keeping of children's assessments should be seen as an important part of a teacher's professional responsibilities without it being a burden on the teacher.

An accurate assessment allows an early childhood educator to indicate a child's progress in a way that is beneficial to the child, the family, teachers, and administrators. To do this, the teacher needs to do the following:

1. Visit households and get complete details of each child from their parents.
2. Prepare profile sheet, collect work samples for each child systematically.
3. Provide equal opportunities to all children.
4. Provide the necessary materials and time for children to do activities. Also provide extended opportunities for the work they have already



done to gauge the progress in a single competency over a period.

5. Observe children's activities, record these in the form of check lists, anecdotes, and event samples, etc., and make the necessary plans for the children's development.
6. Record their reflections about each child and plan their class keeping these in mind.

### Conclusion

Portfolios are useful, effective tools to aid early childhood professionals in acknowledging and

documenting each child's progress. They are unique to each child, and their contents can focus on the child's specific interactions with their environment, materials, peers, and teachers. Portfolios are practical and useful as both reporting and planning tools; their form and format are adaptable for various types of educational programmes for young children. This systematic process is useful for teachers in achieving curricular goals for children by the end of the Foundational Stage and also for a smooth transition to the next stage.

### Endnotes

- i National Education Policy 2020. Transforming Assessment for Student Development. Para 4.35. p 17



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In the heart of a lively village, near the *anganwadi*, an evening unfolds with groups of children engaging joyfully in different forms of play. Educators delight in observing their social participation. Different types of play – with objects, such as plastic cups; symbolic play in which they make different shapes with mud; games with rules, like *lagori*; socio-dramatic play – a group of children pretending to take out a ‘Ganesh procession’; and of course, physical play, like jumping, hopping and running – all of these showcase the richness of children’s imagination and their connection to local traditions. The scene is magical (*jaadui*).

The fundamental quality of the overall learning experience for young children is highly influenced by the way caregivers and teachers utilise materials in their classrooms and how children interact with one another. The role of materials and adults is crucial in play-based learning. Driven by curiosity, children explore objects and use materials based on their imagination, transforming seemingly unrelated items into meaningful play elements.

### Jaadui Pitara

*Jaadui Pitara* (magic box) developed under NCF-FS is a box containing play-based teaching-learning materials (TLMs) tailored for children between the age group of 3-8 years. It supports ‘learning through play’ and is available in 13 Indian languages. It holds contextual and cultural significance for Indian children. State education departments are encouraged to develop a similar set of materials for the Foundational Stage, consistent with the state’s curriculum framework and syllabus, along with cultural and contextual relevance, giving due importance to traditional toys.

In the Foundational Stage, TLMs play a crucial role in making the teaching-learning process more interactive, engaging, and effective. They cater to the developmental needs of children by providing a multi-sensory and age-appropriate teaching and learning experience of developmental domains and foundational language and literacy, numeracy, and

understanding of the world around us (thematic content). The contents of the *Jaadui Pitara* support teaching methods in achieving a wide range of the curricular goals of NCF-FS.

### Contents of the Jaadui Pitara

#### *Enhanced play materials*

*Jaadui Pitara* contains toys and play materials, like puzzles, blocks and puppets, for an active and developmentally-appropriate approach to learning that not only lays the foundation for academic skills but also nurtures essential social, emotional, cognitive abilities and sensory and perceptual skills in young learners. These objects enable children to explore and experience endless opportunities of learning and development based on their maturity level, with the support of teachers. They ensure a *stimulative learning environment*, making classrooms a lively experience with children given the freedom to choose and engage with play materials.

#### *Building blocks and puzzles*

Building blocks are known as ‘super toys’ due to their open-ended nature and endless possibilities of constructive play. Since children use their senses to discover how objects work and manipulate those objects, *constructive play* provides a preschool child with opportunities to develop the ability to classify, measure, order, count, and discern differences in relation to depth, width, length, symmetry, shape, and space. It also helps children’s imaginations and creativity.

#### *Puppets and other toys*

Puppets and toys, such as kitchen and doctor sets, encourage children to develop representation skills or representing one thing as another through imagination (socio-dramatic play and role-play by using materials and imitating voice and actions to imitate others), foster language abilities, socio-emotional awareness, and understanding of social roles and norms, thereby, helping children to make sense of the real world.

Table 1. Forms of play, supporting materials in the Jaadui Pitara and their significance.

Type of Play	Materials in Jaadui Pitara	Developmental opportunities, skills & competencies
<b>Play with objects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cat puzzle</li> <li>Threading 2-3D shapes</li> <li>Stacking colour rings</li> <li>Stacking rods &amp; colour blocks</li> <li>Tangram</li> <li><i>Ganith Mala</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensory motor skills, sensory perceptual skills</li> <li>Exploring the properties of objects</li> <li>Ability to classify, measure, order, count and compile differences in relation to depth, width, length, symmetry, shape and space</li> </ul>
<b>Dramatic play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kitchen set</li> <li>Mortar-pestle, knife and chopping board, <i>chakla-belan</i></li> <li>Hand puppets (crow, lion, donkey, rooster, elephant, shark) soft toys, rat puppet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication of ideas, feelings, and emotions</li> <li>Appropriate social skills</li> <li>Confidence to practise vocabulary and extend learning through new, related words</li> <li>Practice for reading and writing skills</li> <li>Solve problems and develop mathematical concepts</li> <li>Cooperation with peers</li> </ul>
<b>Symbolic play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alphabet tracing board</li> <li>Puppets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Symbolic systems, including spoken language, reading and writing, numbers, various visual media (painting, drawing, collage) music and so on</li> <li>Making up new words and phonological awareness</li> </ul>
<b>Physical play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wooden top</li> <li>Play dough</li> <li>Threading beads</li> <li>Ball</li> <li>Skipping rope</li> <li><i>Lagori</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical well-being, gross and fine motor skills</li> <li>Control, coordination and body balance</li> <li>Understanding movement concepts (spatial and body parts)</li> </ul>
<b>Games with rules</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Ashta Changa</i></li> <li><i>Chowki Bara</i></li> <li><i>Pallankuzhi Manne</i></li> <li><i>Parecheesi</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Range of social skills, related to sharing, cooperation and taking turns</li> <li>Understand others' perspective and</li> <li>Problem-solving skills</li> </ul>

### Play books

Play books include illustrative, thematic activity sheets for the 3-6 years age group and Hindi, English and maths illustrative activities for age group 3-8 years.

These play books, besides making learning fun for children, also:

- Promote positive learning attitudes
- Encourage self-exploration and independent learning
- Provide concrete concepts through print representation
- Promote cognitive abilities and pre-numeracy and number concepts
- Develop fine motor skills, control coordination pasting, cutting, colouring, tracing etc.
- Support picture comprehension, vocabulary, pre-reading and writing skills with conventions of print
- Reinforce and provide practice of the concepts and skills that are experienced in the class/peer group/group activities to promote social development
- Promote smooth transition from age-appropriate, grade-level foundational competencies

The play books also help the teacher in many other ways:

- Support the teacher in building positive learning attitudes, learning experiences that are enjoyable and encouraging
- Facilitate and set an example for differentiated teaching, enable teachers to tailor activity sheets according to their students' pace and learning styles
- Facilitate in maintaining a tangible record of each child's progress, track developmental milestones and early learning outcomes
- Enable systematic documenting of children's activity sheets in portfolio

Apart from this, play books also facilitate and encourage parental involvement in children's development and learning with simple illustrative activity sheets. The activity sheets provide them with a clear insight into the progress of their children and facilitate continued learning at home.

### Teacher handbooks

In the early Foundation Stage (children aged 3-6 years), there has been considerable uncertainty regarding the content for teachers to use with the children. To address this, *Jaadui Pitara* provides a set of teacher handbooks. These handbooks clearly

outline the scope of the thematic content and age-appropriate experiences. The *Khel Khel Mein* handbook is specifically designed for 3–6-year-olds, and there are others for Hindi, English and maths. A handbook for creating low- and no-cost teaching-learning materials (TLMs) is also provided.

### Flash cards

There are 50 thematic flash cards with pictures of animals, plants, flowers and fruits, etc., that serve the following purposes:

- Engagement and interest: Capture and maintain children's interest by presenting information in a visually appealing and thematic manner
- Concept reinforcement: Reinforce thematic concepts and vocabulary, aiding in better retention and understanding
- Multi-sensory learning: Provide multi-sensory learning experiences involving sight and discussion to enhance understanding
- Language development: Support language development by introducing new words and facilitating free, guided, and conceptual conversation around specific themes
- Creativity and imagination: Encourage creativity and imagination through visual representation of thematic ideas



Figure 1. A child enjoys playing with the contents of the *Jaadui Pitara*.

## Numeracy cards

There are numeracy cards (1-100) in two sets with number names and cardinal number dots mentioned on each that aid the following:

- Numeracy skill development: Visual representation of numbers, number names and associating numbers (symbols) with quantities
- Concrete (pictorial) understanding: Connecting abstract (numbers) with concrete symbols (dots).
- Sequential learning: Progressing from basic counting (1-10) for pre-primary to more complex calculations
- Interactive learning: Encouraging hands-on exploration of numbers and relating them to concrete experiences

## Posters

Posters create a print-rich environment, complement classroom conversations, reading aloud, as well as the following with the teacher's support:

- Oral language development: Listening and responding, retelling, using talk and conversation and learning

- Print awareness: Associating spoken language with printed words, seeing interconnectedness between oral and written language
- Cultural experience: Introduction to diverse cultures, perspectives, and literary traditions through a variety of stories and poems
- Expression and communication: Encouraging discussions and other forms of sharing
- Reading with comprehension: Improving picture reading, word recognition and reading comprehension skills with stories and poems with accompanying visuals

## Conclusion

Daily learning experiences that are child-led and teacher-directed through, thematic play materials, symbolic and dramatic play activities, as well as teacher-driven activities, are supported by resources, like teacher handbooks and teacher manuals. This approach is intended to promote 'playful teaching and learning' in the Foundational Stage. These, in turn, foster positive relationships to nurture children and plan experiences deeply connected to children's lives, context, and previous knowledge, incorporating local resources wherever possible.



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