



## 28 Innovative Teaching Style

Maitreyi

In a world today where there are so many things we can learn through a number of ways, I feel it is extremely important for us, as individuals, to find the right way to go about learning whatever it is. It might be about learning how to do a math problem, how the telephone works, or even why leaves are green. I feel everyone has a different learning style, and once we figure out what exactly our strengths are, we can use that to our advantage and learn whatever it is. I have found that when I am faced with different things, the way I go about learning each of them is different, and at times, it has been a challenge to figure out in what way I can go about learning it best.

A large part in the process of learning of course is the teaching method or style that is used. In a school like Centre for Learning (CfL) where I practically lived for seven years, I was given the time and space to learn at my own pace. Being in classes that had students ranging from just three to a maximum of eight students; discussions and questions could be handled one at a time, clarifying everyone's doubts etc. Due to these structures, the relationship between the student and the teacher was one characterized by discussions, questioning and learning. I used this structure to my full advantage, both in my academic and non-academic work.

There were a few projects that we did during the course of our 11th and 12th in school which I feel used a different approach to learning and teaching, both in terms of the role of the student and the teacher. We did two projects, one related to land and the other related to human rights. Both these were unique because of the approach through which we went about studying these areas.

The human rights project was part of our general studies project. 'General studies' is a part of the syllabus in the 12th grade, where a different topic is taken each year. Topics could be about anything social, environmental, etc that we can connect to and study in depth.

Through the human rights project, we aimed to study The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and The Declaration of the Rights of the Child. The project was planned such that we had both a theory as well as a practical component so that we actually see what we are able to study, feel it physically. At first, even before we looked at the declaration, the teachers encouraged us and joined in a discussion where we discussed what we considered as important for us as humans, what we feel we are entitled to as humans. We were asked to imagine that we had to build a society/community. "What kind of rights would your people have? What would they be entitled to?" These were the questions we tried to answer. Following this, we read through the declaration and read it article by article and found that most of what we considered as important for a society did figure in the Declaration itself.



A class in progress - Sharing and discussion

If one looks at this approach to go about learning, I feel it helps one think about things at a deeper level. As we thought about the things that we considered as important, one statement led to another and we had major discussions, right from whether water should be available for free, to whether there should be reservations at schools/colleges etc. There were so many tangents we went off into, and we found that it was quite hard to come to a common consensus about what every individual would be entitled to in our 'new' society. This process of discussion, agreeing and disagreeing allowed for a space wherein there was no 'right' or 'wrong' answer. I feel this whole process of discussing in a space also helps you to think on these things and articulate your view-points clearly.

Another part of this project involved actually talking to people and asking them a set of questions to see whether they were aware of the rights they had, whether the things they were entitled to were being met, etc.



Exploring and discovering

In this approach, the teachers used to make us understand what we were studying by making us go 'out there' and find answers. We had to go out and see for ourselves whether the rights that people were entitled to were actually being met or not. There were two parts to this. The first one involved meeting people and going on field visits. We visited one or two slums in Bangalore and spoke to people who were living

there in an attempt to understand what their situation was, the kinds of issues they were dealing with in terms of what they were entitled to as citizens, etc. I feel my greatest learning in this project came from this. The second part involved us to talk to one person whom we met on an everyday basis and asking them a set of questions that we came up with in class. All of us spoke to either those who came to work in our homes, the vegetable vendors, or the watchmen in our apartments. Through this exercise we learnt that while there are what we consider as the most basic rights such as the right to sanitation, shelter, education etc, and people were still denied those rights. The fact that we listened to people tell us this and show us their homes etc, only made us more convinced of the reality of the situation people are in. If I were to read of this in a textbook, I'm sure this would have had less impact on me.

I feel this experience of learning something really did make such a difference to me, and certainly my friends. The fact that you learn something through experience, I feel makes such a difference because that is how we experience things. We see, we listen and understand what is going on around us, and when you're taught or learn something through this way, it makes a big difference.

Another example of a project where we experienced what we were learning is the land project that we were involved in at school. Here, a large part of the process of learning was through plain observation, documentation and sharing. Again, we were encouraged by our teachers to learn about the land that we lived in through these methods.

The CfL campus is situated on a large area of beautiful land in the outskirts of Bangalore. With school buildings concentrated in one part of the campus, the rest is left to grow with minimal tending. Therefore we have a large list of flora and fauna. As part of the syllabus at the school, engagement with the land is a vital part- whether it means engaging through

gardening, clearing invasive plant species, bird watching, or simply walking through the land on the nature trail that the students have created.

Using observation as a key way of learning about something that's around you, we engaged in this project and learned about the land we live in, the plants that grow there, the birds of different seasons, etc. This approach was extremely interesting because we students were left alone to observe different parts of the campus with minimal guidelines.

“Just observe, and note down what you see, smell, hear and feel” we were told in the beginning. From there we were on our own for a while to learn about what we saw. After a few hours of being by ourselves in our spots, we would come back and look up in books or on the internet to try and identify and match our observations. Along with this, we would share our observations with our teachers and friends, and this way, everybody benefitted, and

it became a process in which everyone was learning something new- teacher and student!

I feel this approach in letting children find out for themselves what there is to find out is very interesting. Because of the fact that people would observe by themselves and share what they saw, I feel we learnt a lot more than what we would have if we were to simply sit down and read a book about what flora and fauna might be found here.

These are two strong examples of how students can learn topic in untraditional fashion. The traditional method of the teacher lecturing students with set and planned notes can be changed into a method where the student and teacher are actively involved in the process. I personally found it very beneficial.

As a person who is interested in getting into education, I believe that with the right settings and atmospheres, both the teacher and the student are learners, and it can be an exciting journey.



Ready for an evening walk



MAITREYI, currently pursuing Bachelors in Mass Communications, Mount Carmel College, Bangalore. She can be contacted at [maitreyi.10@gmail.com](mailto:maitreyi.10@gmail.com)