

Wall Magazine: An Extraordinary Window for Learning Outside the Classroom

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The National Focus Group position paper on Aims of Education under the aegis of National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, clearly states that ‘the school system has come to be characterised with a kind of inflexibility that makes it very difficult to breathe fresh life to it.’ The Focus Group also acknowledges that ‘learning for children seems to have become a sort of isolated and perfunctory activity which they are unable to connect in any organic or vital way with the rest of their life.’

Our experience shows that the school has come to be a centre of power and authority and the teacher, as one of its representatives, tries to accomplish this through textbooks. It goes on well in the classroom and the learner’s epistemological diligence is rarely used in this kind of centralised process of teaching and learning. This is the reason that we come across pre-decided answers to questions, bookish words and examples, irrelevant logic and basics, monotonous analysis and experiences that are not connected with life. Therefore, methods and perspectives of teaching and learning should be reviewed regularly.

There are many such modes and methods related to life outside the classroom that not only make teaching and learning lively and vibrant, but also involve many components of the learner’s epistemological diligence in that process. This article speaks about one such method—the *Wall Magazine*.

A Wall Magazine is usually considered to be a non-academic activity in the school because it contains material from outside the curriculum: the activity is conducted outside the classroom, it is possible to do it without the control and supervision of the teacher, it has no fixed format and the learners can do it autonomously. Many times it turns into an art and craft class. There is no problem with that unless there is a deviation from its purpose. What is amazing is that the so-called non-academic format itself is its strength. Let us try to understand this strength in a sequential way.

With regard to the aims of education, NCF 2005 says that if the learner is not motivated to explore,

then the teaching-learning process is futile. When we look at the Wall Magazine from this perspective, we realise that it gives children the initial impetus to explore and recognise the world outside the classroom as an arena for learning, inspires them to search and find the contents for a chosen topic, look at material other than textbooks, shape experiences from their own lives and let their imagination run wild. And all this of their own will, wish and initiative. The activity starts with looking for content outside the textbook, testing it and undertaking a series of tasks which truly promote creativity. While preparing the Wall Magazine in the Anand Niketan Democratic School on the topic Independence, the children were not thinking of independence in a limited way as given in the books, which is confined to attaining freedom from British rule, but they were considering independence in a variety of ways beyond it. Freedom had a different meaning for each one of them. They were also thinking about animals in captivity and their freedom. Instead of choosing a poem on independence from a book, they preferred to write a new poem themselves. They talked to the teachers, school friends and family members to find out what they understood as independence and finally went on to prepare their Wall Magazine.

While the Wall Magazine opened the doors of creativity on one hand, on the other, it also offered



them opportunities to learn various life skills. Whether we talk about the broader objectives of education or subjects, these life skills are considered

important. In carrying out the task of preparing a Wall Magazine, children learn the skills of working in groups, making their own place in a group, arguing logically, selecting suitable material, respecting each other's opinions, accepting differences, and developing coordination. These skills are learnt organically: nobody is teaching them. Their small group becomes a complete society and social ways become its needs. There is only one goal - to come up with a good Wall Magazine.

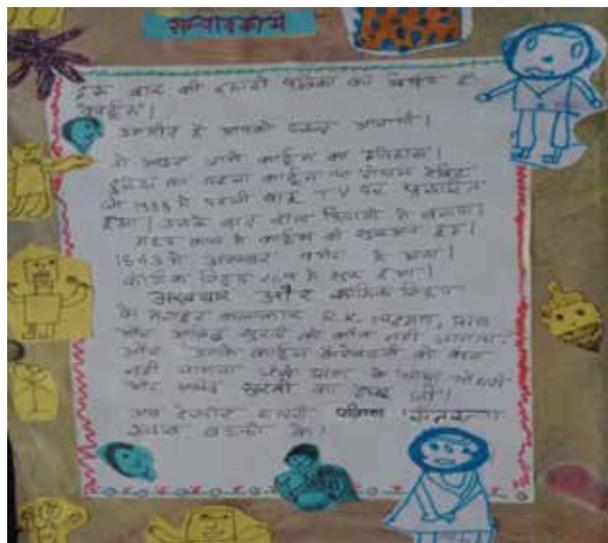
Schools have a lot of concerns about teaching reading and writing and a great deal of work is done to address it, but what goes unnoticed is



how to build and maintain the power of reading and writing, its vibrancy and meaningfulness. If reading and writing can become an inspiration for a specific achievement rather than a general achievement, then it can be fun and meaningful. In such a situation, the objective of making the Wall Magazine attractive, interesting and the centre of everyone's attention becomes the source of its energy. Routine classroom writing has no liveliness or energy because the child writes bookish questions and answers. There is no component of making it attractive, readable and the centre of everyone's attention. When we talk about the skills within the broader aims of education, we also talk about the skills related to the community's desires and aspirations. It can broadly be seen as aesthetic skills. Writing in the Wall Magazine, its adornment and presentation nurture these aesthetic skills.

Education is that which liberates. This has been expressed in many ways. J. Krishnamurthy, Gandhi, Tagore, Ambedkar, Phule and Paulo Freire have talked about liberation in different ways. The path of liberation may be found in independent thinking, self-inspired, spontaneous creation and free expression and it is absolutely true in the context

of education. Our educational documents also advocate it. The possibilities of freedom increase outside the classroom because the framework of the school system is such that the thinking of the teachers, their presence, their methodology and prevailing assumptions change the overall chemistry inside the classroom. The focus is solely on the exchange of curriculum-related information. The making of the Wall Magazine opens the way to liberation from the teacher's influence and hold, opens the path for independent thinking, creation and expression.



The travel memoir for the Wall Magazine was not written in response to any question, nor was the poem written as an example of any *rasa* or *bhava* of Hindi grammar. Instead, it was a spontaneous creation—uninhibited and original. Writing or painting for the Wall Magazine comes out naturally and not under any pressure. Such a composition will fulfil the objectives of education. We are living in a competitive world today where we talk about children's self-confidence and practical understanding. Education is supposed to fulfil these expectations and aspirations of society. The NCF 2005 also discusses them in different ways and underlines the contribution of education in making better citizens. Decentralisation of teaching and learning, believing in the understanding and intellect of children and staying away from supremacy in the classroom can make it possible. Activities and project planning build self-confidence and practical understanding in children which is not possible through the one-sided lecture/discourse of the teacher in the classroom. So the Wall Magazine is like a perfect project which includes the understanding of various handwork activities

as well as planning, sharing responsibilities, identifying competencies and implementing a plan. The activities/materials or contents of a Wall Magazine help in incorporating local contexts and various cultural contexts in the curriculum. Children create space for their life experiences, customs and beliefs and get familiar with each other's background. The topics covered in the textbook are developed in detail in a wall magazine. New dimensions are added to the content. The poem *Man karta hai* in NCERT's grade III book, is one such example. Children prepared their own Wall Magazine with the same title. The content of the Wall Magazine prepared by the children became a further reference and text material for the teacher. The discussion on certain topics that are missed

out in the classroom can be discussed outside the classroom through the Wall Magazine thus enriching the text content.

The textbook becomes a dynamic document with the support of the Wall Magazine. Each lesson from it leads to many threads of children's lives, their experiences, aspirations and viewpoints. Wall Magazines, thus developed, can create a whole new world outside the classroom, which can meet the objectives of the subjects along with the broader aims of education. Teachers and school managements need to understand its importance and accept it as a holistic method of teaching and learning and give children the autonomy to create it. The beauty of the Wall Magazine lies in its not being under the teacher's control.

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