

Learning Outside the Classroom: A Real Life Experience

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Children are most intelligent, smart, curious and can learn anything very fast. Apart from learning and acquiring knowledge from their books, learning outside the classroom is as important as learning the prescribed curriculum. As we know, learning outside the classroom means learning from the environment around us and can be called real life experiences. Children can learn many things from their surroundings, though it might be just the mud in their backyard or flowing water in the river. It is not practical to expect a teacher to impart all learning inside the classroom, so it is very important that we allow and help our children learn from nature.



A seven-year-old child student of grade 2 will learn about different sources of water in his environment science textbooks, but sometimes, to make children understand the importance of a concept and why we need to know about the topic, some simple methods of teaching have to be devised. One way of allowing a child to explore nature is to take him/her to a flowing river or a beach and letting him just observe water bodies, plants, stones and soil. Children will learn many more important things from such observations: about how to keep the water clean because here they learn not to pollute it and how to preserve the cleanliness so that they can drink it. This is the simple and easy way of teaching children the importance of studying the topic and will last longer in their minds than a child who has not explored or had the joy of first-hand experience. Here they learn not only about the topic, but also get the physical activity needed to

improve the gross and fine motor skills of a child.



Talking about motor development in physical education, let us take swimming. We all want that children should be safe from accidents in water, so we keep on explaining to our students about safety at home, outside and many awareness programmes and drills of disaster management are conducted in our schools. Let us think about some of the drills which are taught visually - will the child be able to do it just by an explanation or viewing a PPT? That is impossible to achieve, so taking the child outside to a river and helping her to explore is much better as she will learn faster and will love it too.

Learning science in the higher classes is very much more difficult as it needs extra focus to understand concepts especially for some children. I remember myself: how I faced many problems in studying and understanding science without practicals or real-life experiences. Some of the topics can be learnt much better outside the classroom, through field trips, visiting museums, scientific institutions, factories, exhibitions, farming in the fields, doing experiments and projects. One point, which to my mind is very important, is involving parents in helping children.



One of the most amazing experiences I got from my children's teachers was of reminding us about the involvement of parents as being a very important part of child's learning needs. Here both the child and parents learn together as it brings about emotional, psychological as well as physical development. Co-operative work between the

child and the parents will enable the child to learn to work in groups, improve social skills, enhance adjustment, love, trust, co-operation. According to Maria Montessori, when the child and parents do things together, the child's need for love and care is fulfilled and one of the ways this can be achieved is through learning outside the classroom. The joy the child feels is very satisfying, even if the task was only picture or photo pasting or art and craft work.



The National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) stresses the need for teachers being humane. But with the vast curriculum and hectic work schedule, teachers are sometimes forced to ignore this aspect. Every teacher has to rush to complete the course. So where will she have the time to help children to learn outside the classroom, when she is already occupied with syllabus and curriculum for the whole year inside the classroom? So, it is necessary to plan the curriculum in such a way that child gets to learn outside the classroom in every topic or subject at least once a month



Learning outside the classroom is not only for lower primary but also for higher classes and even college students. The fact is that while it helps young children to grow and develop we cannot deny the strength it brings to older students. For example, while giving assignments to the higher-level students it is very important to make sure that they write facts and think originally. We often see student assignments which are either copied from books or from readymade notes. These things happen perhaps because as teachers we do not tell students to write about their experiences first hand. Although it is difficult, what we can do is organise interviews, field trips and experiments, seminars or conferences.

An assignment on our Constitution, for example, results in writing about it through books. But if a teacher helps students by learning about it outside the classroom with visits to a court, Parliament, or interviews with officials, MLAs, involving themselves in election duty like assisting the elderly, people with special needs, or even poster pasting, there would be some original experiences to write about. Involving them in panchayat or local community work, talking to them about the National Day and how it is related to our Constitution would be helpful. Practical teaching is better than lecture classes which are much harder to remember.



Another example is the field of inclusive education, disability, and special education. Our pre-services trainees, who are all adults (18 to 27). are not aware of some important issues because they have not had practical experience. Being taken out of the classroom, visiting different types of special and inclusive schools and institutions, encountering children with special needs are some of the ways to help their learning. So, learning outside the classroom is important for adult learners and even for teacher educators, since before teaching anything we have to experience it naturally to bring joy to teaching and learning.

All that I have written is from my own personal experiences: first as a student, then as a mother, a teacher and now as a teacher - educator. No two children - not even twins- are alike. We each have a unique way of learning, but what is the same is

that we all live in the same environment, breathe the same air, which is why we all learn better in the real natural environment outside the classroom.

Learning by doing, learning by seeing, learning something in a real-life situation is the best because it brings joy and development to a child.

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