

Morning Assembly as a Learning Experience

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Learning is a continuous process. It takes place anywhere and everywhere, consciously or unconsciously. When we learn consciously it becomes part of our knowledge, increases our understanding, makes us skilful and we are able to get experiences to construct further knowledge based on previous experiences and learning. It may be effortful, situational or contextual facilitated or non-facilitated or any other. On the other hand, we also learn many things which may not have an immediate impact but becomes important in due course of time. So, learning is an inevitable part of our life. It has no boundary or limitation.

In our school education system, learning and its processes are very important. Every effort is dedicated to students' learning - in the classroom, from textbooks, well equipped laboratories and libraries. But there are many more established, yet informal, ways which contribute to the learning of students and are an important and integral part of it. It is true that a good proportion of learning, which has a great impact on classroom and overall learning, takes place outside the classroom.



Whatever is learned in the classroom must be connected and articulated with outside-classroom experience and expectation, must have relevance with context and surroundings. Only then can learning be made concrete and provide the base and opportunity for further learning.

In our schools there are many opportunities for children to learn outside the classroom. Our experiences have been that children learn a lot

through outside classroom activities and in a joyful way with curiosity and enthusiasm. Whatever they learn through these processes and opportunities have a deep impact on their present and future learning

One such activity in school is *Chetana Satra*, or morning assembly. This attractive, vibrant, joyful, informative and interactive session takes place outside the classroom at the start of the school day. It has been well said, 'well began is half done'. *Chetana Satra*, which symbolises the beginning of school activity, justifies the above statement. *Chetana Satra* is not of the traditional type, limited only to ritual prayers to begin school activities. It has become more inclusive and highly interactive. It gives scope for children to learn individually and collectively, to share their learning and experiences and to perform in different ways. Most of the time it is organised and conducted by children themselves through *Bal Sansad* and *Mina Manch*. More importantly the activities of *Chetana Satra* are closely connected to our curricular expectations and classroom transactions. Local cultural connects and enchanting folk prayers and, occasionally, songs, which add a cultural flavour, are the essence of the *Chetana Satra* and break the monotony and add vibrancy and add energy to the morning assembly. Our assembly line formation can very easily be correlated with the mathematical concepts presented in grades 1 to 8. Further, children get the opportunity to generate discussions or to use their imagination and express their experiences in both *Chetna Satra* and during their classroom activities. More than that, *Chetana Satra* provides children the freedom to take leadership initiatives to cooperate, coordinate, support and discipline each other and at the same time respect the culture and local traditions in a harmonious and friendly atmosphere.

Chetana Satra-s are compulsorily conducted through the public address system. This eliminates diffidence among children as they know they are being heard and their activities are being watched by their parents, guardians and the community, who

give them feedback and appreciation. Sometimes famous local personalities, artisans, craftsman are called in to address and share their experiences,



giving children the chance to ask questions or share their experiences. This is how we have managed to transform the simple morning assembly into a significant learning space by creating a vibrant change through the well-thought-out concept of *Chetana Satra*.

Two other participative concepts that are practised in our school are *Bal Sansad* and *Mina Manch* which are directly concerned with children learning outside the classroom. In fact these two are democratic forums of the children, for the children and by the children where they learn leadership skills, active participation, decision



making, self-discipline, cooperation, coordination, support, sharing and delegating responsibilities, collective responsibility, working in and as a team, accountability, idea generation, self-reflection and critical thinking, resource identification and generation, planning, execution and evaluation in a democratic way.

The *Bal Sansad* is headed by a *Pradhan Mantri* (prime minister) with a deputy and includes ministries like *Shiksha* (education), *Swasthya & Swakshata* (health and hygiene), *Vigyan & Pustakalay* (science and library), *Jal & Krishi* (water and agriculture), *Sanskritik evam Khelkud* (culture and sports) headed by ministers and their deputies. In addition, there is a provision for a Minister for Disaster Control. The Deputy Education Minister must be a girl student and she is the ex-officio head of *Mina Manch* and is also known as the *Mina Mantri*. Each ministry has a fifteen-member executive committee which helps in its smooth functioning. All these ministers and members of the executive committee are elected from the five 'houses' with proper and proportional representation from the houses.



There is also a teacher-coordinator to facilitate and coordinate the activities of *Bal Sansad*. It has proved to be a self-sufficient and sustainable model which provides scope and opportunity to children to work in cohesion in a democratic way. The role and responsibility of the functionaries are clearly decided. Meetings, headed by the *Pradhan Mantri*, are held fortnightly and monthly to discuss agenda and issues, for further planning and evaluation, decisions are taken, and priorities decided. Even the minutes are documented, making this an opportunity for collective learning where children learn with zeal and great enthusiasm and become ready to take responsibility and ownership with a sense of appreciation and belonging.

Another dynamic democratic forum which enhances learning for the girls is *Mina Manch*. All the girls from grades 6 to 8 are members. As mentioned earlier, it is headed by the Deputy Education Minister of *Bal Sansad*, known as the *Mina Mantri*. A lady teacher is the coordinator who coordinates and facilitates the activities.

The *Mina Manch* also meets twice a month and looks after the educational and related issues in school. Members are encouraged to take initiative in the admission process, attendance and the participation of girls in different activities.



They discuss educational issues, individual and community health and hygiene issues, social obstacles such as *bal vivah* (child or early marriage), *bal majduri* (child labour), atrocities on girls, dowry, cultural stigmas related to girl child, female foeticide and organises programmes and activities in school and in the community to spread awareness to root out and overcome these problems.

There are many success stories related to *Mina Manch* where child marriages have successfully been stopped from taking place. In many of the schools, it is the impact of the *Mina Manch* that the enrolment and attendance of girl child has increased tremendously as it is real girl empowerment from the beginning. They learn about their rights and contribution to society and about life skills through programmes they have themselves organised.

Bal Sansad and *Mina Manch* are constituted at the beginning of every academic session and now government schools in other places have replicated the election process carried out by election commission. This includes announcement of *Bal Sansad* election date sheet, electoral rolls, nomination, election campaigning, model code of conduct, grievance redressal, returning officer appointment, polling booth and polling parties, voting slips, ballot paper, counting of votes, declaration of result. The entire process is a great learning of the process of a democratic election and its importance for students as citizens of a democracy. In fact, through these platforms they learn institutional behaviour, discipline and manners.

The School Disaster Management Committee (SDMC) is another forum where children participate actively and learn to identify hazards both in school and in the localities from where they come. They learn to recognise potential hazards affecting the lives and property of human beings as well as nature. They also learn rescue processes, first aid and rehabilitation. There is a twelve to thirteen member committee with major representation of children, including all the ministers of *Bal Sansad*, *Mina Mantri*, a focal teacher, chairman of VSS and three *Bal Prerak-s* (peer educators) who train other students through mock drills and exercises related to different hazards every Saturday. As the state of Bihar is vulnerable to frequent floods, droughts and other natural calamities, the role of SDMC became pronounced not only in rescue and rehabilitation but also in continuation of regular educational process of children. Thus, the process of learning about natural calamities, man-made hazards prevention, control, rescue and rehabilitation is an organised and natural one which is enjoyed greatly with full participation in the drills and exercises. More importantly what they learn they share with the community to ensure all-round security.





The concept of *Poshan Vatika* (midday meal) also ensures learning of children outside the classroom. Children learn the importance of equality and equity, importance of food and its conservation, health and hygiene, their personal and collective responsibility, community life. The other benefits

are sensitisation towards the cultivation process, nutritional value of plants and their role in our daily life and healthy living. They also learn the value of labour and respect the contributions of others in their lives.



Real learning of children is not limited only to the classroom or classroom activities. There is always a wide scope to learn outside the classroom. Children actually learn from the context, their surroundings, institutional setups, community and many more. We must not restrict them within the walls of the classroom and force them to become bookworms. We must facilitate the enjoyment of experiential learning. The horizon of learning is wide and the sky is the limit.



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