

# Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

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The statement, *Every Child Can Learn*, makes me think, *learn what?* Because to me, at one level, it is obvious that every child can learn.

It becomes a moot question when we look at learning as something that happens only in schools. School means learning to *achieve, compete, perform, succeed...* We as parents or teachers aspire for our children to succeed in life. The child's *capacity, interests, challenges, abilities*, do not seem to matter here. Therefore, sending children to school and that too to a 'good school', the definition of which varies for each one of us, becomes a very important part of parenting

'While the basic aims of education are to enable children develop their potentials, define and pursue a meaningful path in life; globalisation has put an extra pressure on the education system to create 'winners' who are ready to battle in the race for the survival of the fittest.'

This statement by Meenu Anand reminds of the movie *Tare Zameen Par*, I liked it till the point where a caring teacher identifies the child's problem and finds ways to motivate him. Recognising talent in children is important because it boosts their self-confidence and gives them hope. They look forward to coming to school, and keep going; it is also a beautiful way of letting children be and also reminding ourselves that people can be talented in different areas. But the problem for me (personally) in the movie was when the child had to be a 'winner'!

Teachers must doubtless be using various strategies to help children learn: using activity-based learning to involve children, discussions to encourage questioning, TLMs to make learning interesting, and worksheets...I can go on with the list of things teachers do and the hard work they put in to help children learn.

And yet, we cannot deny the fact that every classroom will have children who are struggling to learn, not able to focus, are restless, have behaviour issues, do not do homework or complete the task on hand etc. There may be many reasons for such issues

in a classroom – learning problems (like dyslexia etc), special needs, first-generation learners, or emotional problems. I am going to skip the category of special needs here and, instead, look at issues related to children with behavioural problems and first-generation learners.

The issues could be many: aggression, violence, tantrums, defiance, avoidance or complaints of being tired, sleepy, lethargic and so on. Many a time, such behaviours may be a manifestation of an inner disturbance in the child. Children who are emotionally disturbed experience difficulties in adjusting to one or more important aspects of the school environment. They have problems in learning because they are not able to pay attention, have difficulties in forming friendships, may withdraw and stop participating. All children have inherent strengths and are capable of learning, provided the classrooms or school programme offers them a positive climate. The learning space should be supportive, encouraging, safe and caring.

For this to happen, teachers need to be well-prepared. A little care and personal touch to find out the reason behind a child's behaviour can actually go a long way in helping her/him. Making children express their emotions is no easy task as they may not have been taught to express emotions effectively. Teachers can, at such times, model the appropriate or desirable behaviour for the child to learn from. Since expressing emotions takes time and needs practice, a lot also depends on how teachers regulate their own emotions while handling children. Having regular informal conversations with children may help in this regard. Some teachers also play soft and gentle music while children are working, to provide them with a calm and relaxed classroom atmosphere. Some let children draw or colour their emotions, a few others give time out for children to reflect on their behaviour. I think teachers need to choose what works for them based on their style and comfort before they resort to such strategies.

However, it is better to discuss the case with specialists, parents and experts before making any conclusions about a child's issues.

For all that we know, children can, at times, be restless simply because they are bored in class, either because they know more (are familiar) than what is being taught or are not able to relate to what the teacher is teaching. They can also be preoccupied with routine things like a birthday party in the evening, the mother being unwell or some disturbance at home, the day having started on a bad note, not having done the homework, etc. Therefore, they may not be mentally present in class. They could also be first-generation learners who are taking time to settle down into the ways of schooling and learning.

### Some strategies that might work

#### *Children who are brighter than others*

What is the basis on which we consider someone to be bright? The teacher needs to ensure that the child has done all the class level work that is expected of everyone, only after which can he be given any additional work. Make it challenging for the child by giving him opportunities to approach the same problem (concept) from various angles. For example, in math, if it is about multiplication, teachers generally move on from one digit to two digits to

three and four and so on. Instead, the child can solve  $4 \times 25$  (by just doing the sum to find the answer with the knowledge of multiplication tables), create his own problems, discover what patterns they find in tables, solve through story sums or word problems, create his own story sums, respond to questions such as, though the answer for  $25 \times 4$  and  $4 \times 25$  is same, what is the difference in writing them like that. Teachers can also expose children to different ways of solving sums. For instance, I remember a child adding  $40+40$  and then adding the 2 to solve  $40+42$ . In subtraction, children are taught to count forward, but some children may be comfortable counting backwards – allow for such different methods. These practices provide an opportunity for the child to widen his scope of thinking, work on the same concept without feeling the burden of going through it mechanically, by doing more of the same kind in the name of practice. This will also keep the child engaged. All of this, of course, requires planning on the teacher's part.

#### *Children who get bored easily*

What about a child who is bored because he is not able to relate to what is being taught? Teachers need

Chapter 4

## Reproduction in Animals

**Synopsis**

1. The process of giving birth to their own kind of animals is called reproduction.
2. Animals reproduce mainly in two ways : giving birth to young ones like themselves and laying eggs.
3. The animals which reproduce by giving birth to young ones of their own kind are called mammals. Human beings, cows, lions, etc., are some examples of mammals.
4. Mammals have hair which keep them warm.
5. Mammals take care of their young ones by giving milk, cleaning them and protecting them from enemies.
6. Mammals are warm blooded. They have a constant body temperature.
7. Most mammals live on land. Monkeys and squirrels which live on trees, whales and dolphins which live in water are also mammals.
8. Birds lay eggs and keep them warm under their feathers. After some days, eggs hatch and young ones come out.
9. Eggs are either oval shaped or round shaped with a thick outer protective shell which protects the growing

parts inside. Inside the egg, there is a white thick liquid called egg white and a yellow liquid at the centre called egg yolk. Egg white is also called albumen.

10. Fishes lay eggs in water and reptiles like crocodiles, snakes and turtles lays on land.
11. Frogs lay eggs in water which hatch into tadpoles. Tadpoles grow into frogs. They look like fishes.
12. Some insects like grasshopper and cockroach pass through three stages in their life cycle. Eggs laid by cockroach develop into small baby insects called nymphs. These do not exactly like cockroaches. They shed their skin several times to become cockroach. This process is called moulting.
13. Other insects like housefly and butterfly pass through four stages. The young ones hatched from the eggs are called larvae and look like worms.
14. After growing for sometime larva covers itself in a cocoon. This stage is called pupa. Finally pupa bursts and the fully grown insect comes out. Unlike mammals, the babies of the insects are not looked after by their parents.

4. Reproduction in Animals

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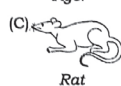

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to find ways of helping the child connect the concepts to real life or use examples that will help the child connect the new learning to the things around him

– by and large, this is required as a general strategy too. Some children may need it for a longer period of time and teachers need to be aware of this.

9. In the egg stage, energy is obtained from  
(A) the leaves of the plants  
(B) egg yolk present in the egg  
(C) killing other insects  
(D) photosynthesis

10. In the larva stage, energy is obtained from  
(A) egg yolk (B) leaves  
(C) photosynthesis  
(D) soil

11. Which of the following reproduce by laying eggs?  
(A)  Tiger (B)  Cat  
(C)  Rat (D)  Frog

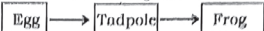
12. Harika checked the temperature of her sister and made the following observation table

day	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Temperature of her sister	98.5°F	98.5°F	98.6°F	98.6°F	98.6°F	98.6°F	98.6°F

From the above information we can conclude that Harika's sister is a/an  
(A) mammal  
(B) reptile  
(C) insect  
(D) egg

13. Mammals have  
(A) constant body temperature  
(B) changing body temperature  
(C) high temperature in night and low temperature in day  
(D) no temperature

The following diagram represents the life cycle of a frog. Answer the questions 14–17 based on this diagram.



14. The animals which live both on the land and in the water are called amphibians. Frog is such an animal. Now, where does frog lay eggs?  
(A) Land  
(B) Water  
(C) Both land and water  
(D) Land in summer and water in winter

15. Tadpoles look like  
(A) frogs (B) eggs  
(C) fishes (D) cocoons

16. Tadpoles can move  
(A) only in water  
(B) only on land  
(C) in water as well as on land  
(D) none of the above

17. Which of the following is possessed by a tadpole but not an adult frog?  
(A) Eye (B) Tail  
(C) Kidney (D) Lungs

18. Dolphin is

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Apart from that, it might help if concepts or content are broken down into smaller and manageable chunks. For instance, if the topic is *Reproduction in Animals*, the content can be reproduced for the child, as shown in the pictures. One need not worry about giving answers towards the end. The objective is to make the child learn, so over a period of time (provided the anxiety over giving correct answers is removed in the class), children will learn not to look at the answers first.

#### Issues faced by first-generation learners

The above strategy should help, to a certain extent, first-generation learners too, though their issues are different. They may experience anxiety for a variety of other reasons – new place, new situation, new people, etc, staying away from home for long, the language barrier. It is quite possible that these children or even others (who are not necessarily first-generation learners) might exhibit some deviant behaviours. Some may withdraw, not respond to the teachers (I had a child in class III who took almost a

year to speak up in class), some may get aggressive, some may become bossy, some may cry for no apparent reason (anxiety over anything new that gets introduced). Like I mentioned earlier, these behaviours could be because of the anxiety that they are possibly going through and a variety of unsettled emotional problems. It is therefore quite important for teachers to establish a rapport with the child (age or class level is no bar – emotional issues can be a problem for any age group – don't we all go through bad days owing to some stressful personal situation?)

Most of the time, the issue teachers face with first-generation learners is that children do not have anyone at home to provide academic support or make them do their homework, the very definition of first-generation learners the first ones to go to school. It is important, then, as teachers to think about the nature of homework in such situations or even the reasons for giving homework. Why keep giving something when it is clear that the

child cannot do it? A lot can be achieved by being a little creative and considerate of children's family conditions. Teachers can effortlessly inculcate other habits in children that pave the way for academic learning – they can schedule after-school hours for the children (literally timetable it as parents may also not have time to spend with their children), develop work habits by setting routines, motivate them to read (it could be labels, sign boards, TV etc), teach time management skills (could be the simplest of things like waking up on time in the morning to getting ready for school).

Once again, I would like to emphasise the fact that these strategies are not only for the lower classes. There are many children who lack such discipline and habits of self-regulation in senior classes too. Teachers need to make that extra effort to explain the kind of work they are giving children. Parents can be requested to stay beside their child when they are doing homework or even just find out from children if they have any work to be completed. Though they may not be able to provide any academic support, the act of being involved in their child's schooling and learning can motivate the child to study. Such involvement and engagement with parents will definitely help and they will start supporting their children. Therefore, the parent-teacher relationship is crucial to this approach. Once parents feel respected and involved, they will also go that extra mile to ensure their child is regular to school, which in itself can be a concern in many cases.

Marks are, of course, an indicator of children's learning and parents also consider marks important. But schools can take initiatives in making learning evidence-based by having meaningful interactions

with parents during PTMs. Teachers can share worksheets, answer sheets and notebooks of children's work with parents and explain to parents their child's work and capacity. Most of the time, this is not considered because parents are not educated and will not understand. I think it is our responsibility as teachers to share children's work and it is the parents' right to know about their ward's performance. The PTMs should not become a complaining session, which is the reason parents avoid PTMs. If we truly believe that 'every child can learn', we need to ensure that we are highlighting the child's strengths as well as the areas of improvement. Some schools screen educational films at PTMs. All these are ways of involving parents in their child's education and not just academics.

All students come to school with diverse needs and abilities, so there is no student who is fundamentally different. Schools also offer remedial classes, extra classes to support such children. Remedial classes will be successful as long as teachers are using different strategies to fill children's learning gaps and are not repeating the same things done in the class. Otherwise, children will find excuses not to attend these classes. The most important aspect here is the community connect: we need to ensure that parents, teachers and the school are on the same side and working for the same purpose and support one another for the wellbeing of the children.

It is up to each one of us as teachers to recognise the needs of the children and provide them a safe and conducive learning environment. It might be good to revisit Chapter 2 of the NCF 2005 document (Learning and Knowledge), to refresh our memories on what learning is all about.

### References

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