

Children who Struggle with Reading

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In school, learning to read is considered to be foundational for the learning of all the other subjects. It is often seen that some children reach upper primary classes without mastering the skill of reading and as a result, they lag behind. During school visits, this comes up as a concern from teachers that the children are unable to read, 'Please tell us what can be done?' Teachers want a strategy which would enable children to read fast. In reality, this requires a well-meditated plan, time and consistent efforts.

In this context, last year, we got an opportunity to support teachers in working with a group of children who were struggling in reading in an upper primary school. This group had many children who had already reached class VI and VII but were struggling with the basic aspects of reading. Two of them were especially behind. They could not even identify alphabets and *matras*. Of them, the girl did not even speak and was also not regular in school. She used to copy a chapter from her textbook and considered that equivalent to studying or schoolwork. But she was unable to read words from the book and was not able to identify *varna* and *matra* properly. The other child was only familiar with his name and the names of his family members; he too was not familiar with *varna* and *matra*. This child also faced the additional difficulty

of forgetting whatever was taught to him by the next day. In this manner, both these children were really struggling with reading. Other children were at different levels.

We prepared a comprehensive plan of working with them. It was decided that apart from learning *varna* and *matra*, the children would also be exposed to some small books of children's literature, which would be read out to them and there would be some discussion around them. These books would also be used to practice identification of words, *varna* and *matra*. For this, we found the NCERT published *Barkha* series and similar children's literature to be appropriate, as these relate to the everyday life experiences of the children. These books were read aloud to the children and then there were discussions around the books where the children brought forward their experiences. Stories and poems were written on the blackboard and children were asked to read them. This was used to practice word and *matra* identification. From the words they could identify, they were asked to make similar sounding words, like *Choti* and *Moti* from *Roti*. Along with this, they were asked to write sentences, record their experiences or think and write what they wanted to.



In this process, children took a bit more time to learn words and *matras* but they have now started reading. They are at the next level. There is hope that in some time, they would start reading fluently. Similarly, the other children of this group too, who as of now, read haltingly, would learn to read with the help of children's literature and their reading speed would also improve. Along with this, they are also practising writing. Now, it seems that all these children would join the mainstream of the class and would be able to learn other subjects also.

While working with these children who were struggling with reading, we have understood that in our educational system, there are many such children who lag behind in the areas of reading and

writing and that is why are left from the mainstream of the system. In many schools, teachers though are able to identify children who struggle with reading, they are unable to plan a systematic intervention for them. As a result, the problem persists. It is essential that we make a systematic plan for work with such children. For this, relevant resource materials are essential, with which the students can connect their life experiences. Such material can then also be used to learn the identification of words and alphabets. In this intervention plan, it is essential to provide the students with meaningful reading experiences. If the work proceeds in this manner, then every child will be able to read and be able to participate in the world of knowledge.



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When a child crosses the threshold of school, she not only brings her bag, slate and chalk, books and notebooks, but also her complete social and cultural background: her full or empty stomach, her curiosities, her fears, hesitations, mother tongue and other facets. And if this child comes from a family that has not previously had a relationship with the structure of education, then the school and the teachers are required to be even more flexible.

Anant Gangola, Education for All, p 6.