

‘There are two goals in the experiential learning process. One is to learn the specifics of a particular subject, and the other is to learn about one’s own learning process.’ David A Kolb

Experiential learning is learning with an authentic purpose that uses real-life experiences from the children’s local context as a pedagogic medium to develop knowledge, skills and character. Addressing the real and contextual experiences makes learning more engaging, meaningful and personalised for each child and helps in the development of vital skills, such as problem-solving and decision-making.

Through its four major components, experiential learning provides opportunities to achieve high critical thinking and collaboration skills. David A Kolb developed the experiential learning concept which divides the learning process into four basic theoretical components:

- *Concrete Experience*, that is, to provide an environment where the child grapples with a problem/situation involving all cognitive dimensions.
- *Reflective Observation* makes the child probe further into the task at hand and learn critically.
- *Abstract Conceptualisation* leads the child to

think outside the box and collaborate with others to achieve learning outcomes. Meaningful experiences followed by reflection and dialogue help the child to think.

- *Active Experimentation* is closer to the destination – real and meaningful understanding.

Introducing the concept of rights

The concept of democracy, the Constitution of India and fundamental rights are generally introduced in Indian schools at the middle and secondary levels. Fundamental rights, as a topic, is gradually introduced from class VI in the NCERT textbooks. These rights, at this age, appear to be somewhat abstract in nature. Hence, great care is taken to introduce these through various representations, narratives, political cartoon strips etc. Another way of explaining these in a more concrete form is by introducing *Child Rights*. What can be a better mode of learning than letting children experience and reflect!

The Heritage School, Gurgaon, uses the experiential methodology for teaching and learning. Through this article, we share our experience of working as Educators in this school through an expedition.

The idea of the expedition *Be the Change* came from the need to bring the concepts of the social science textbook, which otherwise are abstract, to what is more concrete in nature and can be easily understood by the students. A group of teachers brainstormed the concepts of classes VI and VII Social Science textbooks as per NCF 2005 and Common Core Standards (United States of America). Our knowledge partners, *Disha India Centre for Experiential Learning* helped in conceptualising the framework - deciding the big idea, core concepts and flow of the expedition.

What is a Learning Expedition?

Learning expeditions are inter-disciplinary and aim at integrating content as well as skills from natural and social sciences, literacy and numeracy in the best possible ways. This approach takes learners



beyond the textbook curriculum and leads them to multiple opportunities to reach excellence through continuous planning, execution, and reflection. All learning expeditions revolve around empowering children to observe, think, reflect, analyse, synthesise and understand deeply. Using in-depth investigations, learning expeditions take students into the community, the field and bring experts to their classrooms to engage students in real-life learning experiences.

Connecting Expedition to KHOJ

KHOJ is a pedagogy that provides opportunities for children to experience the real world beyond their homes and find the true purpose of learning. Children explore their local history, natural heritage, flora-fauna, demography, as well as the design, layout and working of social, political, administrative and economic systems and their interrelationships. This helps them to relate and understand their local community better which, in turn, equips and empowers them to take responsibility for the betterment of their community.

It is important to understand that at the heart of each such practice or recommendation lies a strong commitment to inclusion and a belief that individual differences in children's ability and interests are an inevitable reality of every classroom, in every context.

Stages of Expedition

Big idea: The backbone of every expedition is the enduring understanding developed in students which remains with them for years ahead.

Guiding questions: These help to focus on and achieve the big idea. Generated from the big idea, guiding questions provide direction and also set the boundary for the expedition.

Hook: All learning expeditions embark on the journey with a compelling experience from the local context of children that engages and sparks curiosity in them commonly termed as, the *hook*.

Learning through Expedition and KHOJ

Each grade in the school is allotted two themes for one year. The teachers are not seen as social science or science teachers *per se* but as teachers

of expedition. In 2013, (when we worked there) two important themes were taken for the expedition:

1. Human body - focusing on science learning outcomes
2. Be the change - focusing on social science learning outcomes

As no learning can happen in isolation, it is extremely important that the children are able to see things in connection to one another.

Keeping the core ideas of the Constitution - diversity, equality, democracy, rights and duties - teachers designed the big idea and guiding questions. To begin with, teachers tried to hook the children to the expedition by showing them a video about a group of children coming from a different socio-economic background. Then, we moved on to news articles on urban and rural children, children from families going through depression, personal experience of parents, a child talking about how she wants parents to spend time with her, to name a few.

Building background knowledge

The next stage, Building Background Knowledge (BBK) is a protocol that includes critical discussion that allows children to build knowledge and become more informed about the expedition. It enables students to read, think and engage in raising questions to further deepen their understanding. BBK supports the unpacking of the expedition and forming of the big idea.

In this context, teachers tried to explain the meaning of keywords such as rights, duties, discrimination, justice and used several readings and group discussions to strengthen the students' understanding of the concepts of 'diversity' and 'equality'.

Flow of Expedition

The goal was to introduce rights in general and Child Rights in particular as proposed by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) to middle school students. The NCPCR's mandate is to ensure that all laws, policies, programmes, and administrative mechanisms are in consonance with Child Rights as enshrined in the Constitution of India and also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A child is defined as a person in the 0-18 years age group.

The special rights of children are:

Right to safe environments

Right to Safe Environments

Right to safe environments

Right to food

Right to healthcare

Right to education

Right against child marriage

Right to freedom

Right to be free from discrimination

Right to protection from abuse

Right to protection from exploitation and neglect

Right to be heard and participate freely

Right to leisure and free time

Right to family life

Right to leisure and free time

From the big idea, we narrowed it down to concretise the idea of rights. We did so by introducing Child Rights to the learners. Of all the twelve Child Rights, we chose to focus on the 'Right to leisure and free time'. According to UNCRC Article 31, the child has a right to adequate rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to his or her age.

In the school, the topic of Child Rights was dealt with in-depth and students created a questionnaire to find out if they are deprived of any right. The same questionnaire was used to collect data -- students conducted interviews of other children in their neighbourhood and analysed the data to find major issues. While students were actively conducting interviews, organising and analysing the data, at the same time in the classroom they were reading in-depth about various individuals and groups working to ensure that every child gets the rights he/she is entitled to.

Needs and rights

The first activity was conducted to understand the difference between a right and a need. It was adapted from UNICEF's Toolkit on Diversion and Alternatives to Detention 2009; Activity 27: Glass of Water. The aim was to elicit participants' existing understanding of rights and to clarify key differences between needs and rights.

What is the difference between these two statements: 'I *need* a glass of water' and 'I *have a right* to a glass of water.'? Which is stronger? Why?' Through this activity, students saw that the main difference between needs and rights is the relationship between the person claiming the rights (rights-holder) and the person responsible for ensuring those rights are met (duty-bearer).

Outbound programme

An outbound programme (*KHOJ*) was organised in collaboration with the *URMUL* (Rural Health, Research and Development) Trust, Bikaner, which has been working towards strengthening the

status of children in society. It works systematically with communities, local authorities, as well as policymakers, to strengthen opportunities and ensure the survival of children in the desert. It also engages in the advocacy of Child Rights and runs the *Childline 1098*. We wanted to engage with the students of a government school in a village and understand their awareness towards Child Rights and in particular, the *Right to leisure and free time*. The outbound programme was designed and conceptualised in a manner that we develop an understanding of the same right in two different contexts.

A government school in Bajju village of Bikaner was chosen and the same process of collecting and analysing data that was conducted in the Heritage School was also conducted by the students of the Bajju Government School.

By this time, all the young minds were filled with various questions and as they were getting more and more curious, here came our much-awaited five-day-long outbound learning trip *KHOJ*. Students and teachers of the Heritage School travelled to Bajju village train and were put up at the URMUL

guest houses.

It was an altogether different experience for the students and teachers of the Heritage school to work closely with the students of the government school, Bajju. After spending a day together in small groups, playing ice-breaker games, we could see a rapport being built. The data which we received from the children was significantly different with reference to the girl child. While it pointed to the fact that girls did not get time to play as they were supposed to do household chores in the context of the village, for girls in Gurgaon city the biggest problem was very few safe spaces.

Children spent evenings sitting on the sand dunes watching sunsets and reflecting on how the life of a child in the city is different from that of a child of the same age in a village. The deep conversations and thoughtful expressions were at times painful and left many teary-eyed. And at this point, we rolled in our next core idea -- active and aware citizens. Our students decided they will make people aware of child rights and started working for action – the culmination.



Culmination of expedition

As decided by students, the culmination of the expedition was a *nukkad natak* or a street play on child rights. We had two theatre persons with us. The theme, dialogues and script were to be co-evolved with the students as and when the interaction took place. So, every day, we would work on the awareness of child rights, in particular, the right to play by creating situations for them to come up with a script around it.

After day two, it was decided that the students of the Bajju school could come to the URMUL campus for rehearsal. Each day, the play progressed with dialogues, script, and actors getting finalised and on the last day, the students of both the schools presented a play – *Bal Adhikar*.

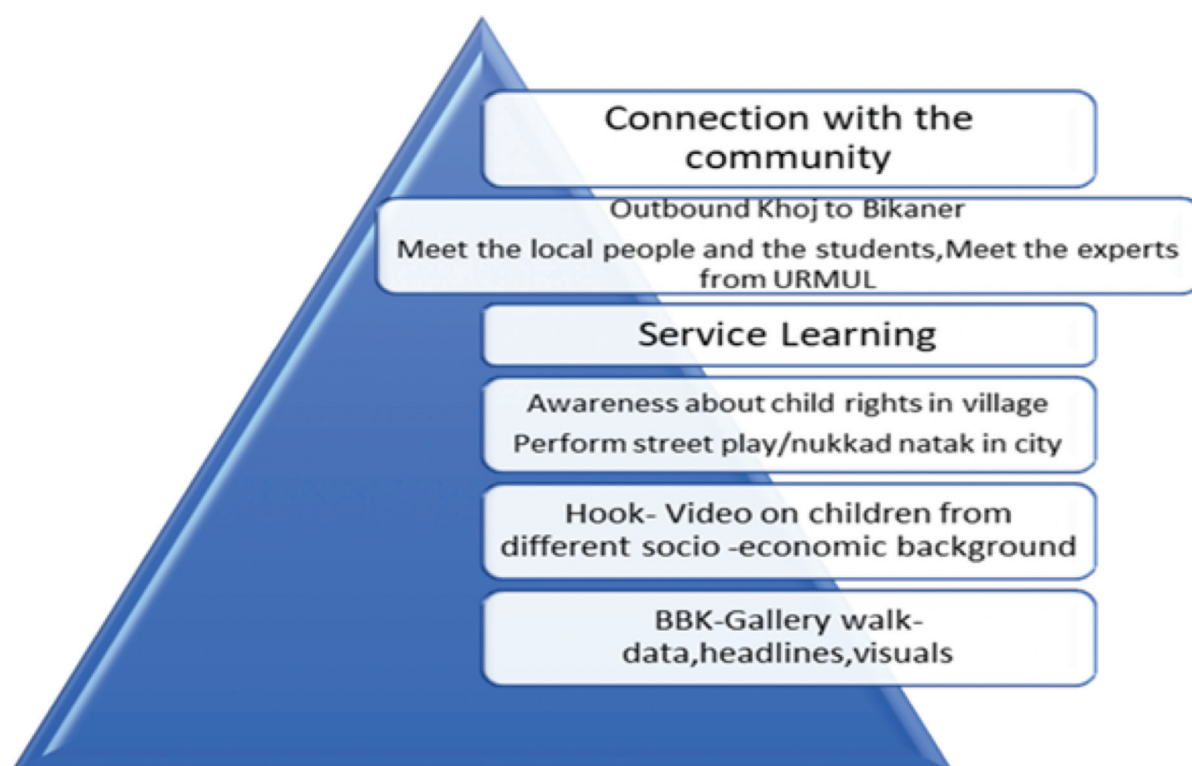
After returning to Gurgaon, the students of the Heritage School wrote an assignment on 'The Power Within Me' in English and *Bal adhikaron ki khoj* in Hindi. Several rounds of drafts were written. It was self- and peer-assessed with a checklist provided. After the play was performed on the streets of Gurgaon, the students were asked to do a self-assessment based on the Learning Targets. Throughout this expedition, learning targets

supported with a checklist and a rubric helped us to keep the learners on the task and culminate the *Be the Change* expedition with success.

Another highlight of this expedition was a rendezvous with Leila Seth organised in the school. Leila Seth (1930-2017) was the first woman judge of the Delhi High Court and the first woman to become the Chief Justice of a state High Court, also the author of *We the Children*, a book that introduces young readers to the Constitution of India.

Conclusion

For us teachers, this expedition remains close to our hearts as throughout its course, we could witness how young minds were receiving the information and collaborating with each other towards a common goal to effect change. The deep reflections of our children strengthened our belief that even concepts such as rights, democracy, equality, that appear so distant from a child's understanding, can be with properly designed instructional strategies and activities explained clearly to them. As teachers, our role throughout was to facilitate their thinking and lead them to the action of being active and informed citizens.



Learning Targets

Social Sciences	<p>I can differentiate between diversity, discrimination and inequality using examples.</p> <p>I can evaluate how prejudice contributes to inequality around me.</p> <p>I can identify key elements that influence the functioning of Democracy.</p> <p>I can justify how Democracy as a form of governance is favourable for ensuring equality, dignity and justice in society.</p> <p>I can cite specific components from the Constitution that ensures equality and justice for all.</p> <p>I can pick specific components of the Constitution to analyse real-life examples of discrimination around me.</p> <p>I can evaluate the implementation of democratic process in my community.</p> <p>I can raise critical questions that probe, and facilitate deeper analysis of the democratic processes that exist in society around me.</p>
Reading	<p>I can use comprehension strategies to understand a text.</p> <p>I can use close reading strategies to extract the required information from the given text.</p>
Writing	I can draw evidence from various texts to support analysis, reflection, and research and present it in the required format.
Speaking	I can present my understanding in a confident, articulate and organized manner adhering to the prescribed format.
Critical Thinking	I can raise critical questions that prove and facilitate deeper analysis of the democratic process that exists in society.
Character and Culture	<p>I can seek and give constructive feedback to improve my work as well as that of others.</p> <p>I can be inclusive by giving all my crew members equal opportunity to participate.</p> <p>I can demonstrate respect by listening attentively to the person who is speaking.</p>
Visual and Performing Arts	I can use theatre (street play) as a medium to campaign for my neighbourhood.



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