

Nature Walks as a Pedagogical Tool

Maddirala Sai Praveen

Learning by playing in different types of outdoor spaces provides a wide array of learning, gross motor and mental health benefits for children. Nature walks are a way by which children in *anganwadi* centres learn from their environment. Nature walks are outings to an open space by which the teacher plans to give specific exposure to the children on a particular theme.ⁱ For children, it is a change from their daily routine during which they get exposed to and can interact with the environment. They experience joy and wonder in this form of interaction.

Types of nature walks

Children can be taken to fields, parks, playgrounds, or a school depending on the purpose of the visit that the teacher decides on. For example, if the plant and tree theme is in progress, the teacher can take the children to a park. Learning happens naturally when children are outdoors experiencing the environment around them. The walk can also be to the nearby post office, bicycle repair shop, police station, place of worship, Primary Health Centre, carpentry workshop etc, where children can interact with the community members and learn from them. These walks provide limitless opportunities through sensorial stimulating experiences for hands-on learning.

A nature walk to look at plants and trees

Let us understand the entire process of this pedagogy by going on a walk along with a group of children from an *anganwadi*.

A day before the nature walk, the teacher informed the parents and asked them to send a water bottle and a napkin with their child the next day. Before going for the walk, the teacher made all necessary arrangements (for example, carrying paper and crayons) and also told the children about the places they would visit. The teacher also stressed the fact that all of them need to be in a group and must stay together.

The walk



The walk started from the *anganwadi* with the teacher leading the way followed by the children in a line, with the *anganwadi* helper at the tail-end. The children came to a field where vegetables were planted. The teacher asked the children to look at the parts of the plants, such as flowers, stems, buds and vegetables that were growing there. The children got the opportunity to touch and feel the plants, flowers, fruits and asked questions, like how do the plants grow? Do plants eat food? To take the discussion further, the teacher had a conversation about plants - parts of a plant, how plants live and the uses of plants.

The children also came across bikes, a tractor, a herd of sheep, cows and buffaloes. They waved to their neighbours. Such experiences refresh the children's state of mind. They enjoy entering

the world in which they otherwise roam freely and regularly. One child expressed her happiness on seeing buffaloes belonging to her family and another in showing his peers the spot from where they brought their water.



Follow-up activities

When the group came to a temple that had ample open space, the teacher made the children sit in a circle and conducted a warm-up activity for them to settle down and followed it up with a conversation on what the children had seen during the walk. Even the children who did not participate actively in conversions inside the centre, shared their experiences joyfully.

The teacher then gave them the opportunity to draw what they had seen during the walk. Children used crayons to draw (good for the development of fine motor skills). They expressed their happiness creatively in the form of beautiful art with details that they could easily recall. The teacher could stretch this activity to include more than what she could do inside the *anganwadi* centre since what the children had seen was fresh in their minds.



A child's drawing of the Gandhi statue (which they had seen on the way) along with two children playing next to it.



Children explaining that the blue circles were lakes and the orange circles were paddy fields.

To provide opportunities for the development of gross motor skills, the teacher had designed a game in which the children were instructed to collect fallen leaves, twigs and flowers. While collecting them, children were giggling out of joy, talking to each other, 'I got more leaves', 'You got a big stick' etc. The teacher intervened where necessary and facilitated a seamless discussion to build their understanding of concepts of 'more and less' 'big and small'.

In a pleasant environment, children are motivated to explore their surroundings, play with other children, and engage in activities conducted by the teacher. There is little scope for them to fight or quarrel with each other in such a joyful setting. Following instructions like not to pluck flowers, leaves, avoid running on the street, crossing the road carefully, etc., encourages children to follow good social behaviour.

Conclusion

Learning from hands-on experiences makes long-lasting impressions in the schema of children. This happens successfully when we bring the children out of the centre and provide opportunities for them to explore and experiment in nature. In the entire process, the teacher needs to provide appropriate scaffolding to children to construct understanding.

Nature walks are an important pedagogical tool which when integrated with a thematic curriculum can aid in enhancing the understanding, thinking and curiosity of children regarding a specific theme. Nature walks, along with suitable follow-up activities, can lead to the development of children's social, emotional, language, cognitive, physical and creative aspects. The children's levels

of interest increase during nature walks which, in turn, increase their participation in the follow-up

activities thus facilitating their learning in a playful environment.



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Endnotes

- i ECE Sangareddy is an initiative of the Azim Premji Foundation to build the capacity of *anganwadi* teachers. As part of this, *anganwadi* teachers are helped with implementing a developmentally appropriate learning programme in the centres. Detailed plans for 14 themes, such as plants, fruits or seasons, etc, that the children explore through the year, have been created.

References

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Maddirala Sai Praveen currently works as Early Childhood Education (ECE) Resource Person in the Sangareddy District Institute. After his master's degree from Azim Premji University, he joined the Azim Premji Foundation. He loves to read fiction and listen to music. He can be contacted at maddirala.praveen@azimpremjifoundation.org