

**21**

When A Teacher Facilitates

Nisha Butoliya

I worked as a Primary teacher for six years in two private schools for three years each. In both these schools, all the teachers were given appropriate inputs to follow Theme Based Teaching- Learning processⁱ under the guidance of Shri Rasik Bhai Shah, Educational Consultant, Mumbai.

Though the whole idea of theme based learning is innovative and the activities that we planned were always exciting, there is one particular experience which is extremely thrilling and that I would like to share with you all.

My class III children were working with the theme 'Myself'. It was the beginning of February 2009 and I had to cover the topics mass, volume and length in mathematics along with the other topics of Language and EVS. The concepts of Language and EVS were easy to cover since I could plan numerous activities based on this theme. I was getting tense, since the activities which would bind all these subjects – EVS, Language and the above-mentioned concepts of Mathematics - were tough to find.

I thought a lot...looking at these words (mass, volume and length), constantly the picture of a weighing balance danced in front of my mind's eye; but what to do? Should I take my children to a shop, where they would see how things are weighed, how liquids are measured? But they see this every day. What could be done to make this experience a new and an exciting one? And only looking at the shopkeeper is not that exciting. Will he allow my children to touch the balance and use it for weighing? But how many children can actually use it - all 30 students? Every time repeating the same thing?...Boring.... These were the thoughts that passed through my mind.

This is the point at which this interesting idea struck me – what if my children make a weight balance, weights, containers to measure liquids? Great!

I told my children that we shall set up shops two days later and sell things to the teachers and students of the other classes. They started asking me a lot of questions, answering some of their own questions and giving me ideas on how this can be done.

We decided to take small steps – they all knew kilogram (kg), gram (g), litre (l) millilitre (ml), millimetre (mm), centimeter (cm) and metre (m). After a kind of recapitulation we went out to collect stones which they were going to use as measures of weight. After that we sat in a big circle in the playground. Each one of them displayed the stones. They labeled the stones – 1 kg, 500gm, 250gm, 50gm etc. I kept a watch on the size of stones – very soon they realised that the relative size of their stones and the quantity it depicts should match. They learnt from their peers, helped each other, corrected themselves, searched for smoother stones.

We went back to the class. Together, we thought about the ways of making a balance. We exchanged ideas...all were great! They suggested the use of mud plates, steel plates, cups, paper plates, leaves, sticks, iron rods, threads, etc.

I asked them to think about the items they wish to sell: one item could be repeated only once. Here, some said that they would sell oil. I said I need rope, is anyone interested in selling it? Immediately 5-6 hands sprang up. Here was the opportunity for me to discuss the difference between length, mass and volume and how we measure them. We all thought about the ways. Containers for measuring liquids

were chosen and we had metre scales to measure length.

Then we discussed how we could make this activity interesting for the children and teachers of other classes? We thought that we'll advertise for the items that we were going to sell. Again there were ten different ideas on advertisements – slogans to be written on paper, slogans to be spoken aloud repeatedly, some models, etc.

The next day, we all prepared for our shops. I helped them with small things like arranging tables, decorating their slogans, pasting their advertisements and was following their suggestions.



The day after, we all came to the school, ready to set up our shops.

All the tables were arranged along the walls. In front of the tables, I saw beautiful slogans and advertisements – ‘Buy 2 kg pulses and get 1 kg free’, ‘Oil for hair, for cooking, for skin; buy and be healthy’. They were original, their own. Some of them also prepared paper bags, because they said we need to keep our environment clean.

My cute little children looked so enthusiastic; setting up their shops, they were so busy, new ideas were buzzing and I stood there watching them, absolutely speechless!

Now the other teachers came one by one with their students. They asked them to give 3 kg potatoes, they

bargained, asked for change and my little children again got busy in calculations. Yes, they also made money with papers! Classes came, teachers asked questions on money, mass, volume, conversions, uses of carrots etc. How much is 1kg rice? What If I buy 1kg and 250 gms.?



Some of my children looked puzzled, some confident - but nobody left the ground. They went on responding to the ‘customers’ queries.

One of the teachers praised my children for their communication in English. She said that they were fluent. I felt happy and proud! But I was wondering if the children who used to fumble had, all of a sudden, become fluent because they got a context to talk in?

At the end of about 2 hrs., when almost all the Primary classes were done visiting, we displayed the board of SHOP CLOSED. My children looked tired, but enthused.

We all saw that the grains of pulses, cereals were spilled all over the floor. What to do? We started thinking. Then I threw an idea – should we collect and throw them in the dustbin? All of them shouted, ‘No!’ (We had discussed about the ‘food we eat’ in the previous theme). Then we all decided to do something which would be useful. One of them suggested that we collect the grains and carry it back home. While pondering for some time, we decided that we will sow the grains in the garden. All of us started

collecting the grains lying on the floor, went to the park, dug the ground, sowed the seeds, and used our water bottles to water the plants.

Every day we used to expect that something will come out and one day, it did. That was a real achievement!

After sowing the grains, when we went back inside the classroom, I suggested that all of us write about the activity - how we planned, what preparations were made, how it was done, experiences of interacting with people and what they felt about the activity overall.

Children wrote 2 to 3 full-page reports – class 3 children! I was absolutely surprised! When they were asked to write based on other given topics they used to write a paragraph or two, but today they went on writing.... in their own words....not in very fluent English...but, believe me, it was an original, perfect reflection of their plans, preparation and their hard work. They asked me several questions – mainly translations of Hindi and Gujarati words and sometimes sentence constructions. I realized that my children were great; it was I who was at fault. I hadn't given my children proper context to write about.

Assessment

We used to follow continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE). My children were always aware that their teacher would definitely keep recording. I didn't mind sharing my observations with my children.

I had the reports of my children to evaluate various aspects of English language – vocabulary, grammar,

spellings, handwriting, creative writing and I also kept a record of observations when they were having their conversations with the other teachers and students.

For mathematics, I went to each of the tables and asked them pertinent questions on conversions of kilogram into gram, meter into centimeter, liter into milliliter and similar other questions.

For EVS, there was not much scope for questions and answers, but I could make my observations on their environmental sensitivity aspects.

Note – All these criteria of assessment are as per CBSE norms.

Reflection

When I sat and thought about this whole experience, I wondered what had I done? What had my part in all this been?

My children had prepared the weights, they set the shop, they had raised questions, they had asked my help, they had thrown out ideas.

They had learnt everything – more on money, mass, volume, length, uses of cereals, pulses, vegetables. They created slogans, they interacted in English with the teachers and students, they understood the questions that were asked by the people, they wrote reports, they realized the use of paper bags instead of plastic, we cleaned the class and we grew some saplings.

Math, EVS, Language - I felt it was a perfect class!

Yes, I supported and encouraged them. I gave them opportunity. They did all the work, I just ignited the fire, I had facilitated!

Footnote

i In theme-based learning, concepts and skills are woven around a theme, so the whole curriculum revolves around the specific themes.

NISHA is currently part of the Language team at Azim Premji University, Bangalore. She was a primary school teacher and an academic coordinator for several years. She worked on theme-based teaching-learning processes for a long time. Her interest areas include developing curriculum, understanding teaching learning process and interacting with students and teachers. She can be contacted at nisha@azimpremjifoundation.org