

**10**

Creative Teaching and Contentment

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Context and challenge

The most contented days of my life so far are the days I facilitated the learning process for primary school children in a remote village in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. I am able to say these words after completing 6 years of service as a Government primary school teacher. From the very first day of my career I realized that the excellent methods that I had learnt during the course of study were difficult to implement in the classroom. It was neither the right time nor the right context. But I am sure the knowledge gained during the course of study is good enough to tackle all kinds of situations. In the initial years of my service, with no courage to face the system and the demands from the community; I compromised and became a part of the large system. However, it took me a few years to get the momentum to meet the demands that the community put on schools in terms of learning outcomes.

The following were some of my observations in a 'typical' village school:

1. Many parents wish to see learning outcomes in their children within no time (in a week)
2. Many children can recite rhymes given in the textbook just for the sake of recitation (no focus on introduction of particular alphabet, concept, context and meaning)
3. Orally they can spell out all the vocabulary listed in the textbook without proper identification and recognition of the words
4. Exercises given in the textbooks are filled by either elders at home or neighbours
5. A feeling among the community that playing games (activities) is not good for education and

that the teacher comes to school only to play with children

6. An understanding that noise in the school means no discipline

The various stakeholders are habituated to see the school from a particular angle. Conscientious efforts of six months made people in the village believe that the things happening in the school was towards betterment of their children only. I spent a lot of time interacting with the majority of the parents regularly to explain the purpose of education, its importance, etc. To make understanding easier for parents, I drew the example of agricultural activity, where they get a good harvest only after tedious work for six months; starting with sowing seeds to harvesting, every stage requires much attention and care. Educating the child is similar; it requires a lot of time, care, and concern. It is unlike electricity where if you turn the switch on, the bulb will glow instantly.

In this context, while I was faced with a number of challenges as a teacher, I saw them as boons to implement a creative teaching learning method, using newspapers as a source for teaching (thanks to Eenadu Telugu daily Sundays supplement for children, "Hai Bujji")

Introduction and identification of alphabets

Step 1: Introduction of alphabet through a rhyme not necessarily given in the text book.

Step 2: Asking 4 /5 questions for which answers will be the words starting with that of the alphabet intended to be learnt.

Step 3: Writing the answers on black board differentiating the first alphabet which is selected.

Example (Telugu first vowel: అ) (a)

మీ ఇంట్లో వంట ఎవరు చేస్తారు ? (అమ్మ, అక్క, అవ్వ)
Mee imtlo vamta evaru chaesthaaru? (amma, akka, avva)

నీవు ఇంటికి వెళ్ళగానే పుస్తకాలను ఎక్కడ పెడతావు ?
(అరుగు)

Neevu imtiki vellagaane puthkaalanu ekkada pedathaavu? (arugu)

మీనాన్న ఉదయాన్నే పొలానికి దేనిని తీసుకొని వెళతాడు ? (అరక)

Mee naanna udayaannae polaaniki daenini theesukoni velathaadu ? (araka)

పులి, సింహం ఎక్కడ ఉంటాయి ? (అడవి)
Puli simham ekkada umtaayi ? (adavi)

For each and every question expected answers are given in brackets and when children do not come up with these expected answers, I had to probe a little bit further till I got the desired answers. This probing activity has some advantages.

It allows the child to speak (a good activity for a new-comer to the school, as it helps in the socialization process), He/She overcomes fear (helps in making conversations and communicating), and most important is that it helps the student and teacher grow closer and know each other better.

Step 4: Reinforcement of introduced alphabet

The poem given in text book or one that is used in step one is copied on a chart and the words with the letters to be learnt coloured brightly

This is followed by repeating of these words, with reference to their respective pictures

Step 5: Exercises for children

A piece of newspaper with three to four lines of 10 to 15 words is given to each child for home work. Children have to go over the taught alphabet with

pencil on that piece of paper (Be careful as sometimes this activity becomes contagious in children and they will start circling alphabets in whatever printed document they come across, including sometimes their elder sibling's textbooks!)

Step 6: Evaluation

Ask students to think of names of various things that they come across and try to come up with words beginning with the same letter of the alphabet.

పిల్లలు ఇంటి దగ్గర ఇది చేస్తారని అమ్మ కొడుతుంది? (అల్లరి)
Pillalu imtidaggara idi chaestharani amma kodutumundi (allari)

మీరు మీ తలను దీనిలో చూస్తూ దువ్వు కొంటారు (అద్దం)
Meeru mee thalanu deenilo choosthoo duvvu komtaatu (addam)

This method requires a lot of patience and time to see results. The teaching-learning process for the first few letters takes a lot of time. Once the students are familiar with the method, it gains momentum and less time is required for the remaining letters and *maathras* (*gunimthaalu*) also.

The same method, with small changes, can be used for teaching *maathras*. How vowels are related to consonants to get *maathras* (*gunimthaalu*) is introduced through a rhyme.

Step1: The following rhyme is to be practised with rhythmic claps

అ ఆ ఇ ఈ ఉ ఊ
A aa I ee u oo

క కా కి కీ కు కూ,
Ka kaa ki kee ku koo

ఎ ఏ ఐ
E ae ai

కె కే కై...
Ke kae kai

ఒ ఓ ఔ
O oo aou

కో కో కౌ,
Ko koa kaou

అం అ:
Am aahaa

కం క:
Kam kahaa

Step 2: With the help of the a teaching-aid developed for the purpose, *mathraas (gunimthaalu)* for all the consonants can be shown and used for the purpose of training and reinforcement.

Two wheels are made of cardboard - one slightly bigger than the other. The outer margin of the bigger wheel is filled with symbols of maathraas and the inner wheel with consonants. Just below the maathraas, two windows are made, as shown in the picture. By turning big and small wheels and by choosing the appropriate window, mathraas for all consonants are displayed to children.

Step 3: A few words are prepared in such a way that that the consonant with particular maathraa appears as first letter in a few words, as second position in the next few words, and as last position in a few words.

Example:

విమానం, విరామం, విషయం
Vimaanam, viraamam, vishayam

చెవి, రవి, కవి
Chevi, ravi, kavi

అడవి, నిడివి, మనవి
Adavi, nidivi, manavi

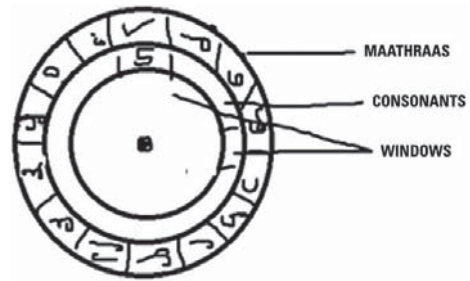
Step 4: Is similar to the exercise mentioned in introduction of alphabets using the newspaper as a tool, except that here, instead of alphabets, mathraas are the focus.

Step 5: Picture with different objects can be given and the children asked to identify the names of the

objects (like one given in the assessment paper shown in the annexure).

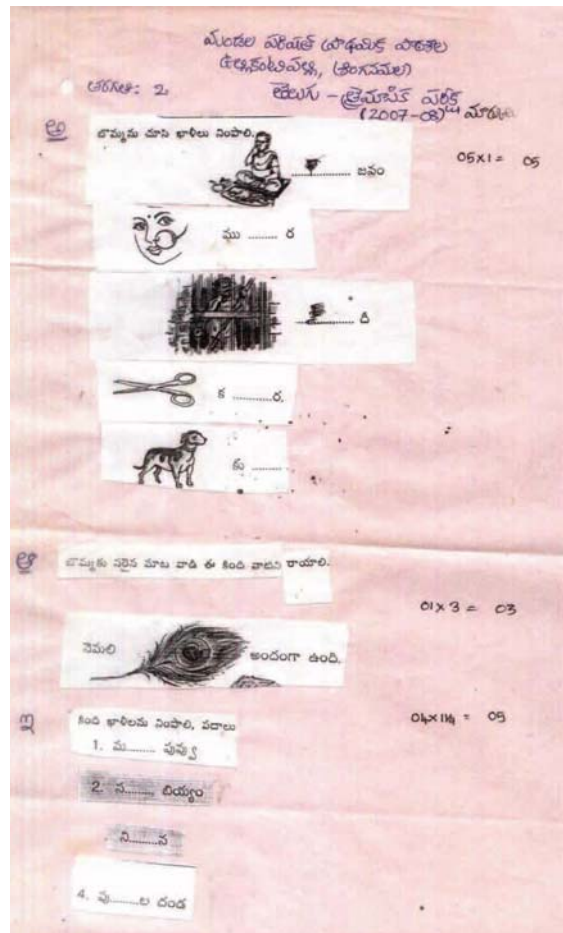
Annexure

1. Diagram of the teaching aid mentioned for teaching *mathraas (gunimthaalu)*



2. Assessment paper used few years back for class 2 children using newspaper cuttings.

(a)



(b)



(c)



NAGARAJU is Editor-Telugu version of www.teacehrsofindia.org portal-a joint initiative of Azim Premji Foundation and National Knowledge Commission. He has taught language and biology at primary and secondary levels respectively for more than 15 years. For teaching language, he extensively used vernacular newspapers, supplements and magazines which were meant for children. He is interested in evaluation of teaching-learning process in school education and is keen in promoting early childhood education. He can be contacted at nagaraju@azimpremjifoundation.org