



Editorial

Primary Pack

Word problems - from foe to friend Anjana A.R.

What is the role of language in a math class? Most children may not have any difficulty when it comes to numbers, but they begin to falter when trying to understand the words in a problem. The math teacher needs to ensure that children not only understand numbers but also the words. A math teacher thus becomes an English or language teacher to some extent. Here are some techniques to help children understand 'word' problems.

Cover Story Like a tree in the forest Anandhi Abhi

How do teachers work as a team at different levels - within the classroom and outside or even through the life cycle of the children? When a group of teachers works pedagogically, the real learning for students lies in the nature and quality of relationships among the teachers themselves.

Children learn more from observation and can see if teachers are truly coming together to serve a larger interest or otherwise. Our Cover Story this month seeks to explore how well teachers are teaming up for the sake of students.

Support and strength in networks

Ardra Balachandran

Cogitations

Carrying meaning through language

Prakash Iyer

Is experience essential for children to learn concepts or trigger fresh ideas? Can teachers create appropriate experiences that can act as stimuli for children? How does language contribute to this process? This interesting article tackles this topic in the form of a fictional conversation between two teachers.

Activity

Triggering creative expression Arundhati Dolas, Adithi Muralidhar and Sugra Chunawala

Things to Think About English, English and English!

Dr Pooja Birwatkar

Schools insist that their students speak only in English during school hours and even informal communication between students is scrutinized. Students are forbidden to use Hindi or any mother tongue in school. Isn't language a unique feature of Indian culture and shouldn't the diversity in languages also be given a serious thought when we proclaim education systems to be all inclusive?



Finding My Own Path

Reaching head, heart and body *P. Ajitha*

The process of teaching and learning becomes more engaging when the teacher decides to meld a classroom experience into a lived experience. Here is how a teacher turned a letter-writing activity in the classroom into an experience where the students learned to value the essential worth of a letter.

Leave it to the children

K. Gayathri

Worksheet Math without tears

S.N. Gananath

Our worksheet this time is more of a fun sheet and is an attempt to bring back the pleasure of working with mathematical ideas at the school level. The content, form and flavor are all diverse and teachers teaching and children learning math are sure to find the activities engaging and insightful.

Took Kit

Meeting the challenge of task-based assessment Sajit M Mathews

Focus

Flexibility in assessment: the way ahead Divya Kapoor

Can a flexible assessment system help students to be more engaged and also benefit from the teaching-learning process? This article focuses on effective flexible assessment strategies that can be implemented in the curriculum and the role of the teacher in giving students the autonomy to choose their mode of assessment. Action Research

A 'smart' way to assess projects Tenzing Rapgyal

A reflective teacher shares his thoughts on how he went about assessing students' work when they were asked to work on an English project.

Book Review

Reflections on language pedagogy Chintan Girish Modi

A Step Ahead

It's time... to talk about it! Neerja Singh

How can parents keep pace with their growing children? With reference to sexual assault, the author lists a few steps that parents can take to engage with their children and to keep the lines of communication open at all times.

Time Out

Taking a path less travelled Mohit K. Sharma and Gaurav Sikka

Comment

Taking play seriously Indira Subramanian

In the Indian school context, play has been relegated to the sidelines, as a pedagogy of learning. So how can the principles of play be given a more central role in schooling? This article gives a few tips on how teachers can foster playful learning in their classroom.

Question of the Week Dr B R Sitaram 46

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Triggering creative expression

Arundhati Dolas, Adithi Muralidhar and Sugra Chunawala

Our creative capacity is what truly separates humans from other species and therefore creativity has a paralleled development with the evolution of our culture and society. (David Spendlove, 2008, p. 9)

reativity is a word that is subjective in terms of interpretation and ambiguous in its definition. Yet, it is used frequently in academic and everyday conversation by researchers, educators, teachers and students. Creativity is associated with an individual's ability to produce something novel, appropriate and/or influential. As an adjective, the word 'creative' can give meaning to people or situations. For example, there can be creative people, artists, thinkers, writers, designers and entrepreneurs and there can be creative problems, solutions, talents, ideas, processes and minds. Creativity is studied in a number of disciplines including arts, sciences, and language. In our context of language learning, we associate creativity with meaning making, imagination, self-expression, and recreation.

The context

In May 2017, a summer camp was conducted with students who were entering grade 5. A part of the camp was dedicated towards developing students' language skills, such as reading and writing. In order to make this joyful and relevant, we included activities that provided opportunities for creative expression, such as, letter-art, reading stories, complete-a-story, word-games, poetry-composition, story-writing, crossword puzzles, picture-description, etc. The aim was to provide opportunities for students to develop their linguistic skills (reading, writing, listening), encourage collaborative work and enhance original and imaginative thoughts and ideas. This article discusses two such activities, designed to spark creative expression among primary school students.

Poetry composition

Composing poems gives students an opportunity to construct and express ideas. Elaborating ideas,

thinking outside the box and forming connections and relations enhances learning and critical thinking. In fact, research has suggested that composing poems may foster problem solving, analytical and creative thinking skills. Poetry writing involves, to a certain extent, manipulation of words in a demanding and interesting way to produce creative outputs. In this activity, we gave some newspaper cut-outs (pictures) to students in groups and asked them to compose a poem by linking the pictures. Composing a poem on some random unrelated pictures may appear daunting. However, students took advantage of this opportunity to showcase their ability to play with words. That students found this activity quite engaging was evident in their group interactions and their innovative poems. They also chose their words carefully so as to present a series of rhyming phrases, a popular trait in many poems.

Here is one such poem:



Image 1: A poem composed by 3 boys and 1 girl based on pictures given to them.

English translation of the poem:

I feel like becoming a cook Sometimes in the hotel or sometimes in the kitchen I feel like becoming a cook. I feel like becoming a photographer Sometimes of butterflies and sometimes of peacocks I feel like becoming a photographer. Sometimes I feel like going to a shopping mall To bring some vegetables and get some chocolates Sometimes I feel like going to a shopping mall. Sometimes I feel like having coffee Sometimes I feel like having tea Sometimes I feel like having tea

Story writing

Story writing involves using imagination, building a coherent picture and introducing a logical flow that leaves readers with something to think about. Students in groups were initially asked to state five words with some constraints. For example, one word necessarily had to be a person's name. After finalizing their set of words (थवा, रवी, नथ, यज, नरेंद्र) students wrote a narrative weaving these words into a story, which reflected their cultural connections.

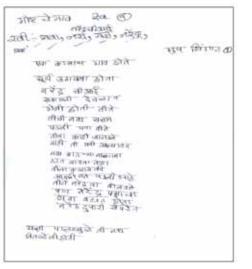


Image 2: Story composed by 2 boys.

English translation of the story:

Narendra's Mother

(Words in English: flock of birds, sun, nose-ring, sacred fire, Narendra)

There was a village called 'Kadlas'. The sun had risen. Narendra's mother had gone to the temple in the morning. There, her nose ring fell into the sacred fire. But she does not realize this. When she came back home, she touched her nose to remove the nose ring and realized that it had fallen somewhere. She called Narendra but he was seeing a flock of birds. By the time Narendra returned in the afternoon, the nose ring had melted in the sacred fire.

This story-writing activity gave students a free rein to play with words, use new words, express emotions and feelings with words and be imaginative. Students also sequenced the events culminating in a dramatic ending! Simple language tasks like this can help students become familiar with grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spellings.

Parting thoughts

Poetry and story composition offer several opportunities to write and express oneself creatively (see references). Though we have showcased only two activities, our preliminary look at students' works indicate that they made connections, sequenced events efficiently, used new vocabulary, brought in dramatics and humour in their writings and conveyed emotions when writing the poems and stories. While research has emphasized links between languagebased activities and development of vocabulary, as well as, fostering creativity and building self-esteem, confidence and self-awareness, it also touches upon the need to connect with students' interests and enhance their literature appreciation. We have attempted to do the same via these activities with children and are currently exploring ways to assess students' works more effectively. While in general it is a good exercise to get students to write and draw about their experiences, it is well worth the effort to add some twists and challenges in the activity which itself can be a creative task.

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