

Institutionalizing Thoughts and Ideas

Anil Angadiki



During every instance of any practice, it is evident that we get new thoughts about improvising, changing or leaving the task. I am trying to aggregate my views around the area of education, especially mainstream school education.

The key stakeholders in this system for establishing a learning environment for children - the teachers - also come across several ideas for implementation, either on their own or from authorities. But these thoughts when tried by a practitioner, especially if the person wishes to institutionalise them in the schooling system, come across several challenges. I am sharing few examples of my experience.

I was in a state of confusion when we started thinking about how we can bring the thought of freedom with responsibility into the school. As our organisation (where I am serving) believes in a culture where the children will enjoy free, fearless and fair environment, which can be more effective in establishing a real relationship between children and teachers, children can get freedom to speak/ask questions that lead to inculcating rational thinking with any content. Such a thought sounds good while hearing, but our prior experience in other organisations had been different from this, our present school children are from small villages and many of these younger children come from their home where their curiosity and questioning is answered with a slap. The free and fearless environment in school has started giving the children a space to enjoy their time in the school.

Thanks to our support system in the organisation who regularly interact with us regarding our challenges of classroom management and the teacher to play the role of a facilitator, we started exploring things like children participating in the process of setting rules and regulations, and had regular dialogues with them to bring down behavioral challenges. Of course these ideas (already under practice in many schools) started giving results in establishing some of our beliefs. However, this resulted in another challenge: the children's caregivers started blaming us for what they thought was spoiling their

children for not taking disciplinary action against the children's odd behavior as it was difficult for them to understand the language of dialogue for resolving issues especially with children.

In many instances where lack of children's internalising their responsibility were seen in the school. We started thinking about some borrowed ideas, like forming children committees. After discussing the idea in the weekly teachers' meeting where we share our concerns, we approached the children with the idea of forming committees in our school. Even though some of them couldn't understand much about what we were trying to communicate, they agreed to try it out, as new things usually fascinate children. I think it was a good step that we involved the whole school in the committees so that each member of the school (younger or older) could participate in the functions of at least one committee. Eight committees were formed, roles and responsibilities of each committee were to be evolved by the members. Each teacher as a member in one of the committee started playing the role of facilitating this evolution. During the first year it was very difficult to get both the children and teachers together to make this work because we were ourselves not very clear on what to do and how. I think it is very difficult for one to adapt an idea from another when the larger purpose of it is achieved slowly. A few meetings were suggested among the committees to discuss strategies for effective functioning.

The initial excitement started diminishing among the larger number of children as they didn't feel excited by the idea or because they did not get a chance to play a decisive role. Those who were actively involved started undertaking the tasks on their own and completing the routine. It was very difficult to bring in the idea of delegation of responsibility. The challenge during the first year of children getting roles in one or two committees - was discussed with all and the rotation of members into new committees has since been implemented every month, with two more new committees added to old list. Ten groups with members from all

classes and a teacher were formed and the choice of a group to serve in a committee is decided through drawing lots in the assembly. This gives every child a chance to serve in all the committees in a year.

Now, we have achieved some regularity in team meetings of committees, delegation of responsibility and children playing their roles. The frequent follow up by staff with the committee members to resolve issues/challenges, the members' presentation about these in the assembly is supporting the idea to move in a constructive direction. Thus the functioning of committees in school is addressing the routine challenges in the school practices like mid-day meal, school assembly, school garden and its maintenance, cleanliness of the school, maintaining the library in school and class, designing and managing events and celebrations, etc. I am not claiming that we have achieved complete success, but this thought is contributing towards a slow development of shared responsibilities in managing school operations. We have sensed some progress in examples of children having meetings to discuss, delegating responsibilities among members, evolving rules of their committees, identifying and bringing issues in front of all, bringing down hierarchy with almost all members of school serving in the committees on rotation basis, children's understanding about the school practices and their mechanism. We are still working on grey areas in developing sense of responsibility of self and towards others, bringing awareness in the children's parents to establish environment of dialogue in their home.

I want to share another example which is related to my practice with younger children, about my success and failure in achieving certain idea/thought (as I haven't experimented this before). From the last two or three years we have been trying to engage children in library related activities, for which a few discussions were also held amongst our group.

I was wondering how exactly we could develop the practice of reading the newspaper or magazines among children. For this, I started trying to introduce the children of fourth standard to some interesting news from our daily newspapers. Out of the news that was shared, the children were excited to listen to reports of accidents and mishaps. I discussed this with the language teacher who introduced the children to the practice of writing certain quotations printed in the newspaper and displaying the same in the classroom. This was

done on a rotation basis and with a little discussion on the display in the class to involve all. Initially the children were eager to write but slowly the practice diminished. This may be due to language reading and writing problems faced by a few children or lack of follow-up of the activity after displaying. So I felt that I should do something else to introduce the newspaper concept. Most of the times when I asked children to go through the paper and share whatever news they had read, it did not work as the children were unable to get news relevant for them to understand or interesting for them. This led to idea of developing a newspaper of our school where children can write the news within the context of our school, but I found it difficult to explain the concept to the children. Even my attempt to start the paper with a small group of children with mixed learning level did not work as I imagined, since the children were unable to comprehend my thoughts. I left the idea there thinking that perhaps the children are too young to perceive what I envision.

This year I got the opportunity of having library periods for the same class who are in fifth standard. Now I started thinking about the same idea of getting our children to work on newspaper reading. For this I planned few activities for about two months, which included picking of news from dailies, reading them, discussing a few, collecting information other than news, making small groups of children and cutting the interesting and varieties of news from old papers, making one single paper of these cuttings and displaying the same etc. Slowly I started putting the same line of 'Can we bring out a school newspaper?' This time, I found not much confusion on the faces of the same children with whom I had failed to convince earlier. They agreed happily and we made five groups and started thinking about the nature and kind of efforts we could put into this venture. During the discussion I slightly modified the thought of daily newspaper to a Weekly as it would be difficult to get news on a daily basis in our school. Hence the first group started its operation of collecting news, writings like poem/stories and drawings from children of all the classes. I was very careful this time about not leaving the initiative in the middle and made sure to follow up with the team every day and motivated them. Finally it was a happy moment for me and the team that we came up with our first weekly paper of our school under the name '*Shala vaara patrike*' (School weekly) as suggested by children.

I am not claiming here that I achieved success because major portion of the paper was covered with a lot of drawings/paintings, poems and stories and a corner space for news. But the initiative has given me confidence that the children can slowly get into the idea. All the groups brought the weekly on regular basis and they got opportunity of releasing the same in whole school assembly. Now the children of other classes have started asking for their opportunity of publishing the weekly of school. I happily agreed and the Class 6 children started bringing out the same (with more news items involved and other staff involved). I personally feel happy that slowly the newspaper concept is getting integrated into the institution. The students from the pioneering group asked about their role in the current weekly paper, I suggested that they support the ones who are involved by giving more news/articles. But the joy is missing. My original thought of bringing children in reading newspaper is still to be worked on, as most of the children with whom I am working are still staying away from reading. My efforts are still on with some more activities planned.

I have many experiences like this one, of bringing an idea of mine or others' which seemed to be getting partial success or failure because of several reasons. I think it may be because:

If the rationale is not clear for the practitioners/ if the dialogue hasn't happened with stakeholders clearly with a regular follow up

If the contextualisation doesn't happen, keeping high expectation with rigidity (less opportunity for change) in the idea or having openness but not losing the originality of the thought.

A thought can never be institutionalised if it has been understood/claimed by the person for ownership

Unless we get understanding of a challenge or come across that challenge in our practice (the one faced by others) will not be dealt by us seriously.

Clarity on the matter, its consequences before, during and after execution is necessary.

The practice of a teacher as facilitator in education field is always under lot of experimentation where she/he struggles with many ideas, the ones printed in guiding documents like National Curriculum Framework, learning theories of children by educationists or ideas of a specific school. During institutionalising these, the teacher should feel her own responsibility and add her own thoughts so that the learning is increased. If they are documented in reflection dairies as a practitioner they can contribute a lot to the quality of our education system.

Anil is currently the Principal of Azim Premji School, Yadgir. He has been with the school for the last five years, and this he says, has given him the opportunity to think about the meaning and purpose of quality education. With degrees in M.Sc. and B.Ed., he has in the past, largely worked with Pre-University College students. He may be contacted at anil.angadiki@azimpremjifoundation.org