

The Aims of the School Assembly

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In this article, I shall discuss two important aspects of school life. First, the aims and use of the school assembly and second, teaching the same subject at different levels.

The Assembly

We gain new experiences every day while working with children in school. I believe that if we go to school as a subject matter expert then it becomes difficult to connect with children. This is because we would be learning something different with the children and the expertise in the subject takes a back seat. I do not mean that expertise in the subject is unimportant but all I am trying to say is that we should bring ourselves to the level of children where they are at a given time. It is not necessary that all of them should be at the same level. Generally the children of our schools are at different levels which, at times, poses a problem while teaching.

I teach science and mathematics to the children of Classes 6 to 8. Both subjects become quite challenging when students of Class 6 do not have a strong understanding of the basic operations, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. In such a situation things become a bit more difficult if we try to follow the syllabus. The fat mathematics books raise many questions in our mind such as : how and when to teach so much! Will I be able to do something according to the interest and level of the children at all? Then I think and ask myself - what do my dear children need? Completion of syllabus or understanding of fundamental operations and concepts? And I decide to do something by which these children continue to have faith in me and at the same time they understand the content properly.

Children are very active and imaginative. Many times we cannot understand their nature. On many occasions, I have learnt from their experiences. I feel that the aim of education is not merely teaching a book from one end to the other. The important thing is to create a free and secure environment for children where they can learn something that develops their understanding.

Here I am sharing whatever I have done or have been doing with my school children.



The usage of school assembly and its aim

School assembly is considered to be an essential part of every school. I agree with this because this is the time when all the children are fresh. They learn from each other in this gathering. However, I realise that each child is at different level and they cannot be grouped class wise. We need to divide them into groups according to their level. The main purpose of the assembly is to let children overcome their shyness, learn something in the group and display it. So I divided children into three groups. Generally children feel shy to speak in front of others as they lack self-confidence. This is the situation even in my school in spite of children having full freedom to speak. I had to make plans to escalate their self-confidence so that each child could come forward and speak in the assembly or elsewhere. In order to overcome these fears of theirs, I formed three groups of children according to the number of students in the school. The number of boys and girls was equal in each group though the adolescent boys and girls of class 6 to 8 want to be in separate groups of only boys or only girls. But considering their emotional development, I put them together and in equal numbers. Each group was given different names like Yellow House, Red House and Green House. Yellow, red and green coloured badges have also been made for them. The groups were given the responsibility of conducting prayers, cleaning the classrooms, watering the plants and some other small tasks. Now it became the responsibility of the children to take up the various duties.

For the first two days of the week the first group would be on duty, the next two days the second group and the last two days it was the turn of the third group. This way the activities of school were managed well as every group wanted to be the best and it helped in achieving the aims of assembly. The children of each group sing the prayer, group songs etc. group wise. General knowledge quiz, story, thought for the day, news headlines, local news etc. are presented according to the roll number of the class and this method ensures that every child gets

an opportunity to speak.

Now the shy children are trying to come forward and have started speaking a little. Some children have become bold enough to face the assembly and give commands. It was fun working in group for the assembly programme and the abilities of the children also developed. Some children are still hesitant but efforts are on. So there are lots of benefits in working in groups. My main motto was to make children speak without any inhibition and the assembly proved to be the best medium for it. Working in groups is very useful as children are beginning to understand the importance of being in a group. Sometimes the children complain that so- and-so is not doing such-and-such work. But they resolve these issues among themselves.

Therefore, school assembly is a good and useful means of working in groups and also helps in attaining the goals of the group.

Teaching the same subject at different levels

As I mentioned before, children who come to us are at different levels. Their skills and abilities are different. So what should be done to develop and sustain the basic skills of each child in this sort of situation? I have been teaching upper primary classes for the past three years. Earlier I used to follow the traditional method of teaching and teaching basic operations of mathematics to different classes separately used to consume a lot of time. Then there were some children in each class who knew these operations and wanted to learn the next concept. This problem was also solved by making groups. The children of different levels were selected from all the three classes. They were divided in three groups. Group 1 had the children who were struggling with the basic operations of mathematics, group 2 had understood the basic operations and was a little ahead and group 3 could generally understand any topic. Though working in groups made things a little easier but since the other teachers had to take classes to teach their subjects, it also posed some difficulty to get children in groups from each class. Still, it becomes easy to work once the different levels are identified because then we know what is to be done with a particular group on a particular day.

The experience of teaching fractions in classes 6, 7 and 8 has been very good. Earlier I was adopting a simple and general method of teaching but I felt that though the children are doing different mathematical operations they have not understood

the concept of fractions clearly. Perhaps the abstract nature of mathematics was bothering them. Then I decided to do something that would clear the concept of fractions in children's mind. My friends from APF (Azim Premji Foundation) helped me in this effort. Based on the discussion with them, I did some activities on the concept of fractions.

First of all, I talked to the children and drew their attention towards fractions. I took some paper, a pair of scissors, gum, colours etc. to the class and told them that we would be doing some activity wherein we will fold or cut papers and make something new. All the children eagerly took part in this activity. With the help of folding papers I taught them the concept of half ($1/2$), one third ($1/3$), one fourth ($1/4$), one fifth, one sixth and so on. The most interesting part of this activity was that the children were trying really hard and in case the folding went wrong they would try to do it again and again till they got it right. Finally, all of them were able to prepare the fraction strips properly. We pasted them on a chart paper and hung them in the class room. The children pasted them in their notebooks as well. They also understood about larger-smaller, ascending-descending and equivalent fractions.

The best thing about this activity was that the children understood the concept of fractions themselves by doing the activity (folding the papers) with their own hands. I am reminded of an incident here. There was a child whose paper got spoilt while folding. It was lunch time. All the children went out to have their food but not this boy. He sat in the classroom, folded the paper again and went out for lunch only after all the fraction strips were ready. It was a heart-warming experience for me. The next day he showed me his work and it was such a satisfying feeling to see that twinkle in his eyes. So this too was a good and useful experience of working in the group.

Wall Magazine

In my school, I have also tried to work with the children on preparing wall magazines. Wall magazines are a wonderful medium to increase the creative capacity of children. The children write their own articles/poems, paste them on a chart paper in a decorative way and hang them on the wall of their classroom. The wall magazines not only decorate the walls, but are also a means to increase the creative capacity of children. Initially the children are not able to bring their original write-ups because it is a little difficult to do that.

So first I told them stories, made them read poems and got them books from the library to read after which some could write on their own and some are still trying.

The wall magazine is called *Umang* and promotes creativity and brings forth the skills of writing and thinking. All the children happily take part in this activity. They say – ‘Ma’m! We have never done something like this before in our school. We love it very much’. Working with the children of different levels is challenging but if one tries and works in groups then a certain level of success may be achieved.

While working with the children of my school; I felt that in order to achieve bigger goals, one has to try and achieve smaller goals first. The most important thing is to make children understand the basic concepts. My classroom experiences inspire me to do something new every day. The children also believe in me. I hope to continue working with children like this in future as well.

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