

My Tryst with TLM

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In my last five years in education, I have had opportunities to visit a spectrum of schools across the country. Visiting a school run by a welfare trust catering to tribal children in Majuli to exclusive schools catering to elite in Mumbai – the range of schools I saw gave birth to a number of questions in me.

I was surprised witnessing the inequities in terms of access to school infrastructure, teacher quality, curriculum and learning resources. The exposure to realities made me patient to witness more of these in my country and reflect on what I can do within my capacity towards making things more equitable.

It was a time when I was working with Pratham Education Foundation. I was part of a team in Assam setting up education technology infrastructure sponsored by a telecom giant. Apart from setting up infrastructure, our objective was to improve the teaching and learning practices in the school

The system we introduced to schools essentially targeted to make teachers 'guide by the side' rather than being 'sage on the stage'. The digital tool enabled the teachers with adequate content in alignment with their syllabus and, most importantly, gave them step-by-step instructions to design a teaching learning material for their lesson. It was indeed inspiring to see teachers putting in effort to create the learning tools for their class and the most motivating moment came when the students participated in the process with the teacher being in the role of facilitator or being a *teaching leader*.

In this piece, I will be sharing two cases in brief: one of a teacher from a private aided school in Dibrugarh and another one from a government school in Mumbai

At Rastrabhasa School in Dibrugarh, Assam, the teacher partnered with children to experientially learn about seeds and germination by practically doing it in their classroom. The teacher had announced in advance his plan for the lesson and had given children adequate time to bring at least one type of seed. He instructed students to

plant the seeds in soil which was placed in small quantities in half-cut plastic bottles.

As the time for lesson approached, he had ready a set of saplings at various stages of growth. On the first day of the class, he got all those pots in front of the class and placed them on the table. All the students were excited and engaged – They had so much ownership of the class that there was a curiosity commotion. I saw two students sitting next to me chit chatting with each other and saying if they had brought a fastest growing seed, then today they would have a tallest sapling. One student was not able to hold his disappointment and asked the teacher why his plant has not grown yet even though he watered it daily.

After conversing with the child whose seed had not germinated, the teacher patiently started his class. He was clear with the objectives of his class and students were ready to learn about plants.

The class started with a three minute video explaining the process of the growth of a plant from the seed stage to a small sapling, using a time-lapse video of the process. The students were happy to see the complete process within a span of three minutes. However, the video made many students question the teacher about what seed was that which grew so fast? The teacher had later to clarify about the time-lapse videography and the growth was shown in such a brief time. The class was pretty amused to learn about the process of making of the video.

After the visuals, the teacher asked whether they had recorded their observation of their respective seed. Most of the students had recorded their observations. As it was a big class the teacher focused on collecting all the notebooks first to review them later in the day. The student whose seed had not germinated was hesitant to come forward but the teacher encouraged her to submit her notebook.

The teacher arranged all the pots in a line so that all students could see the presentation clearly. He

asked students what they could see and to share their experiences – right from selecting the seed to preparing the pot with soil in it. The classroom participation took me by surprise – it was filled with enthusiasm, eagerness and seeking to learn more.

The learning that had taken place was that students now knew about the types of seeds and the conditions required for a seed to germinate. They explored on possible reasons on why some of the seeds did not germinate and the possible next steps they could try to observe whether it would germinate. The teacher supported the students with appropriate information on right conditions for growth.

The class summed up with a lot of satisfaction as well as enthusiasm, with students moving about and there was chatter about the next steps. The teacher quickly reached out to the child whose seed had not germinated at all. He looked fine after the class as he had got the answers on why the seed had not germinated. He was motivated and eager to try again and give right conditions to the seed to germinate.

Later in the day, I met the teacher to reflect on his class. When I asked him how was the class, he replied back with a diligent smile and said, 'It was effort by the students themselves, I was just a guide and gave some instructions'. I was delighted with what he said and I applauded his efforts in the meticulous planning for the lesson and the timely, specific and clear instructions to the learners. He consciously valued every minute of the time he had with the class for classroom instruction.

This classroom observation was in itself a learning powerhouse for me. I had earlier heard of teachers who would go the extra mile to ensure learning. I had heard of teachers who had received recognition at national level for their consistent handwork. But this was the first time I had observed a class by a teacher who was indeed extraordinary and a champion to both the children and me.

In 2015, one of our partner school teachers was recognised as Teacher Innovator for her efforts in enriching classroom experience through her innovative teaching learning tools. On *Saving Electricity* topic, she asked all of her students to get their electricity bills for three consecutive months. And this was how lesson on saving electricity was imparted. The data collected was to help visualise the units consumed and amount charged and how could they save both electricity and money. Discussion on how to lower energy consumption at home was led by the teacher in the classroom. Every month students compared with each other whether their actions on saving electricity at home led to less unit consumption viz-a-viz decreased electricity bills. The teacher found this exercise impacting student learning and she was happy with the students applying their learning to solve real life problems.

In both of the above cases, the use of teaching learning materials or aids were of the low-cost or no-cost nature; however, they did require a certain amount of pre-planning and a robust execution aligned with the lesson or curricular objectives. Sometimes when the objectives of lesson seems vague planning or outlining a plan for effective learning loses its way. Thus it is important to first gain clarity on the objective of the lesson and then finding meaningful ways to teach.

I feel the journey towards using a teaching learning material for effective teaching starts with the objective of the lesson. Once the clarity on the objective is gained, it is easier to plan the materials and aid for teaching. Some tools might be easily available some time will need some brainstorming. A simple material like the electricity bill, kitchen waste, measuring tape among others can be used for different lessons.

Teaching learning materials and aids help to cater to learners with different learning styles and make the process of learning experiential.

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