

## My Business is to Create

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William Blake has always been an inspiration to me. Imagination and creation have been the centre of human existence in his works. It was while briefly going through *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, few years ago, I came across the most touching lines of all that have inspired generations of artists and writers –

*“I must create a system, or be enslaved by another man’s. I will not reason and compare: my business is to create.”*

I always keep this sentiment at the core of my teaching and it must flow into my teaching practices. Teaching for me is like a form of art with all its glory and imperfections. There are ample opportunities to always go beyond the basic and do something extraordinary.

If I had to describe TLMs in layman terms I would say they are things we use in order to support our teaching and it helps us ease and strengthen the connection between the children and the topic being dealt with. As per my understanding, these can be a large number of things, but it was after reading *The Child’s Language and the Teacher* by Krishna Kumar, that the real essence of a TLM became more evident to me. Everything – chit-chat in the classrooms, the scribbling/doodling they do everywhere, the little things that children carry (a piece of rock, a rubber band, some game cards, a piece of jewellery and even the little snake they have in their pockets), fights between children, the swear words they often use (Ashton-Warner, 1963), the songs they sing while playing – can be used as a TLM (Kumar, 1986). They mean something to children and it is these things that we mostly overlook when we think of TLMs. Most often or not, children are not allowed to carry ‘rubbish’ with them to school and if they do they are thrown away in garbage bins.

Throughout my classroom observations at a government school in a village in Chhattisgarh, it has been my understanding that the only TLMs used by the teachers during classroom transactions are textbooks, blackboard, chalk, duster and some

picture charts that have seen better days. Loads and loads of children’s books, given to the school by different organisations, have been locked away for ages in a trunk, as it was feared that children will tear them to pieces. I have often wondered why the TLMs provided to the school are never used while teaching but are locked away in a box. On asking, I was told that they do use them, which left me wondering as to how I never saw them being used in classroom.

My primary focus has been to utilise as many resources as I can that the children give me. I have tried to use the available TLMs and make modifications in them so that they fit in the classroom I work in. When I think of making a TLM, I try to keep in mind the conditions that are available to the teachers in the government school and the method and material should be within their reach.

### Modifying TLMs

While contemplating my strategy for English language teaching as a part of my classroom transaction, I have been looking for an approach that will successfully combine a variety of elements – building an English vocabulary and using the existing one, while introducing the letter sounds. So, when they start to identify words they can work further on identification of the phonic components. I had been working with the Jolly phonics (Phonics, 2018) in a Danish classroom. The videos made by them consist of little songs of two or three lines while introducing different words in English which help in the identification of the alphabet. Although the content in it (the choice of words and illustrations) is appropriate for children belonging to the European middle-class, there is no denying the idea of its applicability in a rural set up in India, with modification, of course. My primary concern was to build as many of those songs for every alphabet, with suitable illustrations. Another thing was that I wanted to present these little songs while using some words and sentences in Hindi so that they can help them connect with children.

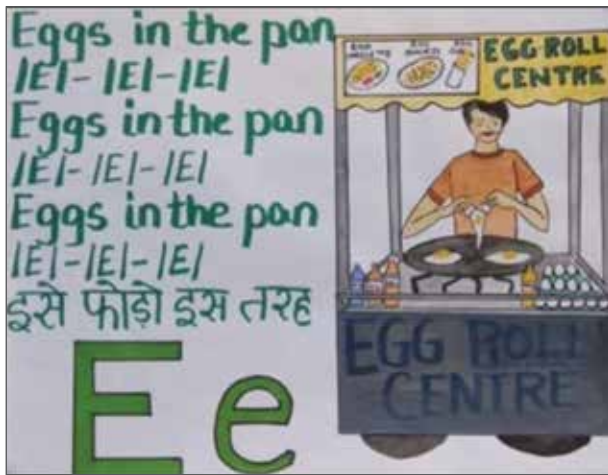


Figure 1. The Eggs and fishing song illustrations

While thinking about an illustration for the E song, I thought of using the concept of an egg-roll stall. This idea just struck me when I met two of the children from school, helping their father run the stall during their village *mela*. Most of the children I work with love to go fishing, so I decided to make a little fishing song for them (fig 1) with a few words in Hindi. Some of the children have goats as pets



Figure 2. The 'Girl and the Goat' song

and I have seen them play during the lunch break, and that is where the idea came for the 'Girl and the Goat' song.

The things I am using to make songs are nothing but things from children's everyday lives. There are no limit to the ideas of a TLM and most of the ideas I use are given to me by children. Their language is a great TLM for a teacher. I try as much as possible to communicate with children in Chhattisgarhi – which, for me, is a modified version mixed with Bhojpuri, Hindi and whatever little Chhattisgarhi I have learnt so far.

Similarly, I have used the floors and walls of the classroom as a TLM on countless occasions. I used the floors to create a hopping game to help them understand the concept of multiplication tables and snakes and ladders for numbers and counting. I have never seen children enjoy themselves as much during a math class before.



Figure 3. Children playing with the multiplication tables and snakes & ladders



## Developing TLMs

Not only are books great forms of TLM, but the manner in which we narrate the stories and poems are an even greater teaching and learning aids. Children enjoy the expressions and silliness during the narration. It has helped me I have been working on is developing stories in English and Hindi that are based on the children I teach. I am working on 16 stories, one story for every child I work with. The illustrations are stills from real life which I have captured through my camera on different occasions. I have tried to hold on to the moments where children have been wildly engaged in something, for example – their expressions and reactions while reading a book (figs 4), the times I have been reading to them from a book and the times we were singing and playing outside just because the weather was pleasant, as seen in figure 5.



Figure 4. Some moments I stole during the summer camp we organised in 4 schools of Bhakhara, Chhattisgarh

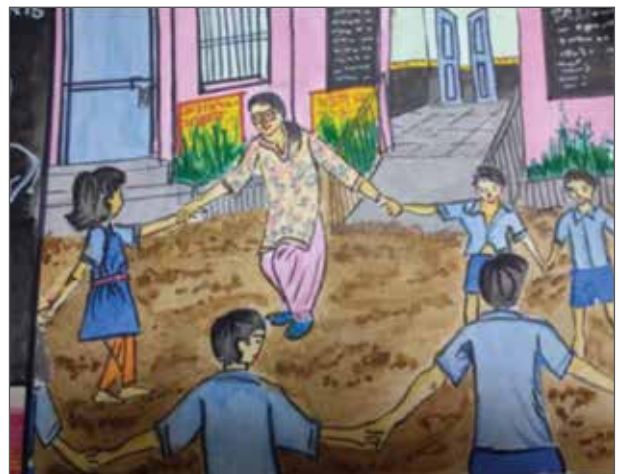


Figure 5. Some of my classroom activities

## TLMs from recycled materials

I have been thinking hard about how I could make low cost TLMs using recycled materials. I had once given a jigsaw puzzle to the children of Class 3 and I could see how involved they were in putting all the pieces together. It gave an idea to make something simplified for children of Class 1 and 2. Therefore, this summer, I made a great collection of the popsicle sticks, keeping in mind the puzzles I wanted to make for language teaching (fig 6). I have saved all my cereal and biscuit boxes, toilet paper rolls and juice cartons which has led my colleagues and neighbours to believe that I might be a hoarder. But I have a larger goal in mind. I cut the printed alphabets on the cereal and biscuit boxes so that children can use them for building words activity. The juice box can be used for making a bus, a house and a funnel that can be used as a TLM for addition in early primary classes.

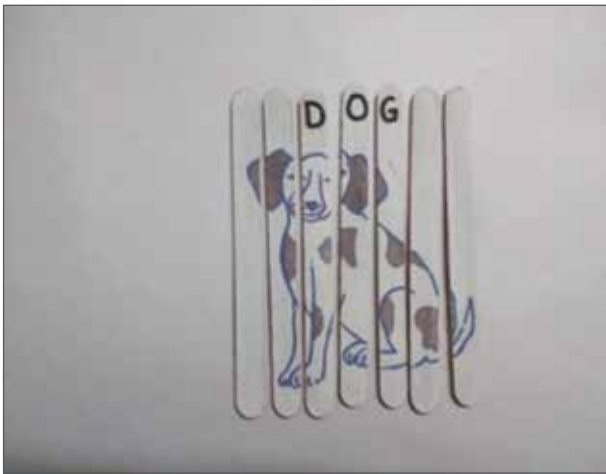


Figure 6. Recycled ice-cream sticks TLMs

**References:**

- Ashton-Warner, S. (1963). *Teacher*. Simon & Schuster.
- Kumar, K. (1986). *The Child's Language And The Teacher*. New Delhi: National Book Trust.
- Phonics, J. (26. September 2018). Hentet fra Jolly Learning: <https://www.jollylearning.co.uk/jolly-phonics/>

It was only recently, during the In-Service Teachers Training (ISTT) in Kurud, Chhattisgarh, that a government school teacher mentioned that a teacher's behaviour and attitude with everyone and everything in school is also a great teaching and learning aid. The selection of words matters, because we are a part of their environment and, just like everything else in it, we are contributing towards their understanding of the world. Something I had never thought of separately as a teaching and learning aid. In the process of becoming a teacher, I've become so many other things – I've become an artist, a singer, a dancer, a poet, a patient and avid listener – to sum it all, I have become an interesting person. The contributions from each of the mentioned versions of me, is what I need to make a TLM.

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