

# Teacher Training Matters

In collaboration with the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, Learning Matters hosted a state-of-the-art teacher training workshop titled: Creating Effective Primary Classrooms. Learning Matters invited the government school teachers to participate in this public and private training endeavour. The 72-hour training session was conducted by the founders of the Rato Bangala School in Kathmandu, Nepal. Shanta and Milan Dixit run a progressive grade 1to12 school that practices the core principles of active learning.

The training was revolutionary for all educators because it transformed their basic teaching philosophy. This workshop moved the teachers out of the traditional classroom of rote learning and memorization of facts, and opened to them the world of developmentally appropriate learning, where the child is actively involved in exploration. The participants took on the role of students and discovered the joy of learning by doing, and making meaningful connections in all content areas.



Teachers are getting to know each other, a very important aspect of building a classroom community.

In addition to looking at learning and teaching philosophy from different research perspectives, and strategies to build a sense of community among the students, the training addressed four main content areas: Language Arts, Math, Social Studies and Science.

## Language Arts:

The teachers were exposed to different comprehension strategies like vocabulary games and dramatic retelling of a story, to support diverse readers in their classrooms. The most powerful aspect of the Language Arts study for many teachers was going through the motions of the

*Writing Process* in a **Writer's Workshop**. In a supportive classroom community, even those who thought they could never write, were surprised to see how well they could write on topics that were personally meaningful to them.

## Components of the Language and Literacy Curriculum

- **Listening:** Involves hearing what has been said and relating it to personal knowledge.
- **Speaking:** Children develop more sophisticated speaking skills as they become better listeners.
- **Reading:** Reading to children is of prime importance in developing life-long readers.
- **Writing:** Children need many opportunities to write everyday--to write for reasons that make sense to them.

## Mathematics:

According to the Cognitive theory of learning, the learner must play an active role in the learning process. Since mathematics concepts are relationships and teachers cannot "show" students the concept directly, children need to explore and manipulate concrete objects, play games and look



Exploring geometric shapes on Geoboards

for patterns to understand these relationships.

Through reflective thought, learners actively construct knowledge: they make connections between old ideas and new ones. Mastery of a new idea is measured in terms of its connectedness to existing ideas rather than a quick correct response. Procedures and drill, which unfortunately take the front stage in our classroom today, should come only after the mathematical concept has been understood by the child. The teacher must ask students questions to understand

the reasoning behind both correct and incorrect answers.

**The goal in a developmental approach to teaching mathematics is to help children develop:**

1. Conceptual knowledge of mathematics
2. Procedural knowledge of mathematics
3. Relational Understanding or the connections between Conceptual and Procedural knowledge

(John Van De Walle)

**Social Studies:**

Social Studies is often the least favorite subject of most students in schools because all it means to them is memorization of historic events, geographic facts and irrelevant dates and names. The participants were inspired by a new meaning of Social Studies, where Social Studies is an intrinsic part of everyday classroom routine and our daily attitude towards life.

**The primary purpose of Social Studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse and democratic society in an interdependent world.**

During the study of Social Studies curriculum, teachers learned how to:

- Plan for long term projects
- Engage children in diverse topics in meaningful ways that are also fun for children to research
- Integrate Language, Math and Science into Social Studies



To make an elevation map of a mountain, teachers in each team first make a mountain of

- Plan and organize field trips for maximum learning and potential
- Recap and showcase/celebrate the newly learned information

**Science:**

In the study of science the highlight for most teachers was the open ended exploration with light bulbs, batteries and wires. "I learnt circuits in my science class by reading and looking at the pictures in the text book, but never really understood what actually makes the bulb light up till today," one participant shared. When the students actively explore materials and come up with their own inferences; they not only enjoy their discovery, but also understand concepts so concretely that no one can take that learning away from them.

**A few comments from the participants of Creating Effective Primary Classroom Training:**

- "We attend trainings where they talk about ideas we can't implement in our classes. This training was an exception. Yes, in government school the teacher has a lot of challenges, but we can definitely use the ideas we learnt in this training in our schools. I challenge the teacher who says I can't do this because I teach in a government school."
- "I learnt that simple materials can be used to create games and experiments. One doesn't need to order elaborate materials for learning."
- "I think if we all follow the hands on, concrete method of teaching math in our classrooms, it can really help the students learn and have fun at the same time. In fact I myself learned a few concepts."
- "I wish I was taught like this in school....there was so much that we were taught, but did we really know what we were doing? Not really! I'm so excited that so many more children today will be taught differently."