

Pragna approach: An effective innovation in primary education

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ABSTRACT

Activity Based Learning is an active teaching- learning methodology. By this method, teachers can make their teaching more interesting. Activities bring activeness and smartness among the students. If the child is provided an opportunity to explore by their own way of learning and provided best learning environment, they will learn things with joy. This approach is very helpful to students in learning at lower primary level. Teachers have been trying to create learning environment for students through various activities.

Keywords: Activity Based Learning, teaching, learning,

Introduction

Activity Based Learning is a technique assumed by a teacher to emphasize his/her method of teaching through activity in which child centric teaching – learning methodology and an innovative quality initiated. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Gujarat has been implementing various projects towards universalization of education. The Feature of the ABL method is that it uses child – friendly educational aids to foster self-learning and activity allows a child to study according to his/her interest and skill.

According to observers the ABL (Activity based learning) method has created a visible improvement in children’s learning and psychology. British philosopher, R.F. Dearden (1970)¹ says that, ‘An activity is not just a bodily act, it necessarily involves mental act.’ Important thing is that an activity essentially includes consciousness of what one is doing. Further, it also includes consciousness of one’s situation.

According to Pica (2008)² “Activity based learning is the process of exploration and discovery of acquiring knowledge; of knowing how to acquire it.”

Activity Based Learning is more effective than any other method. It is very useful in primary education and kid’s education. The learning games and other games related activities are very useful in primary school teaching. Teachers have to understand the relationship between learning and games. Now-a-days different teaching methods are being discovered. Actually the teaching and learning should be an interesting thing for the teacher and the students also. School should be an interesting place of teaching learning experiences. So teachers have to find the new or different methods according to the students learning level and their interests. In primary education, teacher has to make different learning strategies such as fun learning, active learning and games.³

History of Activity based learning Approach

In India activity based learning started for some period of time in 1944 around world war – II when a British man David Horshurgh came to India and finally decided to settle down over here. He was an innovative thinker and charismatic leader. He started teaching in Rishi valley school. He joined the British council and used to work in Chennai and Bangalore for many years. After his voluntary retirement, He located a 7 – acre (28,327 sq m) site in Kolar District and set up his own school called Neel Bagh. (About 100 km outside Bangalore in 1972). Neel Bagh sought to address the needs of good quality education in rural India. Neel Bagh was known for its creative methods in teaching, well – planned learning materials and was based on an innovative idea of Horshurgh. Horshurgh developed a diverse curriculum with his wife Doreen and his son Nicholas and daughter in law penny. Neel Bagh begins with a point of divergence with the prevailing approach where curriculum decided the future opportunities of children. The curriculum included music, masonry, gardening, carpentry, art, handicrafts, philosophy as well as the usual school subjects like English, Mathematics, science, Hindi, Canada, Sanskrit and Telugu. These pedagogic materials were systematically planned with sketches and drawings and an occasional touch of humor. Later on Horshurgh started a library in Neel Bagh which was accessible to teachers and students. This initiative of Horshurgh was later proved to be one of the pioneer and milestones in ABL. In modern time ABL was first practiced in the state of Karnataka in the block H. D. Kote, Mysore district in 1995 there after followed in the corporation schools of Chennai, from 2003, as an effort to provide special schools for children who had been freed from bonded labor. In 2006 ABL adopted by all the 270 primary schools in the Chennai district.⁴

UNICEF assisted pilot project which was named Nali kali (joyful Learning) the other states that follow ABL are as follow ABL are as follow

No	States	Year of starting
1	Karnataka	1995
2	Tamil Nadu	2003
3	Andhra Pradesh	2004
4	Madhya Pradesh	2008
5	Rajasthan	2008
6	Gujarat	2010
7	Jharkhand	2005

Source: http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_90543.html

• **ABL Impact on India:**

Under Activity based learning education main focus is on child or we can say that it is one of the child centered approaches. It develops self-learning skill among the learners and allows a child to study according to his or her skill. Activities here can be in the form of Songs, Drawings, and Rhymes, Role play to teach a letter or a word, solve mathematical problems from a sentence, Understand social science and even concept of science.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme by Government has introduced many initiatives and creative methods to bring about changes in teaching methods for both teachers as well as learners.⁵

Objectives of Activity based learning approach:

Objectives of Activity based learning approach are as under:

- Provide special schools for children who had been freed from bonded labor.
- For teaching, use well planned learning material.
- Encourages co-operation among students.
- It embraces an activity – based approach to learn in a group environment.⁶

PRAGNA APPROACH

For panoramic development of students, teacher uses different approaches during classroom teaching. But it is very difficult to teach each and every student according to child's individual need, individual differences and their capacities etc.

Educationalists and teachers are always try to find out some approaches in which all students can be joined in educational process and also their educational achievements can be measured. Pragna means an effective approach to fulfill the needs.

Why PRAGNA?

Pragna is an approach in which group based activities are included. Through it students can learn the things on their own and through it they can get pleasurable education with their classmates and whatever they learn the teacher and students evaluate that education. This approach is related to the process of 'learn without burden.'⁷

- It gives children an opportunity to learn by their own pace and level.
- It helps children "how to learn".
- Children with special needs get enough time and opportunity.
- It gives child an exposure to various project work and field work.
- Children continuous and comprehensive stress-free evaluation is embedded.
- Children are learning without burden.
- It provides children a platform to learn through experience.

Objectives of PRAGNA APPROACH :

- To get opportunity to each child get education according to their own pace.
- To develop the ability of every child to get quality education.

- To evaluate whether children could achieve the required quality education or not.
- To receive education from collaboration with each other children.
- To get enough time and opportunity to children with special needs.
- To get equal opportunity to learn children with different levels.
- To provide stress free activity based education to children.
- To continuous and comprehensive stress free evaluation of the children.
- To share child progress with his/her parents through the year.
- To bring a change in traditional classroom teaching practices.
- To expose children to different kinds of projects and field work.⁸

PRAGNA APPROACH IN GUJARAT

The state's experiment with Activity Based Learning to educate primary school students using charts and games have yielded positive results. It has shown significant changes in children's interest in attending schools. After successful implementation of activity based learning in STD I to IV in schools across Gujarat state education department all set to introduce it in 1,200 more schools in rural and urban areas

The then Project Director of SSA, Mr. Manoj Agrawal said that, "We have observed that activity based learning reduce strain on students. According to him, many other states also visit Gujarat to see implementation and said that course module and teacher's training are also completed."¹⁰

Initially it was introduced in 250 schools in STD I and II. After finding positive feedback, it was extended to STD III and IV in 250 schools and in STD I and II in more 2,500 schools. Gujarat will have Activity Based Learning approach in nearly 4000 schools.¹¹

Physical Environment of Pragna classroom

Classroom environment encompasses a broad range of educational concepts, including the physical setting, the psychological environment created through social context and numerous instructional components related to teacher characteristics and behaviors. More frequently the physical environment has continued to appear in contemporary studies as an influence on behavioral and academic outcomes current studies of the physical environment have investigated aspects such as class composition, class size and classroom management.

- **PRAGNA CLASSROOM :**

The classroom processes are designed based on Pragna approach. There are subject specific classrooms instead of common classrooms. In Pragna schools, each class has two regular teachers while subject remains same. On alternate days, children change the classroom. Classroom - I is for Gujarati and Environmental Science and Classroom- II for Mathematics and Rainbow activities.

- **Physical Environment of Pragna classroom :**

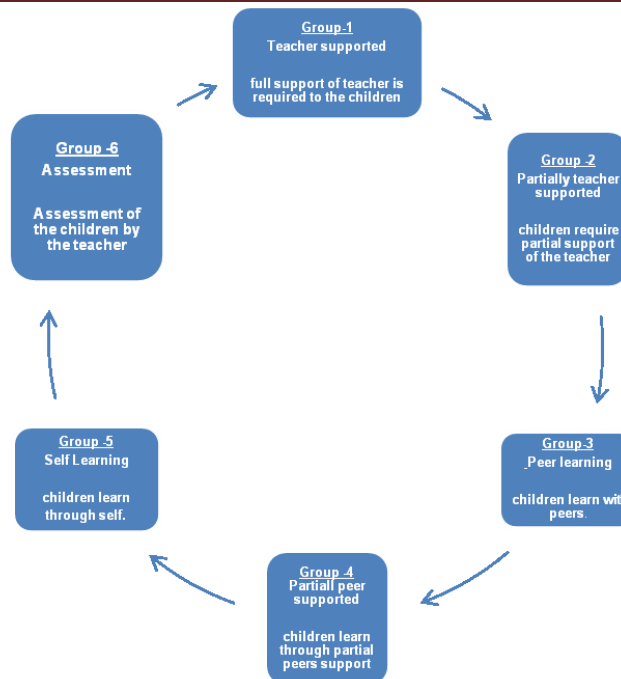
Teachers have many tools for learning in the physical environment of Pragna classroom. It will be helpful to child for doing activities. The tools are: Rack and Tray, Ladder, Group Chart, Student Slate, Teacher Slate, Student Progress Chart, Display, Learning Cards, Workbooks, Flash Cards, Game Board, Rainbow Activities, Student Profile, Student Portfolio, EVS Project Sheets, Mathematics Practice Book, Gujarati Vachanmala, EVS Manan, Training Module, TLM Box, Training CD, Advocacy CD, Advertisement CD and Jingle, Pragna song etc.¹²

Seating Arrangement :

In Pragna classrooms, there are no tables, chairs, benches or any kind of fixed furniture, but everybody (teacher and students) in classroom sits on mat or carpet.

Group formation :

The combine group of children from standard one and two are divided in six groups according to the stage of learning pace. These groups are



The concept of the activities to the children would be introduced by the teacher for the first two groups. Peers will help to practice the activities to children for the third and fourth group. The children are asked to perform the particular task without the support of peers to develop the habit of self-learning this is very effective process to make groups and learn by their own and also by their peers, ultimately all of them work together, learn together which emphasizes them for social and emotional growth.

2.4.4. Role of Teacher:

A teacher who is paying legitimate attention to the class and letting the students learn by themselves plays his role just to clear doubts.

As we know that in ABL approach a class is divided according to the expansion of support needed for the activity which was doing by the students in the actual classroom situation for different activities. All the students require different stages of attention from their teacher at different times. So, teacher must have various skills to manage all demands on her time and keep the whole class engaged. This ability of the teacher keeps the whole class engaged in different groups where learning happens. This particular ability of the teacher can be understood from the classroom communication. All the teachers keep attention on students and engaged them in different activities to get success in these processes which are followed in the class. During this thing the teacher faces very few challenges in implementing this approach. Some Pragna teachers gave their views that they have to perform double roles for making teaching learning material.

- Regularity in children presence has increased.
- Now private institutions also show their interest in Pragna approach.
- Pragna Teachers also enjoy their work compared to other teachers.
- Teacher is trained to deliver in different more engaging ways.

Learning Process

In Pragna approach, subjects are taught together in Standard – Ist and IInd, Standard-IIIth and IVth. The curriculum for each subject for standard I and II is segregated into milestones. For different activities ranging from simple to complex of milestone are represented on the cards. All cards are arranged in a sequence called ladder. To keep cards there are tray which is arranged in rack likewise starting from cards to milestone learning process is arranged.

- The children get the card according to their pace.
- According to cards, activities are done
- Everyone sits according to card.
- Children are distributed into groups according to the symbols on their cards

- Teachers note the progress of child according to card
 - The student activities and samples progress chart was displayed in the classroom by the teacher
- The curriculum for each subject for standards I and II was differentiated into milestones. The milestone comprised of a sequence of different activities ranging from simple to complex, which are represented on the cards. All cards were regularized in a sequence called ladder. Ladder helped the children to select the card according to their learning pace. For the learning of any concept there was a specific sequence called learning cycle which has following features:
- The children learnt from the cards.
 - Children distributed themselves into groups according to the symbols on their cards.
 - The child condition was recorded on progress chart by the teacher at the completion of every card. The progress chart was displayed in the classroom.¹³

PRAGNA MATERIAL

The main aim of Pragna Approach is that children easily learn by doing some activities. The material for Pragna is prepared by the core team members. This material is very useful as it is innovative, simple, cost-effective and reusable.

Rack and Tray

Pragna classroom are arranged with specially designed racks for each subject. In Maths classroom there is a blue colored rack for the subject of Maths. In other classroom there are two racks – for the subject of Language (yellow rack) and for the subject of Environment (green rack).

Each rack contains specific number of trays in which specific numbers of cards with special symbols are kept. The new designed racks also contain TLM box and they are moveable. (2016-17)

Ladder

Ladder is a specific way for the children to learn step by step according to his/her stage. In Pragna approach there are three colored ladders – Maths (blue), Language (yellow) and Environment (green).

Ladder is always kept besides the relative subject rack. Ladders are kept on height where the children can easily see and touch the symbols. According to the ladder chart symbol the children will take the same card from the tray do her/his work. Ladder is made with the different milestones.

Group Chart

Group charts are displayed on the walls of Pragna classrooms at the height of four feet. Each subject has six group charts.

Each group chart has specific symbols. Mathematics – birds, Language – animals, Environment – carom, Dholak, dice etc. Children will sit in the group according to the symbol of cards printed on group chart. Group 1, 2, 6 are teacher oriented groups so they are arranged closed to each other.

Student Slate:

In each class there are 10 slates for the children. They use the slates when they are doing the course of the activity. Students slates are kept in a line under Group Chart one from where children easily take it.

Teacher Slate:

Teacher slate is kept under Group Chart one. Teachers use this slate to explain concept and to give more practice to children.

Students' Progress Charts

Subject wise student progress chart is displayed in the classroom. After completing each milestone, a child takes the evaluation card. According to it child performs task/activity in the workbook. The teacher checks the workbooks and records every child's performance on the student's progress chart for each subject. Standard wise, subject wise and individual child wise progress is recorded in these charts.

Display Board

Each classroom has five display boards. The total display area for children in the classroom is 20 square feet. Children are encouraged to display their work on the display boards. Display board is arranged in one line on a proper height where children can display their task/activity by their own.

Activity Cards:

A card helps children to learn or to do activity. Cards help children in which group they have to work. It also helps children to take material from the box or to take workbook and do exercise. By completing specific number of cards children move from one milestone to another.

Workbooks:

Workbooks are designed according to the cards of ladder's activities. According to the cards children use the workbook for practice, reinforcement or evolution. By the evolution of workbook teacher comes to know the progress of children and it helps the teacher what to do further.

Flash cards

Flash cards are prepared to encourage the students for self-learning. They are designed as a part of a learning material.

Game Board

Game Board is also a part of the learning material in the form of cards. It encourages the students to learn themselves interestingly.

Early Reader

Nineteen early Readers have been developed in the form of story books. These stories have been developed with focus on specific alphabets as part of ladder. A child will listen to a story the teacher will narrate and then will read out the same story from the book.

Pictorial Dictionary:

The Pictorial Dictionary helps children in recognition of letters from a word or a sentence. For example, picture of a boat, spelling of the boat and description / features of a boat are listed in four to five sentences. It helps children to understand the words with proper meanings.

Rainbow Activities:

Rainbow activities are considered as a separate subject. The term rainbow is used because there are seven main categories of activities. Each category is divided into ten sub-activities. Each sub-activity contains five activities. Thus the children do 350 rainbow activities during the course.

These activities have been developed for the comprehensive development of children. It satisfies the need for multiple intelligence development among children. It also gives exposure of various activities related to development of civic sense among children.

Student Profile:

General information regarding student, attendance, identity, photograph, hobbies, progress in three subjects, strengths and weaknesses of students etc. are included in Student Profile.

Student Portfolio:

Student's written work, drawing and other creations are kept in student portfolio. The teacher maintains a separate portfolio for each child. The student profile is also kept in portfolio. The portfolios are shared with parents. These portfolios are proved very instrumental for community involvement.

Project Sheets for EVS:

Children have to do various projects in EVS at school and at home. They have given project sheets in which they carrying out the project plan and write about the projects.

Practice Book for Mathematics:

Children are given practice book for Mathematics in which they practice the mathematical concepts they learnt. This practice book is in addition to the workbooks used at school. By this practice book student can practice and clear the concept.

Gujarati Vachanmala:

Gujarati Vachanmala is also given to children for reading at home. It includes language concepts like grammar, vocabulary, comprehension and oral work. There is also a written work as a part of it. At home it gives a space to child to interact with parents and peers.

EVS Manan:

A book called Manan for EVS is also given to the child. This book helps the child to understand the concepts properly learnt at the school. It includes all the concepts of EVS for self-learning.

Teacher's Handbook:

Subject-wise handbooks are provided to all the Pragna teachers which are used by the teachers during classroom transactions. The handbook methodology includes concepts, material, songs manual, stories, of ladders and cards etc. for each subject. The handbook gives proper guidance to the teachers. By using it teachers can do their work in a proper way. It makes teachers work easy.

Training Module:

Training Module for Pragna explains whole concept of Pragna in details. All teachers are given this module. It contains the topics like child psychology, pedagogy, child friendliness, group rotation, student portfolio, community mobilization, comprehensive and continuous Evaluation (CCE), etc.

TLM Box:

Teaching Learning Material (TLM) Box is required for all subjects. Teachers are encouraged to acquire it. All the TLMs kept in the box are related to the cards. The TLM symbol on the cards, suggests a child the particular activity tools he/she had to pick from the TLM box for the task. Teachers are also encouraged to develop their TLM Box according to locally available material.

CDs': Training, Advocacy, Advertisement and Jingle

Training CD has been developed for training of teachers. It helps teachers mainly to deal with classroom management and group rotation. It demonstrates the whole Pragna approach as well as group rotation, teachers' role, Parent's feedback and children's feedback.

The advocacy CD has been developed to explain the Pragna in brief before public representatives, Government officials, parents and other stakeholders. For mobilization through electronic media, the special jingle on Pragna has been developed.

Pragna Song

The Pragna song was written by Prakash Parmar CRCC - Kim Cluster, Surat and composed by Bhavesh Pandya, CRCC, Ranpur Cluster, Banaskantha (Both are Pragna Core Team Members). The Pragna song helps a lot in environment building during training or meeting related to Pragna. The Pragna song is also sung by children during the assembly in school.

Evaluation:

Evaluation is done in two ways in Pragna Approach:

- **Evaluation in learning group:**

Students learn in their own way in first five groups. Sixth group is Evaluation group. In this group, teachers evaluate the learnt matters of student of above five groups.

By evaluation teachers allow the students to go in further milestone or if there is any query teacher do remedial work or start again from specific card.

- **Comprehensive & Continuous Evaluation (CCE) :**

In Gujarat Activity Based Learning: Pragna was implemented in June 2010 in 258 schools, after Standard 1st and 2nd that it expanded to Standard 3rd and 4th. 10 schools of each taluka and 25 schools of each corporation were started this approach.

In June 2012, another five schools from each taluka of state included in this program.

		2010 Phase I	2011 Phase II
State Level	State core Team QE cell	30	67
		3	3
District Level	OIC TT	25 + 4	25 + 4
	Zonal Co-ordinator	9	-
	Dist. Co-ordinator	-	23
	Dist. Pedagogy Co.	25 + 4	25 + 4
Block Level	No. of BRC Co-ordinator	48 + 4	224 + 4
Cluster Level	No. of CRC Co - ordinator	120	1497

Cumulative Coverage	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
School	256	2,586	3,756	7,504	15,991	20,080	22,097
Teacher	566	6,247	14,634	25,742	48,763	70,402	79,489
Student	18,484	2,07,763	4,77,881	7,92,816	14,93,411	21,53,820	23,94,792

Source: http://gujarat-education.gov.in/ssa/projects/pragna_project.htm

Training for Pragna Teachers

Training for Pragna teacher was organized by Education Department 2 or 3 times during the educational year. Training was given by Dist. Pedagogy and Pragna experts in different clusters. Training modules were also given in each training.

During trainings a special focus was given on confusing matters. Training was focused on knowledge, attitude and practice building and making teachers comfortable so that they would conduct the activities efficiently.

Summary

The present article is an amalgamation of theoretical foundation of activity based learning: PRAGNA. The focus was on theory related to pragna approach implemented since 2010 in Gujarat, India. It is proved effective in many research works. The reality of this approach is teachers have to work hard to create learning ambience for students. If they do not work properly or as suggested by experts then this approach remain on pieces of paper and students do not try to learn as suggested in this approach.

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