

Glimpses from the Educator's Dairy



Every week, educators-maintained diaries reflecting on what went well and what challenges emerged during implementation. Here are the key themes that emerged from these diaries.

Question: What went well this week?



Educators were asked for their criteria of success and often depended on observed feedback to identify the successes.

- Theme 1: Nurturing value beyond the activity – A majority of the educators described the bird feeder activity as a success. This is despite the fact that birds do not visit most centres – either because they are too crowded or because they are scared of the children. However, the activity was contextualised to span other living being as well, with children feeding lambs, cows, dogs and even ants through the activity. Over the observed period, children participated actively in feeding these animals. As one observation described, “When a cow walked into our school, we watered it in a bucket, and the children refilled the water [in the bucket] from their bottles after the cow drank from it.”

- Theme 2: Strong observations – Many educators noticed students’ observations sharpening. In the “This is Me” activity, many students keenly observed their clothes, hairstyles and other features of their physical appearance, and reproduced it in their drawings. This observation strengthened as the children grew more comfortable with the activity. As one observation described, “This week, the children explored themselves, their body structure, organs, functions, and locations. Initially, they would just stand in front of the mirror and leave, but after the activity, they began to enjoy observing themselves. They noted the shape of their teeth, how their eyes open and close, and what their hair looks like.”
- Theme 3: Behaviour beyond the classroom – Many educators noticed students’ behaviour outside the classroom reflecting the same values as the activity. This was most evident in the bird/animal feeding activity, with children reminding each other not to chase the chicken away, plucking leaves to feed animals in school, and asking parents for more food to feed the dog. As some observations described, “Children asked their parents to bring more food for the dogs this week.” and “Children picked leaves on their way to school to feed the lambs.”
- Theme 4: The joy of self expression – Many educators noted the success of activities including free drawing and This is Me. It allowed children to draw from their imaginations and many children exhibited joy and confidence because of this. As one observation mentioned, “a child drew a braid on the first day and two braids on the second day, showing their observation skills and creativity.” In another instance, “During the ‘This is Me’ activity, the children drew the clothes they were wearing. The girls especially drew umbrellas and dresses. The boys also drew the same, saying their sisters had similar dresses.”

Overall, the activities positively influenced children’s behaviour both within and beyond the classroom – helping them express themselves better, observe more, extrapolate the values to other contexts, and take home these learnings.

Question: What were key challenges in this week? How did you address these challenges?

Educators described challenges faced in implementing the activities. Answers also described how these challenges were addressed, ranging from contextualising the activities to those challenges that could not be overcome. There are also some unexpected difficulties that emerged that have been described.



- Meditation: The biggest challenge was making children stay quiet and focused when they meditate. Teachers found it difficult to do this as a small group activity as the other children would distract those meditating. Some therefore made this a whole group activity. Other teachers added it to prayer time to encourage focus. Teachers also used meditation aids like toys. This is reflected in comments like "Getting them to meditate was the main challenge. When five children were meditating, the noise from others disturbed them.

I placed a mat and a toy for each child to meditate on." Infrastructurally, centres did not have a quiet place available to encourage meditation.

- This is Me: While this activity did not witness too many challenges, the greatest one involved quality of drawing. Children initially struggled but got more comfortable with time. When some took longer than others, this caused some implementation challenges. Finally, in one situation, children did not write their name and the educator needed to do so manually after the activity.



- Bird Feeding: Educators consistently faced challenges in attracting birds since classrooms were usually based in crowded spaces. The activity was adapted to include feeding all living things, so students fed cows, dogs, goats and chickens. Some challenges that emerged was children being afraid of the animals initially, overseeing children and ensuring their safety when they approached the animals, and ensuring food/water was always available for the animals.

- Seed Pot: This activity faced implementation challenges. Pots sometimes broke or fell, seeds did not germinate, or plants withered due to over or underwatering. It was also difficult to care for the plants on holidays, and the plants occupied significant space in an environment without too much to spare.

- Diversity Cards: The cards were too small for the children and some of them handled the material very roughly. This needed to be managed. Teachers also spoke about the need to increase their understanding before implementing this, with some reading up about different religions in order to talk to children. Some others questioned the extent to which children truly understood the concept of diversity - "I found it challenging to explain the

diversity cards to the kids. Do our children truly understand what we tell them about the different religions on the diversity cards? I have my doubts."

- Implementation Challenges: In some cases, the children repeated the same activity multiple times and showed different levels of interest in various activities. Educators addressed this by restricting activities to once per day. Other implementation challenges included poor attendance on some days, and low energy/children being ill on others.
- Resource Availability: Educators consistently had to manage with fewer resources than ideal - drawing supplies with colour pencils wearing out too soon, paper, etc. Pots also needed to be bought for the seed planting, and this posed a challenge for some. Overall, all centres reported having lesser space than ideal for implementation. The most common challenges are reflected in this comment - "The main challenge was the lack of drawing pads. Many activities involve drawing, but the school only has two drawing pads, so I used sheets underneath for drawing."

Overall, most challenges were logistical, and those that could be addressed were overcome with contextualising and educators' commitment. Challenges like resource availability and space constraints were, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the pilot implementation.

Question: Were students engaged in all activities?

Educators drew from reflections on specific children as well as specific activities to arrive at feedback on what works and what challenges are.

Overall, children participated independently and actively in the various activities. In some cases, very enthusiastic children helped explain activities like the Diversity Cards to other children. In other cases, children participated a little less actively and needed nudging from the teachers. One teacher observed that "Children were comfortable and excited about drawing and putting bird feeders. All materials were easy to use." while another observed that "when [the children] went out, they felt the leaves of plants and trees during the 'My Tree' activity."

- Bird Feeder: Following the adaptation of this activity to span all living things, it was a very popular activity. Children brought snacks from home to feed the animals and birds, and consistently watched them eat. It soon became a part of their daily routine to refill the feeders and observe the animals and birds. This led to growing respect for natural environments as well as interesting conversations among the children. In one observation, educators noted that "[the students] observed and refilled the bird feeders with interest, learning that all living things are equal" and in another,

noted that "the children discussed why chickens do not drink water while they eat and whether chickens have mothers."

- This is Me: This was another activity that received enthusiastic responses. Some students were particularly interested in drawing themselves from the mirror, with children coming up to do this activity as soon as another put it down. However, in some situations, young children expressed hesitance to participate - "three-and-a-half-year-olds were not willing to do the This is Me activity." Another result of the activity was the interesting conversations it led to. One observation noted that "the children discussed whether boys should wear skirts while watching the girls" during this activity.
- Diversity Cards: While children enjoyed the activity on average, some did not engage with this as they were too young. One observation noted that "as they had not started speaking properly, they were less involved and couldn't ask questions about the messages on the cards."
- Seed Pots: This was another activity that students enjoyed. However, a logistical limitation was maintaining the plants over the holidays. The plants withered and "made the children sad." However, they were then replanted.
- Meditation: This was perhaps the most challenging activity for the students. Some were easily distracted, and using a toy while meditating sometimes heightened this distraction. The space restrictions and lack of privacy also made this hard. As one educator observed, "All activities were done comfortably and enthusiastically, but children need to get used to not disturbing others during meditation."



While student engagement was largely high, the only exceptions to this were with activities that were perhaps complex for their age. This was particularly true with diversity cards and meditation. On the other hand, activities like This is Me, Bird Feeder and Seed Pot received enthusiastic engagement. Children not only made these behaviours habits but also engaged in interesting conversations against this context.

Question: Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the delivery or content of the activities?



- Meditation: The largest challenge for meditation was a space constraint, making it difficult for children to concentrate when others were playing and making noise. To overcome this, educators made it a whole group activity. Some also suggested playing calming music to help children focus. Educators also flagged the specific challenges of having children with disabilities in class. Without constant supervision, children start pinching or hitting each other.
- Diversity Cards: Educators suggested the need to localise the diversity cards. As one educator noted, "[children have] never seen pictures like those of China or Africa, so it's better if the pictures are more familiar." Another key suggestion was to make the cards larger to allow for easy explanation to groups of children. One educator also suggested having support videos to help explain to children. However, this exercise did help students learn about other religions, etc.

- Free drawing & other drawing activities: Educators asked for more time to be allocated to these activities, as young children sometimes found them difficult. From an implementation point of view, they also flagged the need to differentiate between the different drawing-based activities, as children tended to get confused. Some teachers addressed this by making specific activities available only on specific days of the week.
- Bird Feeder: Teachers suggested creating environments that encourage birds to visit such as making a nest.
- Seed Pots: Some teachers suggested this activity be made a home activity as maintaining the plants over non-working days is difficult. On the other hand, other educators suggested growing this activity into a kitchen garden and/or growing vegetables that the children can then eat, to ensure that effort is not wasted.
- General Implementation: Overall, teachers asked for more resources to be available.

All suggestions sit at the intersection of logistical limitations and the desire to 'do more' with each activity. Balancing these two factors proves to be the challenge for educators.