

## Calling Parents and Teachers: Share your experience with us!

### Special Theme *for* December 2019

As a seven-year-old in a Convent School in Delhi, I found the strange name of 'Edinburgh' in my English textbook hard to pronounce and harder to locate in my mental world, let alone a map. In fact, school just churned out more and more of these strange names and words which did not seem to have any bearing at all on my lived experience. And as the years rolled on, I was struck by a single lesson in Class Four, where our Science text had a chapter titled 'Four Common Trees' – and voila! Three of those trees (The Red Silk Cotton Tree, the Rain Tree and the Gul Mohur) were *actually growing on our school campus!* This memory stands out as one of the few instances where what we learned in our classrooms actually connected to our immediate world outside it. And there aren't many more such memories that survive ...

Much later, as a teacher in a school in Kalakshetra, Chennai, I discovered the power of contextuality!

My third graders had to learn the difference between rotation and revolution. How was I to have eight-year-olds experience these contrasting motions in the distant heavens?

Suddenly, I had a flash of an idea. The school atmosphere was one where students chanted prayers of five religions in the daily Assembly, and pujas were often performed before the serene statue of Lord Ganesa on the Assembly grounds. I asked them how they prayed at home: and one child demonstrated how he folded his hands across his chest in a 'Namaste'. Closing his eyes, he rotated slowly as he chanted his prayer. I then asked them how they prayed when they went to a temple. Immediately, several hands shot up as they described the manner in which they would circumambulate the sanctorum where the Deity was housed.

So, I called upon students to demonstrate the two different motions. When I announced 'revolution', two students would spring out of their seats, and while one stood still, the other would go around the first in slow circles. When I announced 'rotation', each student would stand in one spot but slowly spin around in that spot.

In no time, the students understood that to demonstrate 'rotation' they did not need two people, while to show revolution, they did.

I believe that this example worked because it was so firmly embedded in the students' immediate context. Unfortunately, since the diversity of our textbooks hardly matches the enormous diversity of a country like ours, teachers often have to rely on standardized content and examples to transact their lessons. During this process, the precious opportunity to connect the students' immediate experience with their learning is often lost.

**THINKING TEACHER** and **TEACHER PLUS** would love to hear your own true stories of bringing the local context into your engagement with your own children (as parents) or your classroom transactions (as teachers): whether it was to explain a difficult concept, turn around a class that was hard to manage, or move out of the curriculum in order to add that zing! Here are a few instances that you can select from to develop your narrative:

- When the content to be taught seemed to be far removed from the children's immediate experience, what was your strategy to bring it into their field of experience? (an example is shown above.)
- When you changed your lesson plan because something unexpected arose in class – and your unplanned lesson was a huge hit!
- When your students turned around the lesson purely by virtue of their engagement, and you found that your planned lesson would not have been half as impactful as this spontaneous one ...
- When you wove the local environment into a History/Grammar/Mathematics class ... (while it is relatively easy to do so in an EVS/Science/Social Science class, we welcome contributions in these categories as well).

Email your articles to [neeraja@thinkingteacher.in](mailto:neeraja@thinkingteacher.in) and [editorial@teacherplus.org](mailto:editorial@teacherplus.org) in approximately **1000 words** by **September 15** and **TEACHER PLUS** will publish the selected contributions in the **December 2019** issue.