

Reflecting on projects

By [Neeta Sur](#) | Aug 31, 2012

As teachers, most of us are familiar with 'project work' and the innumerable scrapbooks, lab books and files that are heaped on our desks at the end of the summer vacation or the beginning of a break in our routine — timed perfectly to match the slight (and always very slight) lessening of other corrections. Thus, those all-time favourite projects on – 'My Family', 'Summer', 'Indus Valley Civilization', 'The Renaissance', will litter the staffroom tables for weeks before being returned to the learner with appropriate grades.

More importantly, our children and their parents are even more aware of the nature of project work. For, although the child is meant to benefit tremendously by using this technique to learn, in some cases the parents seem to gain far more from the compilation of the 'project'. From 'Google searching' the net for facts to collecting and cutting pictures with just the right amount of white border around them, pasting pictures and calling out the summarized data to their precious child, the parent has perfected the art of 'doing project work' amongst the many other evening chores needing attention. Therefore, one might be able to empathize with them when they feel aggrieved and demand an explanation from the teacher as to why the little one has received a B and not a B+ like his best friend - especially when there seems to be little difference between the number of pictures and the number of lines of information produced.

Of course, many schools have now made it mandatory that project work must be done in class to ensure that the children themselves are producing the 'project' file and no adult or poor parent takes on the burden. So, pupils are given advance information about the project topic, the names of books or sites they might refer to or anything else that is required to collect information and illustrations from. Finally, of course, the date and time when the project is to be put together in class and 'learning' to happen.

As a teacher for Class 5 children till recently, I used to pat myself regularly on the back for having found a great method of ensuring that children are more focused in their project work and parents less burdened. Thus, the children were asked to prepare projects on a topic being discussed in class and that which was part of the syllabus; they were given a choice of topics and subheadings under which to find information but most importantly, they were informed that the project was not meant to be longer than two pages.

The rationale was of course that there must be a reason to want to find more information on any topic, and if it has to do with a part of the syllabus then you have a reason! To keep their interest alive in the topic, children must be given a choice and so there you are, any one out of three is rather a lot of choice being given to the child and finally - to keep her focused on the important matters, a few subheadings beginning with what, when and how are absolutely necessary. As for the two-page limit! That would force the learner to understand all the reference material she had gathered and then cull out the most essential (or at least so I thought). And of course the thought at the very back of my mind, the diminished load of correction, was certainly not to be ignored.

Now, having been away from classroom teaching for many months and having had the opportunity to look at classroom teaching and learning objectives from a different angle, I wonder if I feel so satisfied about the project work that I expected my children to do. A question that I ask myself today is - did I follow the basic tenets of project work during these years?

Did we (the children and I) begin by discussing and agreeing on the topic to be investigated? A topic that was of interest and of relevance to the children?

Did I check to see the knowledge that the children already had on the topic and revisit prior experiences related to the topic? Was the information then recorded?

The questions to be answered by the in-depth investigation - were they formulated, or predictions made on what those answers might be? Or a discussion on where the answers/ how the answers might be found?

In how many ways were the children allowed to collect or represent the data?

Once all the data was collected did we sit together and reflect on the information? Were discussions held on ways in which to prepare or

conduct reports, which could then be shared with others?

Today with time and space at my disposal to reflect on my own practice in the classroom, I begin to realize that what passed off as project work in school may only be given the label of 'reference work'. Reference work that guided the children to find information on some questions that were related to their syllabus. But did it make my children more curious? Would it have allowed them to explore the unknown with an enthusiasm that would give rise to more questions? Left to themselves would they want to find out more? Did I learn along with my children? Did it help make them lifelong learners?

I think not!!

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Subject: Views and Reflections

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Grade/Standard: Class 1-2

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