

Educating young learners: Post Lockdown

Coronavirus pandemic has locked us inside our houses and has changed the way we used to live. Now as the Government has started to unlock, many people are anticipating that the world after the lockdown will be very different from the world we have known till now. This also indicates that our schools will be working differently in the future. HRD ministry along with NCERT is already working on the guidelines to reopen the schools with less capacity to maintain the physical distancing and keep children safe from the coronavirus. The indication is that classrooms will be accommodating 30% of students each day, of its actual capacity. It can be challenging for Primary grade teachers to engage young students in the learning process, especially when they will be attending schools for fewer days.

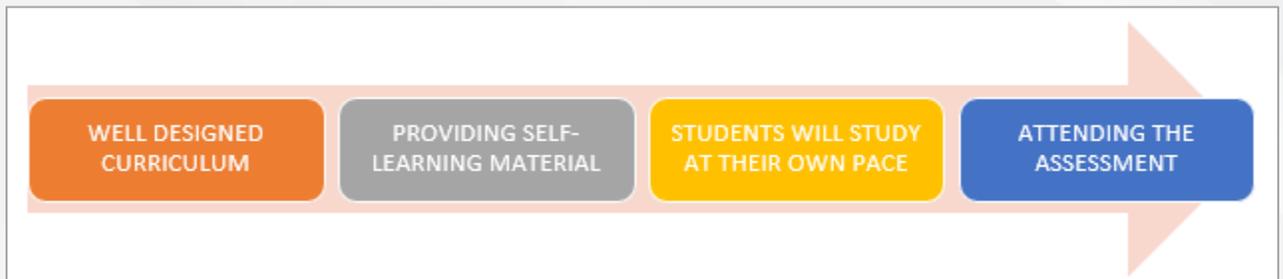


Schools are closed, but learning is on

During the lockdown period, we have already tried various ways to engage our students in learning activities in distance mode. Now, it is time to give it a more serious thought and consider applying ‘Teaching and Learning in distance mode’ model to educate our students.

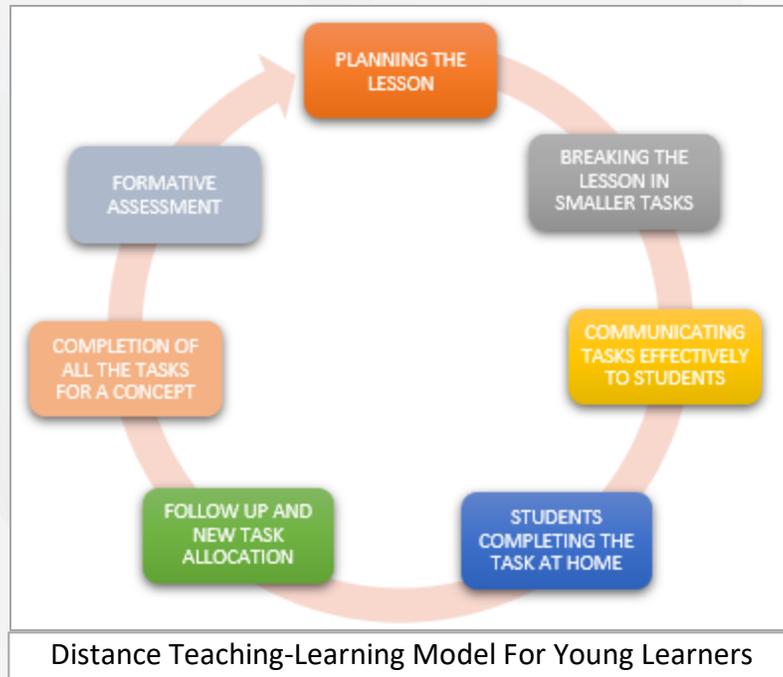
Teaching and Learning in Distance mode:

Well! The idea of “learning anytime, anywhere” is not new for the educators. Ed-tech companies are trying to sell this idea for a while now. For a long time, different universities are offering different courses to a large number of students in distance mode. How do these distance mode courses work? There is a well-planned curriculum, learning material is provided to students (which is simplistic and self-explanatory), students study on their own, attend the required assessment process and you are done with the course.



Distance Learning Model For Adults

The most important thing in the distance learning process is that the learners take charge of their own learning. They ensure their progress and learning. You may say, this will not work for young children. Maybe yes, and that's why we cannot use this model directly but have to adapt this model to fit it for our young learners:



For young learners, teachers will plan the learning lessons, break it down to the smaller tasks, communicate the smaller tasks every day (or in two days) to students and ensuring that they complete the tasks at their homes (if possible with the help of their parents or elder siblings). The lessons will be planned in such a way that smaller tasks/activities will lead to the learning of a major concept, just as we do for our classroom teaching. But instead of facilitating, monitoring and supporting students in the tasks by being physically present in the space, the teacher will design the simplest tasks, which children would be able to do on their own with the available resources at their home.

The major difference between learning in the distance mode for young students and adults is that teachers will be the one who are going to take charge of the learning of the young learners and will be connected with them throughout the learning process.

Engaging students in learning process in distance mode:

To adapt the 'Teaching-Learning in distance mode', it is important to believe on the fact that **every human being is curious to learn** about their surroundings. The role of a teacher is to help children focus on the things and patterns they are not observing or focusing on in their everyday life and connect them with the formal concepts.

We are listening and talking about the child-centric classroom-pedagogy for a long time. This pandemic has left us with no choice but to explore this idea further. We need to think and explore more about the idea of “**flipped classroom**”, where children will engage in the learning process and decide what they want to learn, when and how. The teacher needs to learn from the child which topic he or she is interested in and make their learning plans accordingly.

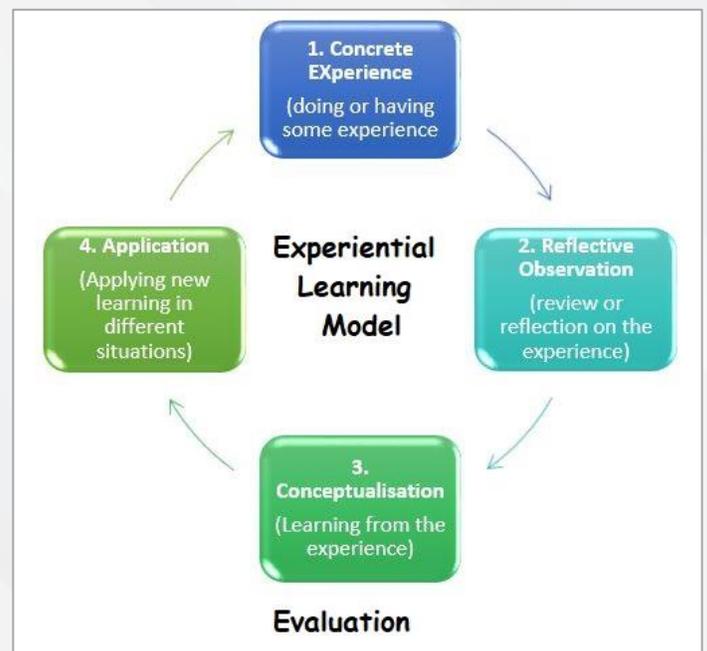
Homeschooling is also one of the concepts which we can explore. But most Indian parents are not aware of the idea, especially the parents of lower socio-economic strata, who themselves are less educated or illiterate. If possible, we can engage with parents of our students and communicate the learning tasks to them and involve them to ensure the learning process, as teaching elders is easier in the distance mode than that of young children. Teachers can talk to their parents and support them to learn about how they can support their children in their learning journey.



Parents Supporting their Children in Learning

Designing the Learning Tasks: Experiential Learning model

We are aware that young learners are different and their learning needs are unique. The attention span of young children is short. They are not efficient readers and writers. Their focus is short-lived and they can easily get distracted by anything around them (because some of the most ordinary things could be new and exciting for them). In such a case, adapting the experiential learning model will be helpful. NCF-2005 already suggested that it is important to engage all 5 learning senses of children while engaging them in hands on learning experience. Experiential learning model includes four stages for learning as shown in the chart.



When we design the task to be done in distance mode, we should design in a way that students would be able to engage in the first two steps of the experiential learning model, i.e. Concrete experience and Reflective Observation, of the concept/phenomena. For example, if we want our students to learn about the measurement, ask them to use a scale and measure the length of 5 leaves. If possible, write it or at least audio record their answers. Recoding the responses will be important for Reflective Observation, which means they will understand what they have done. In the process, the child will learn: to use the scale, estimated length of the measuring unit, about different leaves and their shapes. Teachers must be very clear about the objective of the learning task they are providing.



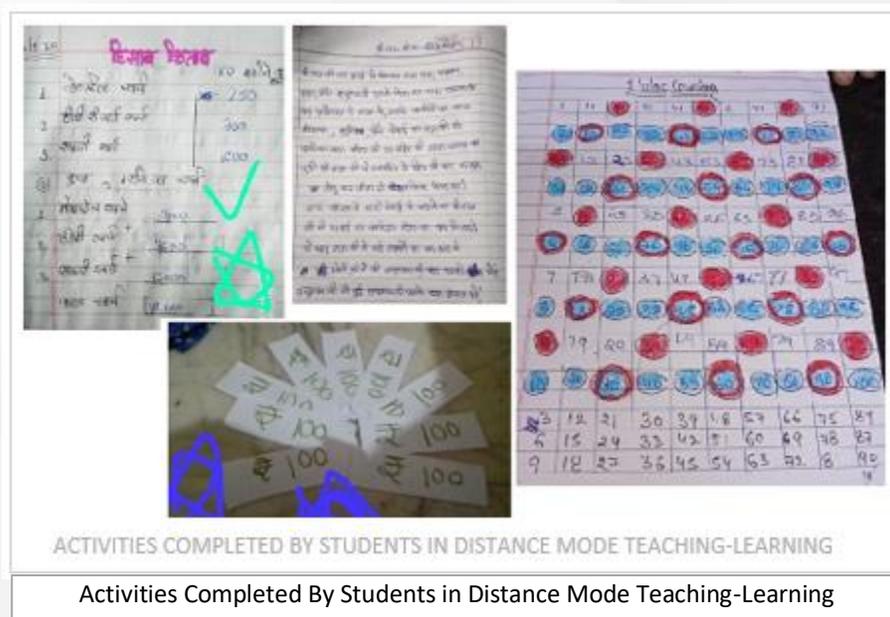
Once the student will be in the classroom (even if for a day or two in a week), we can discuss their experience of working on the task and consolidate their learnings, i.e. conceptualization or learning the concepts. After that, we can help them in applying their understanding through worksheets, etc. where they would be reflecting on their learning on the paper. This is an important step in formalizing the learning.

Principles of designing the learning tasks and the journey for students:

It is not that difficult to design the learning tasks/activities for students to do in their homes and learn. You just need to keep the following basic principles while designing the learning journey for students :

- ❖ **Plan any one topic thoroughly:** Pick up any one topic/concept you want your students to learn, say in a week. Divide this topic into the subtopics. Arrange these subtopics in the hierarchy of simple to difficult. Design the appropriate number of activities for each sub-topic.

- ❖ **Align with the prescriptive curriculum:** When you are planning for any topic and sub-topics, make sure you align it with the prescriptive curriculum of NCERT. For example, when NCERT recommends that children of grade-1 should be able to classify the geometrical shapes as per their appearance, don't push your students to remember the definition of the shapes. Just ask them to cut various shapes and segregate them.
- ❖ **Make sure the child would be able to use different learning senses:** Young children are still in the exploration mode and cannot learn some of the concepts without experiencing them on their own. For example, you cannot make the child understand what a rough surface is until they have touched and felt it on their own. No video, no explanation can help them learn about it. So while designing the learning activities, we should make sure to engage students in gaining experience using their all 5 learning senses.
- ❖ **Contextualise tasks :** When we have just discussed the importance of helping children to gain experiences, the activities must be contextualised, i.e. the material to be used should be available in their houses. We cannot ask children to cut the pizza to learn fraction but to share a roti with their sibling.
- ❖ **Tasks should be achievable:** The activity should not be too difficult or too long for the students that they soon lose their interest in it. It should be doable and give the child the confidence of achievement. It will keep them interested in learning.



Stay connected with your students :

Education is about the overall development of the child. So, we should not just engage the intellect of our students, but also help them develop socially, emotionally and physically. It is important to stay connected with your students when they are working in distance mode. Most teachers around the world are gaining this insight that encouraging children and supporting them emotionally has become more important in this uncertain time than ever before. We can use various technological tools like Whatsapp to connect with our students. Students can share their work with you by clicking a picture or making a video of it. Make sure that when children share their work, encourage them and praise their efforts. We can also speak to some of the students on-call whose parents can't afford a smartphone or an internet connection to ensure that they are doing well.

Our everyday experiences play an important role in our formal education and so our emotional wellbeing. So, while children are not in the school, for now, let us help them gain the various experiences to develop a strong base for formal education.

About the Author



Varsha Gupta is working as an educator for over 6 years in different areas such as teaching, curriculum & content development, and teachers' professional development. She completed her Bachelor's in Elementary Education and Master of Education. Her interest lies in understanding 'What is knowledge' and 'How people learn'. With the growing involvement of technology in our life, she is also keen to figure out healthy ways of utilizing technology in learning process of young children of primary grades. Currently she is a faculty, Mathematics at ITEI. You can connect with her on :

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