



Building Language Inclusion

To enhance children's understanding, expression and comfort in the classroom by including their primary language in communication

Leader Name : Reeta Ryal

Leader Designation: Community Teaching Fellow

Community Teaching Fellows are teachers from the community who lead exemplary classrooms and support educators in the schools.

School Name: Government Primary School, Gular Dogi, Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand

Location : Gular Dogi Village, Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India

Testimonial

“There is a girl in my class, called Pooja. She used to not speak to me when I entered the classroom. When I asked another educator in the school, she shared how initially Pooja used to talk a lot and in Garhwali, but upon noticing that her peers speak in Hindi, she slowly shut down. That is when I started using Garhwali with her. There are many other children like Pooja, who prefer talking in Garhwali. When I adapted to their language, they automatically feel comfortable with me and converse a lot openly. I entered with the assumption that they are naturally shy, but it turned out to be just their preference for language. Making this small shift has now enabled me to learn more about the children, their learning styles and strengthened their relationship with me.”

- Reeta Ryal
Community Teaching Fellow



The Challenge

A number of research* studies show that children learn best in their mother tongue, especially in the early years. From infancy children are exposed to their home language and have a large bank of home language vocabulary by the time they enter school. However, currently the school language is different from the home language (Hindi/English). Children are expected to pick up, understand and communicate in a new language i.e. the school language from day one.

This results in lower engagement/expression among young children as well as them being unable to find a place for their home language within the school, which is demotivating.



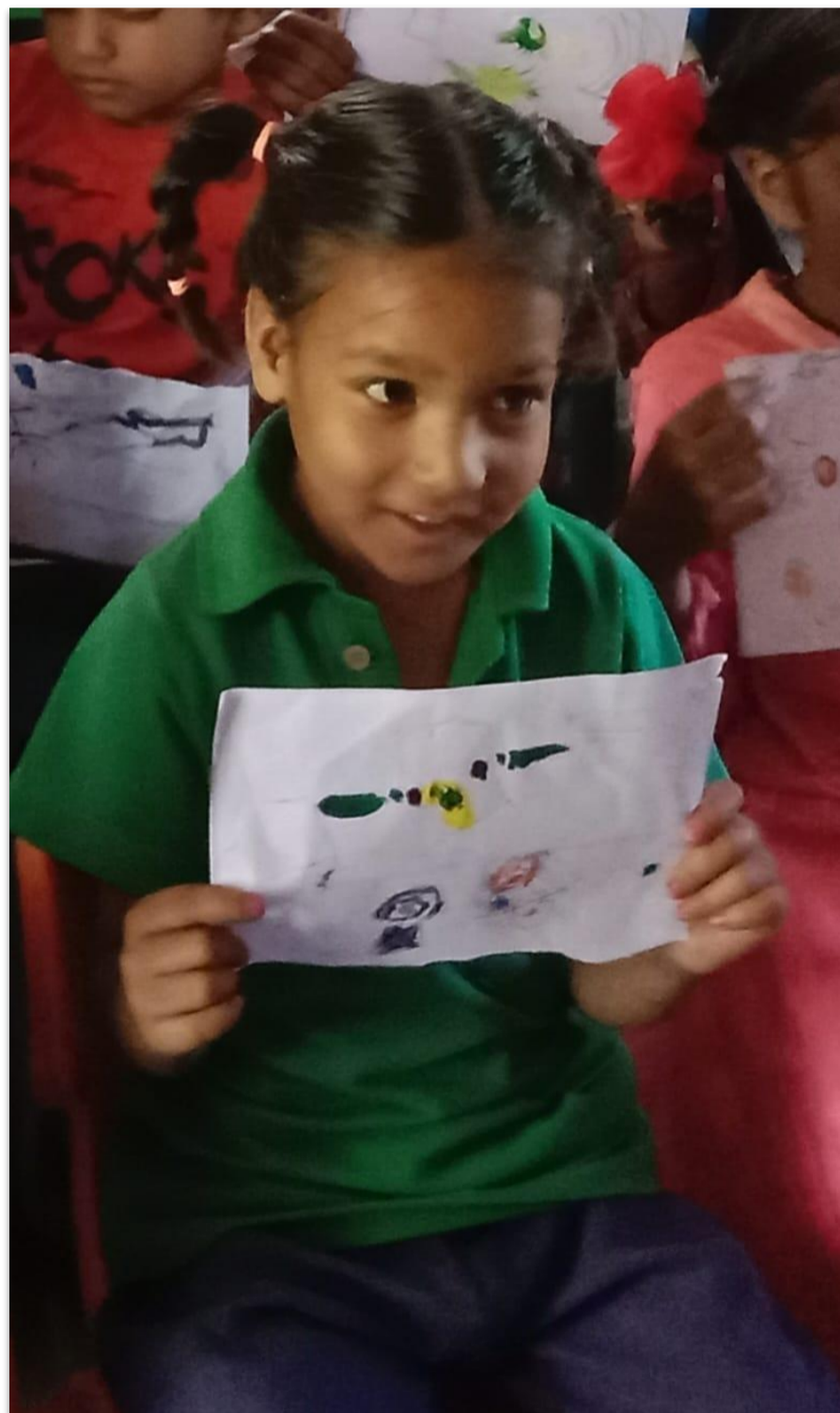
* <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/3036/file/Early%20literacy%20and%20multilingual%20education%20in%20South%20Asia.pdf>

What Changed?

In our schools we have introduced a larger framework which defines the sequence in which a language is introduced to the children over time. This framework builds children's foundation in their home language first. A practice that Reeta has been using for this is code-switching* i.e using both Garhwali and Hindi in class to ensure that all children are able to understand what is being communicated by the teacher or their peers.

This has led to children feeling acknowledged and encouraged to express themselves freely. Not only the teacher, but children also naturally engage in code switching - so another part of this practice has been accepting children's response in Garhwali or a mix of Garwali and Hindi. Therefore, there is a two-fold impact of code-switching in a classroom:

- Children bridge the gap between home language and new language with ease.
- Children feel accepted inside schools since their language is respected and included in the classroom space.



*Code Switching also known as language mixing is when a speaker alternates between two or more languages.



Project Steps

Building Language Inclusion is a behavioural practice. Educators can promote positive relationships and support children's developing language abilities when they:

- Accept all instances of children's code-switching as indicators of their current communication abilities.
- Observe and respond to the ideas and information that children express during code switching.
- Build on children's ideas and information by inviting them to continue to talk about what's important to them.
- As a general rule, educators should ask questions and make comments in only one language at a time.



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