

Teachers: Igniting a Spark

I suspect that we teachers spend too much of our most precious commodity—time—on creating presentations for students to hear and writing exposition for them to read. I think we serve our students' learning much better by investing our time into crafting good questions that lead students to develop and deepen their understanding of what we want them to learn.¹

– Dr Allan Rossman

The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.²

– William Arthur Ward

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind; he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him; he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself.³

– Sri Aurobindo

So far, this book has set out an exciting vision of what pupils do in an ALfA classroom. Students work in pairs, ask each other questions, and engage in fun and meaningful activities. They take initiative and responsibility for their learning.

But where does the teacher fit into this vision? If the classroom is student-led and student-centred, does that mean the teacher is no longer needed? On the contrary, just as the ALfA student is more active than the traditional student, the ALfA teacher is also more active than the traditional teacher.

We may not have noticed the traditional teacher's passivity because we associate activity with talking, and conventional teachers talk a lot. But

their delivery is cognitively stale: they repeat the same lecture over and over across all their different classes; section after section, year after year. In this context, Stephen Covey's famous quote makes much sense:

*'Experience is overrated. Some people say they have twenty years' experience, when, in reality, they only have one year's experience, repeated twenty times.'*⁴

It's not the teacher's fault. In many countries, instructors have little autonomy – they must follow the curriculum to the letter and are given detailed prescriptions for what to do every period of every day. Much as the traditional system stifles children's creativity, so too are teachers left feeling like cogs in a machine.

The essential roles of the traditional teacher are all mechanical – reading from the textbook, writing on the board, marking children's homework, and enforcing discipline. They keep her busy but lack fulfilment and meaning. If students are 'products' in the industrial education system, then teachers have been reduced to machines in the production line.

ALfA is different. In an ALfA classroom, every lesson is different as the teacher responds to students dynamically. She is a galvaniser and motivator, less concerned with perfecting her performance than bringing out the best in her learners. The ALfA teacher stays in tune with what matters to children and joins them in the excitement of exploring new learning. Where industrial education represses each teacher's spark, ALfA ignites their passion.

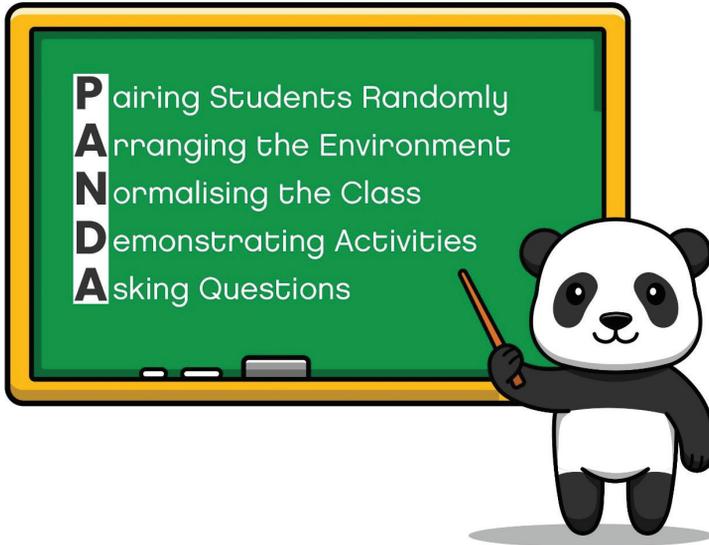
This new paradigm for a teacher's role may sound complicated, but in practice, it is intuitive. Children are curious, thirsty for knowledge and keen to understand their world. When given the right conditions, students build intrinsic motivation and their learning flourishes. Teachers need only to encourage that development rather than interrupt it.

The PANDA Teacher

What does this mean in practice? The ALfA teacher no longer spends much time performing the traditional duties – lecturing students, writing answers for them to copy, or marking homework. Instead, they have five vital roles to play in their student's learning journey:

- Pairing Students Randomly
- Arranging the Environment
- Normalising the Class
- Demonstrating Activities
- Asking Questions

When you're wondering what roles you have to play in an ALfA class, remember that word: PANDA. And your children's learning will grow as quickly as the bamboo this cuddly giant feeds upon!



The Five Key Roles of an ALfA Teacher

Pairing Students Randomly

As we saw in Chapter 4, ALfA draws on a long and illustrious history of peer learning. Many other programmes use peer learning to various extents, but in ALfA, paired learning becomes the dominant modality through which every lesson is digested.

The other unique feature of pairing in ALfA is that it is random, with fresh pairs made daily. This process has many benefits:

- Students learn the most when exposed to diverse partners. Different children have unique styles and insights, so each brings their partner a particular benefit. Also, learners gain more when they can sometimes work with someone more skilled than themselves and other times have the opportunity to explain the material to a classmate at a lower level.
- A rotation that allows all children to take turns with each other will reduce cliques and favouritism. Random pairing means that the best-performing students aren't always matched together and that unpopular or marginalised children aren't the odd ones out. Unlike systems that deliberately pair 'strong' with 'weak' learners, no one feels judged here.

- The diversity of partners facilitates communication, collaboration, and character development.⁵ It helps learners with arrogant or standoffish tendencies to be more accommodating and humbler. It assists those with an inclination towards shyness to become capable of expressing themselves. Students who spend time working together learn to see each other as whole persons—even if they are of different backgrounds or have learning disabilities.

Arranging the Environment

Unlike a traditional classroom, where every desk is oriented towards the teacher, the ALfA classroom should be set up so that it is easy for learners to interact with each other. Teachers can achieve this by having desks face each other, seating multiple children around large desks, or using floor mats.



Children studying literacy together in an ALfA classroom. The lack of chairs is no limitation; in fact, it can allow for more flexible use of classroom space

An ALfA classroom must be conducive to movement. Students should be able to get up, change positions, put their chairs together, and work in different pairs as conveniently as possible. While children can make do with chair-attached desks, it is better to have detached chairs that enable them to adjust seating. There should be space between different groups to free up movement so learning pairs don't disturb each other with their activity.

You must also ensure that students can access resources. For example, when working with younger children, learning pairs should be able

to reach workbooks and game pieces. Teachers responsible for older children will fill the room with reference materials (including technology if appropriate) that they can look up on their own. Anything that helps the students operate independently will streamline the learning experience.

Teachers may also ask children to bring appropriate materials from home—or even gather creative counters from the schoolyard! The teacher can trigger children’s imagination with suggestions but leave plenty of scope for their own ideas as they decide what materials will facilitate their activity.



ALfA students using leaves and flowers to represent three-digit numbers

Normalising the Class

When you first introduce ALfA to your students, they will have been accustomed to the traditional classroom, where they were passive learners forced to compete against each other for marks and the teacher’s attention. As you embark on your ALfA journey, you’ll need to draw your pupil’s

attention to the ‘new norms’ of the class: working in pairs, taking turns leading, and asking each other questions.

This process can start when forming classroom rules at the beginning of the year. Many traditional teachers dictate a set of ‘ground rules’ for the class. This process can be helpful, but we suggest that students play a more active role. You may ask them: ‘What rules do you think we should have in our class?’

Suppose you work together with your students to collectively come up with a set of protocols, such as:

- We will put items back where they belong
- We will take turns with each other
- We will do our best to help each other
- We will speak respectfully to each other

Now, you can ask students to explain in their own words why each rule is important. The goal is to instill a sense of collective ownership and responsibility for the classroom social environment.

As you go through the school year, it’s important to remember to embed ALfA principles at every stage along the way. This will enable students to understand the approach quickly and see your integrity in applying it consistently in all you do.

Demonstrating Activities

Children in an ALfA class spend most of their time working together in pairs, doing activities, and asking each other questions. However, many lessons require a short demonstration from the front so that children know what they are doing. We’ll show this more explicitly at the end of this chapter.

Of all the roles of an ALfA teacher, this one looks most similar to that of a traditional teacher. She is at the front of the classroom, doing most of the talking, with all the children paying attention to her. But there are several critical points of difference to note:

- The traditional teacher *explains* a lot, but the ALfA teacher *demonstrates*, using fewer words and more actions.
- The traditional teacher explains *alone*, whereas the ALfA teacher does a role play with a child so that the students know what they must do in *pairs*.
- The traditional teacher focuses on the class getting the correct *answer*. In contrast, the ALfA teacher focuses on the class understanding the *process*.

When demonstrating activities, the ALfA teacher must maintain a tension between explaining the process well, but also giving students enough time to work on the real meat of the lesson on their own. Remember, you're not teaching them everything, you're only getting them started! So make sure you *help them enough* that they can proceed competently with understanding, but *release them enough* that they still do most of the work on their own with their partner.

Asking Questions

The traditional teacher's job is to give answers. The ALfA teacher's job is to ask questions.

Many teachers aim to transmit information directly, sometimes as if by force.⁶ However, research shows that direct transmission doesn't reflect how our brains learn.⁷ The mind is not a blank slate to be written on; instead, it's an active network of existing knowledge and experiences upon which new knowledge can be built. If a teacher verbally dumps information on her students without connecting it to practical, lived experience, it will not assimilate nearly as well.

The ALfA teacher asks meaningful questions that allow learners to use their existing knowledge. That is what makes class interactive, engaging, and memorable. Then, via paired learning, children adopt the question-asking role for each other. That frees the teacher to observe each pair at work around the room. He can monitor student understanding to see which pairs need help while the others continue working. This process differs significantly from the traditional setting, where lecture activity must stop, and all other children are forced to watch and wait every time a teacher interacts with a particular child.

Now, Let's Look at the 5-Step ALfA Lesson

Much as the ALfA book progresses from simple to complex concepts, the micro-structure of each lesson develops from straightforward to more advanced activities.

We'll unpack the five steps of an ALfA lesson using a sample module on two-digit subtraction.

Step 1: Teacher-Child Demonstration

The first step of an ALfA class is to demonstrate the activity that the children will be doing. Randomly select a child to come forward to help you, and then begin the demonstration. Take it nice and slow. Announce what you are doing each step of the way, and ask the whole class simple

Module 22 We can solve money questions **Level B**

Pictorial representation of the activity →

Some demo questions and paired dialogue →

Prompts explaining the activity, encouraging children to make more questions →

20 grams 100 grams 1 litre 1 litre

Which of these is the cheapest? Which is the most expensive?

How much water can you buy with ₹100?

How much does 2 litres of milk cost?

How many packets of Magi do you need to get 200 grams?

Prompts Sit in Pairs and...

1. Bring some empty packets of chips, biscuits, namkeen etc. from home.
2. Check and compare the weight and cost of each item. Make questions for each other and solve in your notebook.

Sample ALFA numeracy module

questions, interspersed with affirmations, to ensure that they are following along.

Start by reading the word problem, for instance:

‘Aliya had 52 rupees. After she spends 16 rupees, how much will she have left?’

- TEACHER: ‘So, I need to count out 52 to represent Aliya’s money. How many ice cream sticks do I need for 52?’
CLASS: ‘Five’
- TEACHER: ‘Great’ (gets out 5 ice cream sticks and shows them to the class). ‘And how many matchsticks do I need?’
CLASS: ‘Two’
- TEACHER: ‘Perfect.’ (gets out 2 matchsticks) ‘Now I need to take away 16. How many matchsticks are there in 16?’
CLASS: ‘Six’
- Teacher: ‘I had 2 matchsticks. So, can I take away 6?’
CLASS: ‘No.’
- TEACHER: ‘Right. I’ll have to exchange one of my ice cream sticks for more matchsticks. How many matchsticks will I get from the bank in exchange for my ice cream stick?’
CLASS: ‘Ten.’
- TEACHER: ‘Great job.’ (Puts down one ice cream stick and, in return, picks up ten matchsticks)
‘I had two matchsticks earlier, and now I’ve got ten more. So how many do I have in total?’

- CLASS: 'Twelve.'
- TEACHER: 'OK. So now I can take away six.' (Gives six matchsticks to the child with you) 'How many will I be left with?'
CLASS: 'Six matchsticks'
 - TEACHER: 'Excellent. I had five ice cream sticks earlier, but now I've exchanged one, so how many do I have left now?'
CLASS: 'Four.'
 - TEACHER: 'Now, we were taking away 16, so I can take away one more.' (Gives one ice cream stick to the child helping) 'How many will I be left with?'
CLASS: 'Three ice cream sticks.'
 - TEACHER: 'Right. I've got three ice-cream sticks and six matchsticks. What number does that make?'
CLASS: 'Thirty-six.'
 - TEACHER: 'Well done, everyone!'

The focus of the demonstration is not so much on getting the *correct answer* but rather on following the proper *process*. A traditional classroom might start with the teacher explaining a formula or process by writing on the board, but demonstration is much more effective. The children are *hearing* your description and *seeing* you follow the proper procedure. Asking questions throughout makes it more likely that they pay close attention.

Step 2: Child-Child Demonstration

If the emphasis of the first demonstration was on following the proper mathematical process, then the second demonstration focuses on the paired nature of the activity.

Randomly draw two name chits to call two children forward. Give them another question to work through in front of the whole class, while you quietly observe. Sometimes, children will follow their peers' demonstrations more closely than yours.

The two children you randomly selected to come forward may make some errors – for instance, subtracting the ice cream sticks first or forgetting to put back an ice cream stick when they are drawing ten matchsticks. Errors are great learning opportunities! Don't rush in to correct the pair; ask the rest of the class to see if they can spot it and help.

Step 3: Paired Work

After these two demonstrations, it's time to engage the whole class actively in paired work. Give two or three questions (for instance, those given

in the prompts) for each pair to work on solving using their hands-on materials, using the same process they just observed.

Initially, you might quietly roam the class to see how they are doing. However, don't be too quick to offer help if a particular pair is struggling. Instead, suggest they ask the help of a neighbouring pair. In doing so, the other pair gets the chance to deepen their understanding through teaching. This process also builds social bonds and develops communication and collaboration skills.

Ideally, as the class grows used to paired work, you won't need to roam the class anymore. Instead, you can sit quietly to observe or take photos and videos of the activity to add to your portfolio and document the class progress.

Once pairs are comfortable solving this type of question using their *concrete* materials, it's time for *abstract* representation, that is, in writing. To do this, you'll need to temporarily return to Step 1 for another demonstration. Draw a giant ice cream stick on the left side of the board and a matchstick on the right. Use the question you demonstrated earlier, which the class will still be familiar with, and this time solve it using writing.

The process will go something like this:

- Remind the class of the original problem (52-16).
- Ask them how many tens and how many ones in 52. Write '5' on the tens side and '2' on the ones side.
- Similarly, write '16' underneath: 1 on the tens side and 6 on the ones side.
- Gesturing to the ones side of the board, ask the class, 'Since I can't take away 6 from 2, what will I have to do?' They will respond, 'Exchange one ice cream stick for ten matchsticks.'
- Ask, 'How many matchsticks will I have now?' (12) Write a '1' before the '2' to make '12'.
- Ask 'How many ice cream sticks do I have now?' (4)
- In the tens column, cross out the 5 and write 4 instead.
- Gesturing to the one's column, ask, 'Now I'm taking 6 away from 12. How many will I have left?' (6)
- Gesturing to the tens column, ask, 'Now I'm taking 1 away from 4. How many will I have left?' (3)
- Ask: 'What's the total number remaining?' The class responds: 36.

As the children follow along, they start making cognitive connections between the concrete manipulations of ice cream sticks & matchsticks and

the abstract process of carrying (crossing out the 5 tens and writing 4; writing 1 in front of the 2 ones to make 12).

You can now let the learners return to paired work and give them questions to solve both in writing and using concrete objects. A neat way to do this is for Child A to solve a problem using their ice cream sticks and matchsticks, while Child B follows along and solves in writing. Then, for the next question, they swap roles.

Step 4: New Questions

Conventional textbooks and workbooks often give lots of practise problems for children to solve. Practise is indeed essential for mastery. So why do the ALfA books only give 3 or 4 practise questions?

It's because, in Step 4, the children go beyond what's given in the book and start making questions for each other.

It is well known that young children ask a lot of questions—a recent UK study suggested an average of 73 per day!⁸ Sadly, the traditional education system often stifles children's curiosity, leading to a drop in the quantity and quality of questions. Contrast the 5-year-old's question 'What is the biggest number?' with the 15-year-old's query 'What questions are most likely to come on the exam?'

Children making questions to ask each other is baked into the ALfA process. This approach has many advantages:

- Making up questions helps develop children's creativity and critical thinking.
- Children often feel more motivated to try solving questions given by their partner rather than those provided by a textbook.
- Children enjoy challenging their peers and might ask tricky questions to stretch their partner.
- Control of error is built into the process: kids check each other's work. If they disagree on an answer, they discuss it and might ask another pair their opinion. The process forges collaboration and communication skills.

One story illustrates how much children enjoy posing tricky questions for their peers. In a module on fractions, we started by folding a paper into four parts and colouring one quarter to show what a quarter means. Soon, we posed questions for kids to solve in pairs (Step 3), like 'Colour two-thirds of your paper' or 'Colour three-eighths.' But the children were up and running once we got to Step 4. We saw one girl use a ruler to carefully

divide her paper into a 16×24 grid before colouring in 37 rectangles and asking her partner, ‘What fraction does this represent?’ (37 / 384)!

In early lessons, children can pose verbal questions to their partner—ideally as word problems. In later modules, as their writing skills improve, children can write a few questions on chits of paper for their partner to select from and solve.

Step 5: Homework, Feedback and Gap-Filling

The ALfA process is so effective within the classroom that there’s not much need for homework. We also don’t want teachers to be overburdened by repeatedly giving homework and needing to mark it.

However, we can extend Step 4 to homework as well. Of the questions children write for each other, they can designate a few as homework. The next day, when the pair returns, they can check each other’s homework before going into their new pairs. This process further develops children’s creativity and critical thinking as they make and solve each other’s questions, averts teachers’ need to check a mountain of monotonous worksheets.

However, it is still essential for the teacher to maintain a feel on the pulse of the class – what proportion of students have developed the relevant competencies and which specific topics have proven the most challenging. To gather this information, the teacher needs to take periodic feedback from the class.

In a traditional classroom, most information flows from the teacher to the students (as a lecture). When the teacher occasionally stops to take feedback, it is often by asking a question and telling those who know the answer to raise their hand. She then selects one of the kids who raised their hands to answer.

However, there are several drawbacks to this method of taking feedback:

- The teacher may not get an accurate sense of how many students know the answer. Some kids who don’t raise their hands may know the answer but are shy or don’t want to be singled out. Conversely, some kids who think they know the answer may not actually.
- The rest of the class—both those who raised their hands and those who didn’t—is passive while a single child answers.
- When choosing a child to answer, avoiding the perception of favouritism is difficult. Students may think, ‘Why bother? The teacher never picks me to answer.’

So, what's the alternative? We can transform the process of taking feedback from a dry, non-participatory and potentially stressful experience into a fun, formative quiz that gives reasonable insight into the class learning levels. Here's how it works:

1. Make a simple multiple-choice quiz covering key concepts/competencies from the latest lesson or two. Remind children that it's just a game; it doesn't matter who gets right or wrong answers.
2. Write the first question and its options on the board (or describe them orally).
3. Give everyone appropriate time to think and solve (in writing, if possible). Alternatively, you can invite children to discuss it with their partner and solve it together.
4. Ask children to vote for their answer. There are several ways to do this.
 - (a) You could say, 'Everyone who thinks option A, stand up,' then, after doing a quick headcount, 'Thanks, please sit down. Now everyone who thinks option B, stand up,' and so on. This technique is fun, quick and easy, but sometimes kids will vote with the crowd or follow their friends.
 - (b) Ask children to write their answers in large font on a slate or paper. Have everyone hold their answer up to reveal simultaneously, and take a quick count of how many got it right.
5. Repeat Steps 2–4 for other questions on your quiz.



The aim of quizzes is to gain instant feedback on the class learning levels. But it is not data collection for the sake of data collection; rather, it enables swift action to remedy any learning gaps. Consider three scenarios:

- **Students do very well** (e.g. > 90 per cent). We can move on to the subsequent modules.
- **Students do pretty well** (e.g. 60–90 per cent). Make fresh pairs. This time, be deliberate in ensuring that children still struggling with a topic sit with those who have mastered it. Repeat Steps 3 and 4: they work in pairs and make questions for each other to solve.
- **Students aren't doing well yet** (e.g. < 60 per cent). If most of the class struggles with a concept, repeat Step 1: a demonstration. You may want to try a different activity or approach to the same competency. For instance, if children struggle with using ice cream sticks and matchsticks to understand 2-digit numbers, try clapping and snapping instead.

Scan the QR to check out a video showcasing the five steps of an ALfA lesson.

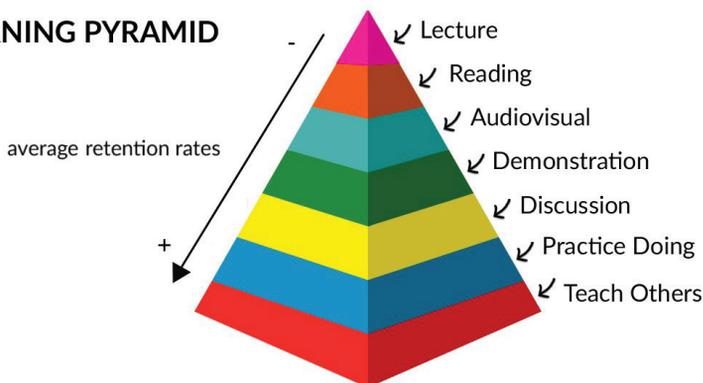


To recap, the five steps of an ALfA lesson are:

1. Teacher-child demonstration
2. Child-child demonstration
3. Paired work on set questions
4. Pairs make new questions for each other
5. Homework, feedback & gap-filling

Let's reflect on the five-part lesson through the 'learning pyramid' lens.

LEARNING PYRAMID



The highest rungs, representing the least effective learning strategies—listening to a lecture or being given a reading to do alone—are not used at all in ALfA. Instead, the first two steps of the ALfA lesson focus on demonstration, which is in the middle of the pyramid. The third step could be considered ‘practise by doing’, and the fourth and fifth steps involve ‘teaching others’, with the children making questions for each other to solve in the class and for homework. See how quickly the ALfA lesson progresses to the pyramid’s lower rungs and spends substantial time there!

Taking Questions Deeper

As discussed above, a crucial role of the ALfA teacher is to ask questions and encourage students to ask questions of each other. In the early stages of math and reading, we ask simple questions for which there is only one desired answer (e.g., ‘What is this picture?’ and ‘What is its first sound?’ or ‘What do you get when you subtract 2 from 5?’). However, the teacher’s role will evolve once the learner moves beyond mere decoding. The goal is no longer to extract the ‘right answer’ but to get students thinking, developing their questions, and doing independent research. Once learners consider the material independently, their personal, reflective responses will be more meaningful than the canned answers they were conditioned to produce in the traditional classroom.

How does a teacher encourage students to explore problems for themselves? One approach is to use ‘Why?’ questions instead of the stale ‘Where? What? When?’ typical of rote memorisation testing. Look at this example and consider the contrast in responses that these two inquiries would generate.

Rote question: *‘What river goes through the city of Shanghai?’*

Deeper question: *‘Why does Shanghai lie on a river?’*

The first question is just a memory test. The second option propels children to do more meaningful research. Suppose they discover Shanghai was built on a river because it facilitates travel routes, improves fishing access, and provides a convenient water source for agriculture. Those answers may lead the child to consider further questions, such as ‘Does that mean other cities were built on rivers for the same reason?’ ‘Which of those reasons apply to the large cities on the coastline?’ and ‘How did my city come to be in its location?’ You can see the contrast from the original prompt of ‘What river?’ which has no natural follow-up once answered. The ‘Why?’ questions open many more avenues of thought.

CMS Teachers' Experience of ALfA

I (Sunita) am chief academic advisor at City Montessori School—the world's largest school, and a recipient of the UNESCO peace prize.* Some CMS campuses started using the ALfA programme in 2023, and found it to be highly effective and engaging. Here is what some of the teachers had to say:†

'The very essence of learning through ALfA Classes is PAIRED LEARNING. When sitting in randomly created pairs, the passive student also becomes an Active Learner. In this process unknowingly, students help each other and learn to develop the 21st century skills. It also leads to higher student attendance and engagement throughout the day. It helps children to collaborate with their partners, mend their ways of communicating. It helps learners to understand the virtue of empathy, compassion and working as a team. They become independent and confident citizens.'

– **Swati Grade**, 2A, Station Road

'I am very satisfied by seeing improvement and remarkable confidence level in my students' overall skill development. And all the credit goes to the initiative led by the school for providing the opportunity of ALfA classes. It has made children revise their basics and helped them to get their base stronger, the activities performed in the classes excite students to learn, it provides a fun and friendly environment for the children and this helps them in their overall personality and skill development. Also the Alfa classes are encouraging the students for teamwork. The work of the teacher as a galvanizer has helped children to think and work on their own, the children learn efficiently now. Previously two children (Aizah Ahmad and Om Kesarwani) who were especially not doing well in reading have now become good readers by the ALfA literary method of reading.'

– **Firdaus Abbasi**, Grade 2B, Station Road

'ALfA is a student-led teaching-learning platform where in students actively participate in teaching-learning process. Children have started taking initiative to participate in various class activities the instructional ways to guide children to acquire, understand, and apply new information

* Guinness World Records (2023). World's Largest School by Number of Pupils. <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-school-by-pupils>

† As reported in an online feedback form filled out in November 2023.

and skills that will help them in their studies and their lives. The collaborative activities via pair learning have developed confidence in them and have motivated them to express themselves in front of others especially the introvert and slow learners.’

– **Tayyaba Fatima**, Grade 2A & 2B, Anand Nagar

‘ALfA has been a transformative approach that has significantly improved the learning experience and overall well-being of both students and myself as a teacher. Shy and special needs children now actively participate, ‘low’ performers have shown remarkable progress, and hyperactive students are more focused. There’s a noticeable improvement in the quality of work, understanding, and writing. Comparing this year to previous ones, ALfA has accelerated learning and enriched the educational experience. Additionally, it has had a positive impact on the social development of students, fostering empathy and teamwork. Personally, I find great satisfaction in this approach, with reduced correction work, increased creativity, and a sense of accomplishment. ALfA is a model I wholeheartedly endorse for the educational community.’

– **Moushumi Sengupta**, Grade 3F, Gomti Nagar Extension

A capable teacher in the ALfA curriculum will work ‘Why?’ questions into the framework of every lesson, as well as ask such questions spontaneously when the opportunity arises. Prompts like, ‘*Why might the author have made that plot choice?*’ or ‘*Why is that country’s clothing so much more colourful than others?*’ make the day more exciting and keep children’s minds engaged. And open-ended questions can lead to research projects that students work on over many days or weeks.

Some traditional teachers seek to demonstrate their expertise by knowing all the answers. In contrast, the ALfA teacher does well to adopt the Socratic approach—asking questions as if from a position of ignorance to elicit our students to think more deeply and explain themselves more cogently.

Scan the QR codes to hear teachers’ experiences with the ALfA programme.



Government school teachers,
Unnao district



City Montessori School,
Lucknow

Conclusion

Many teachers are skilled experts in their subject, but that has little impact on whether they can teach well. We have all had brilliant instructors (like Professor Viru ‘Virus’ Sahastrabuddhi in *Three Idiots*) who failed to connect with their students due to their teaching style or demeanour. Our children don’t need experts impressed with their knowledge; they need galvanisers who help students discover new knowledge themselves.⁹

The roles of the ALfA teacher—from making pairs to normalising the class, from asking questions to encouraging students—are ultimately much more meaningful and fulfilling than the traditional teacher, who merely writes on the board and checks homework. The ALfA teacher serves simultaneously as a friend, role model and inspiration. But they are no longer the focus of the class, which has been placed squarely on the students. They just help those students to fly.