

Building as Learning Aid (BALA)

Bal in Hindi means a child or a boy (as in case of Govt. Boys Schools in Delhi). The acronym BALA means a girl. BALA is an innovative way to look at the relationship of a child with the school space.

The fact that physical space can be a resource in the teaching-learning process has never been explored seriously. Building as learning aid (BALA) is about maximising the learning value of the school space. A range of learning situations and materials can be actively used as a learning resource by innovatively treating school spaces (classroom, circulation spaces, outdoors, natural environment) and their constituent built elements (floor, wall, ceiling, door, windows, furniture, open ground). This resource can complement the teaching process and supplement textbook information. A three-dimensional space can offer a unique setting for a child to learn because it can introduce a multiple sensory experience into the otherwise black and white world of textbooks and blackboard. It can make abstract concepts more real for the child. Dimensions, textures, shapes, angles and movement can be used to communicate some basic concepts of language, science, mathematics and environment and to make learning a truly memorable experience for children.

BaLa aims at using floors, walls, pillars, staircases, windows, doors, ceilings, fans, trees, flowers, and even rainwater, as learning aids. For example a window grill can help children practice pre-writing skills or understand fractions. Angles can be marked under a door shutter on the floor and ceiling fans can be painted with color wheels for children to enjoy ever changing formations. Moving shadows of a flag-pole can be used as sundial to understand ways of measuring time, and planting trees that shed their leaves in winters and are green in summers can create a cool, comfortable outdoor learning space.

- BaLa can be introduced even in the building components of an existing school.
- It can be combined with building repairs, up-gradation and new construction.
- It makes joyous learning possible for children.
- It makes a variety of learning materials accessible to children outside the classroom, even after school hours.
- It has the potential to create conducive self-learning situations for children.
- BaLa learning aids are not standard. Teachers can adapt them to suit their own specific needs and conditions.
- The learning materials, integrated in the built environment, are more lasting and durable, and cannot be stolen or misplaced.
- Even though fixed, these learning aids can be used in multiple ways.
- The value of the school building increases manifold at a fractional increase in its actual cost.