

Novel Pedagogies

*Insights and Stories from an Interactive
Experience With the Mangroves*

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Preface

This project was an initiative aimed at creating environmental awareness, specifically focusing on the importance of mangroves, amongst the children of Salehabad, which is located next to Manora off the coast of Karachi. Salehabad is a fishermen community housing an indigenous community. The aim was to use the power of art to inspire young minds of Salehabad to appreciate and protect their unique coastal associations.

The project actively involved the children of Salehabad through art workshops, storytelling sessions, and hands-on engagement in the creation of an art installation. Additionally, a collaboration was created with local school and community members to ensure the sustainability and long-term impact of the project. The larger aims of the project were raising awareness, imparting environmental education through creative narrative building, community engagement and creative documentation and dissemination. The aim was also to create lasting impressions on a blank canvas, through developing a narrative that will imprint the lives of the school kids, and a bond will be created between humanity and the earth. The vision was to reach beyond just art-making and nurture empathy and connect young hearts to the grandeur of existence. Just as nature safeguards us, the aspiration was for these children to become its guardians too.

The mangroves on the coast of Karachi play a vital role in the breeding of young marine species, oxygenating the entire coastal belt and protecting the coast from tidal storms. The fishing community speaks of their integral role in the ecological system and identifies the damage and large scale cutting of the mangroves done by industry to save on fuel expenses. The project aimed to voice the concerns of the fishing community with regard to changes to the ecological context, including the mangroves and untreated waste dumped into various waterways and sea, and the pressing issues they face that contribute to poverty for them. The lens used was that of children and how they appropriate urban space on a peninsula, and how they relate with natural elements around them, like the sea, the beach and the mangrove forest. The project thus connected the local community's voice from the child's lens and linked it back to the urbanites as a public art and narrative expressive therapy creating a sense of ownership and collective belonging. The idea was to look for a space for more than what it is, and turn the lens inside out. The question being asked was, 'what if the mangrove forest starts reclaiming its space back', thus making the mangrove forest the protagonist. This publication brings together the learnings from this engagement and is meant to serve as a platform for building ideas on how to develop pedagogies which can help adults inculcate a sense of responsiveness in kids.



Mapping

Importance of Mangroves, Structure-Building Day

Explaining the role of various species living within the mangroves.

Warm-Up Exercises

Discussing the questions we asked before: The character from the story read on site showed us one way we can save the mangroves, but can we come up with more ways? Do you know why the kids in the story thought it was important to save the mangroves?

Small discussion on extinct and endangered species

Explanation through riddles and idioms for children to remember easily. This awareness methodology is through Poises – Expressive arts methodology (Stephen K Levine) adapted by Rutaba Syed & Alishba Sohail.

Painting the Endangered Species

Kids started painting the endangered species on the bird feeders

Write love letters to mangroves

Now that we know the mangroves are upset, let's build a bond with them once again. What did you learn? + how can you save and take care of your environment?



The Process



Making the waterbed

Placing our bird feeders and making the waterbed with shoppers: Instead of the species being inside the protection area, we find plastic and trash in the water

How to Save the Mangroves, Finalizing Public Art Project

Overlay of ideas on the branches and structure to make the "wish tree". Embedded concept of these world visions come to life in an art format.

Making the birds with Wire

Wire outline by kids were made to engage in coiling and learning of alternative methods of using trash.

Tying the rope and planting the seeds

Kids tied their ropes around the tree's heart and hung them on the tree

Wind chimes

Wind chimes made out of wasted cans, seashells, rope and beads were also tied on the tree.

PEDAGOGY 1

Roleplay

In my view the role play activities with the students such as bees, oysters, fruit bats, monkeys, crabs, algae, sea urchins, snakes and mudskippers using yarn became a very interesting activity. This was engaging and students adapted to the role they were assigned to. Questions were asked about co-ecology and co-existence and these complicated questions were discussed using this activity.

Students were required to be different species that inhabit the mangroves, and ideas of co-dependencies were explained. For example three students were bees and ideas of importance of pollination and their role in fruit production was played out. Two more students were oysters and they were asked to think about their role in filtering the water systems and what would happen if they were to become extinct. Similarly, one student was a fruit bat, and they were questioned to address the idea that if they don't feed on fruits, how will seeds disperse from one site to another, connecting to the idea of germination.



The roleplay activity

PEDAGOGY 2

Interactive Book Reading and Narrative Building

Book reading and narrative building in an actual setting, next to the mangroves helped go beyond simple storytelling and the students could experience the context that was being narrated in the story. This activity was accompanied by a dramatic poem recitation which was followed by interaction through a question and answer session.



The workshop conductors narrating a story about mangroves

Story Narration

The Angry Forest

Break of dawn came very different for Salehabad on the first day of autumn. Shiza opened her eyes to her school bag hanging above her head...on a tree branch. For a moment she thought she was dreaming, she shook her head twice and then looked again that it was actually a tree branch coming from the broken floor beside her bed.



She immediately ran outside her room to see more water and twisted branches coming from the floor.

As the neighbors stepped out... all gasped at the broken roads, the sky hardly visible between the dark leaves, the floor now thick as tar with mud, and the water rising slowly above knee level. Her family called out to her as they all ran outside. The panic and chaos had now taken over the island, people held onto their families and started moving in all directions to make sense of their land that seemed unrecognizable now.



Everyone frantically made their way to the shore only to witness the water parted from the middle while all the branches, mud, hills and trash lead to central source in the forest across the water... the forest they had forgotten of lately. Shiza screamed:

"Ma! It's the mangroves... it has taken over the land!!"

In response, all fishermen, wood workers and neighborhood men gathered their tools, shovels and knives to rush to the source tree. Meanwhile others fled to look for help across Manora and Keemari. Soon policemen and furious residents made way into the forest. Shiza and her classmates had now reunited by the port facing the forest and watched as people aggressively moved into the forest cutting, burning and gutting all that came in their way. The children observed the roots and branches as they grew more pointed and damaging with a roar as they got cut... as if the trees got angrier with each strike of the axe.

The children called out to people "Stop cutting! Stop hurting it... you're making it worse" they cried. Yet no one listened and went more aggressive with each strike.

Shiza gathered her six friends, grabbed a few carts, some bandages her mother kept aside and decided to go into the source trees. She told her friends "I think the mangroves is really angry... we must go in and talk to the police" on hearing this her friends giggled and ignored what she was saying but some followed her out of curiosity.

On reaching the mangroves Shiza bent down and started removing trash, hard wire, fishnets and bricks from the arched roots. Her friends started putting bandages dipped in mud over the freshly cut branches by the islanders. They kept apologizing and singing ballads to the trees to calm them down.

While cleaning the roots, children felt the branches moving and water was dripping from above them. Bilal who was helping the group screamed "Its ALIVE!!!.... The trees are alive". The children looked up and stood stunned as they saw the trees come to life. But all of the trees were shedding tears that made the water at their feet grow more

Suddenly they heard one tree speak...

"Oh dearest, look what brought you to me... How does it feel to lose your land?" The tree cried louder "It hurts my soul that it took me taking over your land to have you be kind to me. We meant no harm, yet all people of the city did to me was harm. I was rare, I was one of a kind. Yet no one tried to know me, love me or care for me. Many times, I saved you all from the heat, I gave you fish and prawns but all you did was put litter in me. You kept hurting me and my family". Shiza gathered herself and began hugging the tree, apologizing for all the wrong things by her people to which the mangroves responded "Oh child you deserve better and so do we. I didn't mean to harm you but only to show you what it would feel like if I invaded your land. We could co-exist...we could have thrived. I am not angry just deeply hurt for many years." As the mangroves cried, it retracted the roots, branches, mud and all the water back from the land. Salehabad looked a little like itself again but scarred and hurt much like the forest across it.





Story of The Mangroves

I'm a friend like that.
Keeping you always in my shadow.
But you don't come to meet me
Even if you come, you leave a wound .

I cry so much that I have become a river in your
memory, flowing in my feet.
There is a world in this river in which many people
live.

There are generations

You don't know these generations.
Don't you ever ask me their stories?
There's a whole world in me.
One day a snake came to meet me
He made his abode in me.

I was so happy in his adoption that I flourished with
joy.
My creatures are strong even in sorrow.
But this is you
Stealing everything, too

مینگروو کی کہانی

میں اک ساتھی ایسا
اپنے سائے میں رکھتا ہمیشہ

پر تم آتے نہیں ملنے
آ بھی جاؤ تو زخم چھوڑ جاتے ہو مجھ میں

روتا ہوں میں اتنا تمہاری یاد میں
دریا بن گیا اب میرے پاؤں میں


اس دریا میں ایک دنیا بسی ہے جس جل
میں کئی نسلیں ہیں

ان نسلوں کو نا تم جانتے ہو نا پہچانتے ہو
کبھی پوچھو مجھ سے انکی کہانیاں
پوری ایک روداد بسی ہے مجھ میں

اک روز اک سانپ آیا ملنے
بنا لیا اپنا بسیرا اس نے مجھ میں

اسکی آپنائیت میں میں اتنا خوش ہوا
خوشی سے میں اور کھل گیا
میری مخلوق دکھ میں بھی ہے مضبوط






Why couldn't you just leave me?
Are you jealous of me?
How long will you walk carefully with the dust on
my chest?

You live by my breath.
You live in my shadows
Your food is sent by me.
My skin is your earnings.

You have everything connected to me.
What else is bothering you now?
Why can't you bear the treasure of nature?
Why are you destroying my family?

Shall I take your land in return?
I will approach with my roots, and take these
houses and this settlement,
Then I will call upon the water that is a source of
destruction.

By making a wave
Finishing everything off
All that is dear to you
How long will you hurt me?



پر یہ ہو تم
سب چرا کر بھی ہو مزلوم
کیون رہا نہ گیا تم سے؟
جلتے ہو کیا تم مجھ سے؟

میرے سینے تک مٹی بھر کے کب تک احتیاط
سے چلو گے مجھ سے
میرے دم سے تم جیتے ہو
سائے میں میرے ربتے ہو
تمہاری غزہ مجھ سے قائم ہے
میری جلد تمہاری کمائی ہے
تمہارا سب کچھ تو جڑا ہے مجھ سے
اب اور کس بات کی پریشانی ہے
کیون نا برداشت ہوتا تم سے قدرت کا خزانہ
آخر کیوں تباہ کے جارہے ہو میرا گھرانہ

بدلے میں اب میں لے لوں تم سے تمہاری زمین؟
جا کر لوں اپنی رگوں سے یہ سارے گھر یہ
ساری آبادی
پھر پکاروں اس پانی کو جو اسازا ہے تباہی کا
لہر بنا کے کردون ختم
وہ سب جو ہے تم کو عزیز
آخر کب تک دوگے مجھے تکلیف



Riddles

Explanation was done through riddles and idioms for children to remember easily. This awareness methodology is through Poises – Expressive arts Therapy (Stephen K Levine) and was adapted by Rutaba Syed and Alishba Sohail from Centre for Arts based Methodologies and Wellbeing.

1 I have no legs but I am not a broken chair. Many people are afraid of me, but I am not even a ghost. You may find me in the sleeves but I am not a hand

Answer: Snake

2 My body is strong but it cannot be weighed I live in the ocean But I am not from the family of the fish

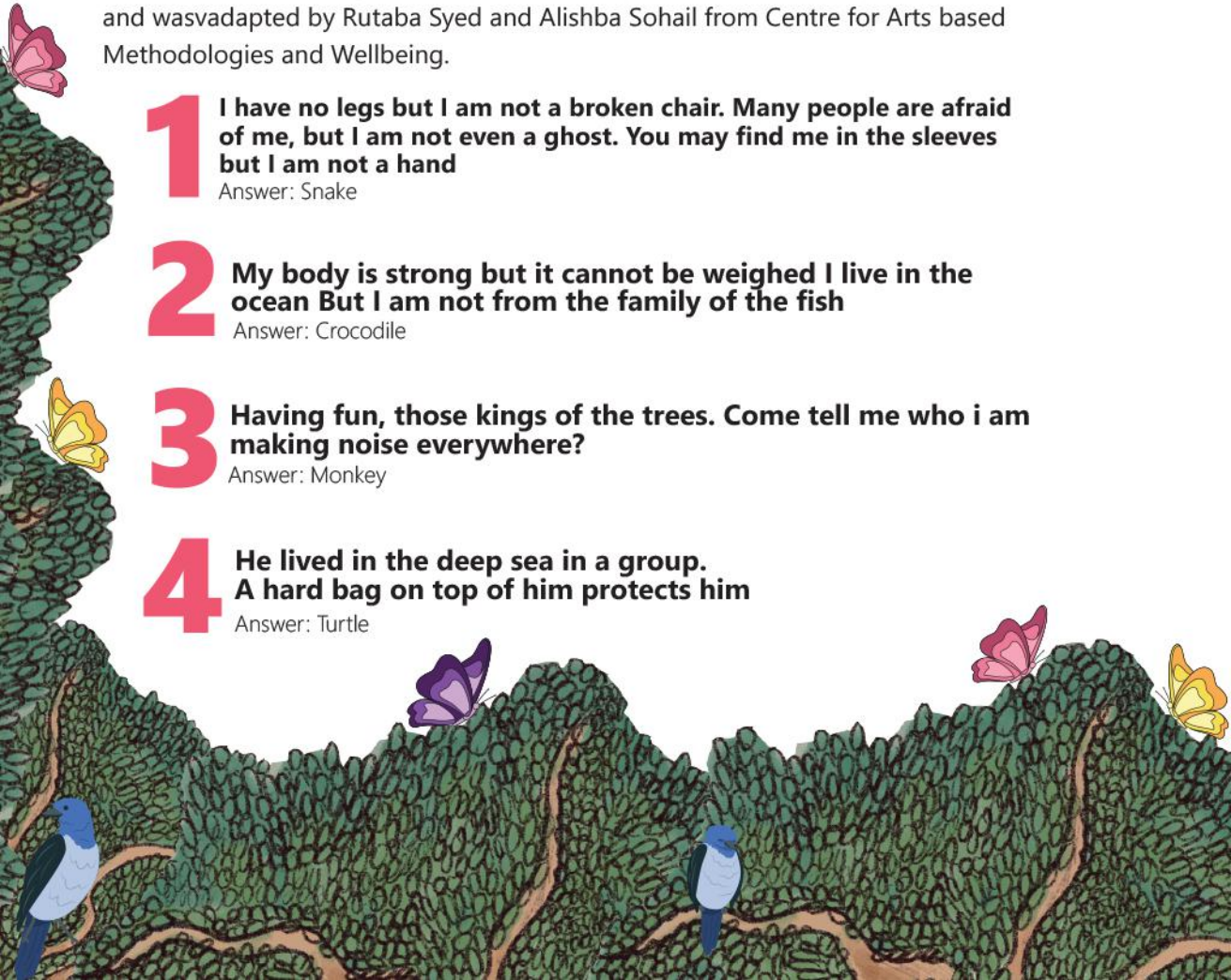
Answer: Crocodile

3 Having fun, those kings of the trees. Come tell me who i am making noise everywhere?

Answer: Monkey

4 He lived in the deep sea in a group. A hard bag on top of him protects him

Answer: Turtle



پہیلیاں

ٹانگیں نہیں ہیں میری لیکن میں ٹوٹی ہوئی کرسی نہیں -
بہت سے لوگ مجھ سے ڈرتے ہیں لیکن میں بھوت بھی نہیں۔
آستین میں ملتا ہوں لیکن میں ہاتھ نہیں۔
جواب: سانپ

میرا جسم مضبوط ہے لیکن تولا نہیں جا سکتا
سمندر میں رہتا ہوں لیکن میں مچھلیوں کے خاندان سے نہیں
جواب: مگر مجھ

درختوں کے وہ بادشاہ، مزے کرو آؤ بتاؤ میں کون ہوں، ہر طرف شور مچا رہا ہے؟
جواب: بندر

گہرے سمندر میں رہتا ہے ایک گروپ میں۔ ایک سخت بیگ ہے میری حفاظت کرتا ہے۔
جواب: کچھوا



PEDAGOGY 3

DIY tools as interfaces between human and non-human worlds

Various methods were used to help the students develop interfaces between human and non-human elements and think about the idea of bringing the mangroves back to life. Some of these methods are mentioned here.

Method 1: Map-making and Drawing Based on Questions about Salehabad

The students were asked to think about the bird's eye view of Salehabad and how the mangrove forest sits right next to it? They were also asked to think about what if the mangrove were to take back Salehabad, and to put these ideas on drawings. The notions of co-ecology and 'who are we' were also put in the narrative building for the creation of these maps

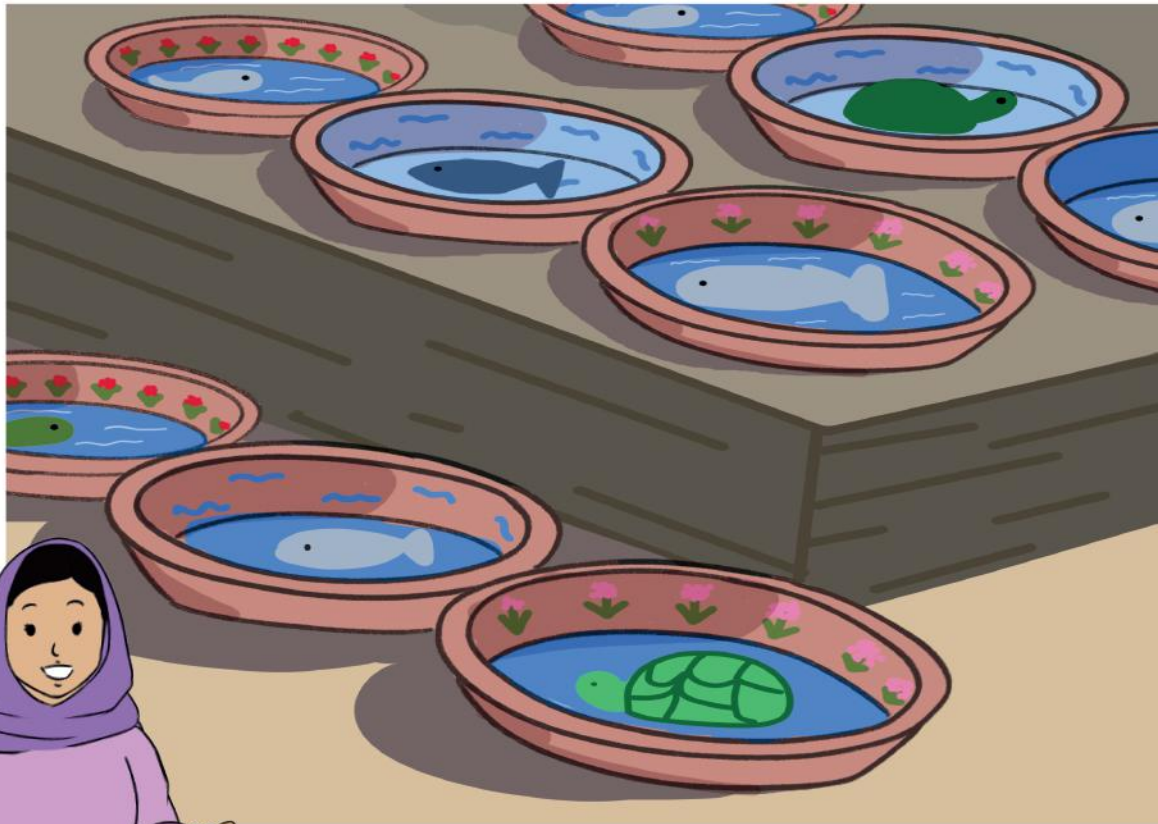


Student drawings of Salehabad from a bird's eye view



Method 2: Painting the Bird Feeders

Information about the endangered species found in mangrove's ecosystem of Pakistan was given to the students and then they were asked to pick and paint some of these endangered species on bird feeders which were to then become part of the final installation.



Bird Feeders made from clay and hand painted by children

Method 3 : Creating Wind Chimes from Recyclable Carbonated Drinks Cans

The idea of recycling and upcycling was introduced here. The concept of untreated trash going into the mangroves and the sea was also talked about. Ways of recycling trash creatively and preventing it from ending in the sea and in the mangrove forest was explored via developing wind chimes using sea shells found on the beach and empty carbonated drinks to create art pieces.



Children made Wind chimes from recycled soda cans

Method 4 : Using wires to Create Animal Wire Sculpture

Pieces of wires lying around the school campus and on the streets were also seen as trash. Some of these also ended up in the sea and could harm the sea animals. This idea was introduced to the students and wire sculptures were created using wire wastage and put on the public art installation of the tree.



Bird sculpture made by children from recycled wire

Method 5 : The Installation Itself

A public art installation named "The Wish Tree" was created through engaging the students on the school campus. The idea here was to make a symbolic tree, using recycled materials, that was adorned with plastic shoppers instead of leaves. The branches were adorned with wind chimes made from trash, bird feeders, and real plants were planted as part of the installation by the students. This installation promoted human and non-human interaction and emphasized the interconnectedness of all living beings with the environment.



The Wish Tree

PEDAGOGY 4

Giving Identities to non-human elements- haree-haree

It can be agreed that there is a raw beauty of identity, sense of belonging and attachment that lies under one's name. If a non-human entity is to be given an identity it needs to be named first. 'Names' also help create a difference between one identity and another. This methodology was used for the this activity where each participant was asked to name the plant and talk to the plant. This short activity also served as an ice breaker and enabled the students to settle in the new context which was next to the mangroves and away from the school.



Children from Salehabad Govt. School joyfully coming up with names for the plant

Some Learnings

- 1) Community involvement created a sense of ownership and connection to the installation and plants.
- 2) The art works served as a platform for education and advocacy.
- 3) Interactive elements like bird feeders and plants allowed the students to directly engage with ecological concepts and learn through their experiences.
- 4) Ideas about recycling and upcycling were inculcated via practical experience. Knowledge was gained through introducing the idea of co-ecology, and by discussing ways to connect with local ecosystems.
- 5) Reinforcement through various practical methods helped put the message across clearly; the students learnt about mangrove species through role play, riddles, painting on bird feeders and making wire sculptures.
- 6) Creating the installation within their everyday environment was meant to ensure they keep connecting with it and take care of the plants even later as each student was given the responsibility of taking care of a plant and to keep refilling the bird feeders
- 7) Furthermore, I think going to the community really worked rather than asking them to venture out from their familiar environment. Thus, the project had local relevance as it took inspiration from the local environment and community history.
- 8) In short, the novelty of the project lied in the combination of community engagement, ecological awareness, sustainability, and the potential for long-term positive impact on both the environment and the community.

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Novel Pedagogies: Insight and Stories from an Interactive Experience With the Mangroves

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The project entailed public community participation via public art work. The idea of 'trash into treasure' by CFAW previously used in "Hamara Kachra Hamari Zimmedari" was also used to create the public art work and to create novel interfaces for human and non-human interaction.



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