INSPIRATION FROM INNOVATION: TEACHERS’ IDEAS TO IMPROVE CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS
STIR EDUCATION

At STIR Education, our belief is that the best way to improve the quality of education is to empower teachers and principals. As the people closest to the challenges of providing all children a high quality education, teachers and principals are uniquely placed to lead change in the education system.

STIR has two very simple ideas about how to do this:
1. By identifying the teachers and principals who have created successful, innovative practices – what we call ‘micro-innovations’ - to improve education in their schools and recognising their efforts publicly
2. By creating an ecosystem that enables those micro-innovations to be shared with other teachers and schools – through partner organisations and teacher networks – and that encourages and inspires the development of additional micro-innovations

By identifying teachers’ innovations and building the STIR network of teachers – what will become India’s most creative community of teachers - our aim is to improve the quality of education for over 1 million children in the next three years.

This guide introduces just five of our micro-innovations: We hope that it inspires you to introduce a similar idea in your classroom, to share your own micro-innovations with STIR and to join the STIR network of innovative educators!
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Whether you are a classroom teacher or a school principal, STIR Micro-Innovations will inspire you to develop effective new approaches to improve your classroom or school.

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Sajd Hasan is both Principal and a teacher of Standard III at Babul Uloom School. He believes strongly that only education can only solve India’s social and economic problems and works hard to ensure that all students at Babul Uloom are taught at the correct level.

Babul Uloom is a new school that is based in a Madarsa in Seelampur, East Delhi and serves the children of labourers, small shop owners, vegetable vendors or rickshaw pullers; all the children are first generation learners. The school is a new school that has been set up by Sajid and is intended to be a school run ‘for the community and by the community’. As such, Sajid recruited all 7 teachers at Babul Uloom from the Seelampur area.
HOW CAN I HELP MY TEACHERS DEVELOP WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK?

Although the teachers at Babul Uloom are very committed, they are young and inexperienced and most lack formal training. Those who have taught previously are settled into old habits. Sajid is very keen to support them to develop as teachers for the benefit of the students at Babul Uloom but formal training opportunities are extremely expensive and do not necessarily encourage on-going reflection and improvement.

Sajid was struggling to help his teachers to identify their mistakes and to examine their work critically. Often teachers would become defensive when he tried to provide advice and training.

“I had a number of conversations with teachers about their teaching and tried to suggest ways that they could improve but the approach was not proving to be very effective. I needed a way for them to see themselves in action and to identify ways to improve for themselves”.

DO THESE CHALLENGES SOUND FAMILIAR?

To help his teachers to become more effective and to recognise their areas for improvement without becoming defensive, Sajid now films his teachers delivering lessons. He then gives them the film of the lesson and asks them to watch it and to think about how they could improve their teaching. Sajid then organises to meet with the teachers and has a detailed feedback discussion with the teachers based on their own ideas about how they can improve. As the teachers have themselves identified the aspects of their work that they could improve, they are no longer defensive about feedback given.

SAJID’S SOLUTION: FILMING TEACHERS

Sajid developed a low-cost solution that helps teachers to improve in the short term and to become reflective teachers who capable of identifying their own areas for improvement.
The reason why Sajid’s innovation is successful is because it recognises the crucial need for all teachers to reflect on what they are doing in order to improve as teachers. By instilling a culture of reflective practice, Sajid is creating short term improvement opportunities and building capacity in the long term. If you introduce this innovation at your school make sure that you:

1. **Allow teachers to identify their own areas for improvement.** Build on their insights and ask questions to get to solutions to challenges but the more the teachers can recognise their own weaknesses the better.

2. **Make sure you point out the aspects of the teachers’ lessons that are positive** and encourage them to continue to develop those areas of practice as well as focusing on the things they are not doing so well.

3. **Provide some structure/ guidance for the teacher’s self-reflection** to ensure their review of the lesson is not aimless and that they do not just watch thinking everything is perfect.

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**SAJID’S ADVICE**

Over time, Sajid has **improved and built** on the initial idea of filming teachers to support their professional development.

• Sajid now asks his teachers to focus on some particular actions when reviewing their lessons – for example, what were the children doing while you were writing on the blackboard?

• The teachers now often focus on a particular aspect of teaching - their key development area - for several lessons in a row in order to consolidate improvement.

• As he builds trust with teachers and they become open to the idea of changing their practice, Sajid has begun to provide more of his own feedback to teachers and points out areas that they could work on – for instance their style of questioning.

**Could you film your teachers to support their professional development? How could you adapt the idea to suit your school and to help your teachers develop?**

You can introduce the filming in your school in exactly the same way that Sajid did (see filming for professional development ‘step by step’ below); you could adapt the filming idea to fit your school’s context – perhaps teachers could film each other?; or you could develop your own innovation to help your teachers become reflective practitioners at low-cost.
To implement the Case Studies at your school:

1. **Organise to film each of your teachers delivering a lesson once a week.** If possible, arrange the lesson in advance so the teachers feel ready to have you observing their lessons.

2. Explain in advance that they will be leading their own feedback and review – try to **ensure the process does not feel threatening or as if they are being ‘checked-up’ on.** If you are going to ask them to focus on a particular aspect of their teaching, ask them to think about this in advance.

3. **Film the lesson.**

4. **Give the teacher the film to review and reflect on their teaching prior to a feedback meeting** (which should also be organised in advance). This could be done on a computer if the school has one or on the camera itself if no computer is available.

5. **Meet the teacher for a feedback meeting.** Encourage them to lead the feedback and build on their points. Over time, add in more of your own feedback.

6. Jointly **decide on the focus of the next lesson to be filmed** and the area of the teacher’s practice that you will focus on observing.
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR VERSION OF FILMING FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hopefully you will find that once you begin filming teachers in your school it will help them to become open to the idea of changing their practice and reflecting on what they can do to improve.

However, it is important to understand the impact in a more rigorous manner. How will you know whether it is having the impact you want? Think about trying the following:

1. **Tracking the teachers’ attitudes over time** – do they gradually become more positive about being filmed and more open to improvement?

2. **Keep a formal record** of all the areas that you would like your teachers to improve in and work through them systematically.

3. **Every once in a while conduct a more formal ‘performance management’ observation** of your teachers to let them know how they are progressing against standard measures of teacher effectiveness.

### POSITIVE BENEFITS

“My classroom management has improved lots. I am able to see my teaching actions through the video and correct them myself.”

“I am able to see my action and my students’ actions through the video and identify mistakes. This has helped me to improve my actions.”

### CHALLENGES TO MANAGE

“It can be hard to find the time to watch the films and review them properly. I am working to make it a habit.”

Sajid has created processes to manage these challenges. How else could you manage them?
Devanik Saha teaches in the girls’ shift at Nigam Pratibha Vidyalaya School. He strongly believes in teaching children positive values and is committed to helping children learn important life skills as well as the core academic curriculum.

Nigam Pratibha Vidyalaya is a run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. The school serves students living in an unrecognized colony lacking basic resources such as water and electricity. Approximately 2000 students attend the school, almost all of whom are first generation learners whose parents are illiterate; most of them are employed as auto rickshaw or cab drivers, workers in local sweat shops or other non-formal jobs.
Despite trying a number of different ways of explaining mathematical concepts to his class, Devanik was frustrated by his students’ lack of progress. He just could not improve his students’ results as quickly as he wanted and was determined that they would genuinely understand the concepts rather than just learn them by rote.

Devanik had no money available to purchase expensive educational resources but continued to experiment with different methods of explaining mathematical concepts. Having tried and failed to teach place value using a variety of different approaches, Devanik began using a bundle of straws to explain the concept of place values to his class.

“As soon as I began to give the children visual clues, I recognised that their learning would be accelerated. Giving the children a bundle of straws to assemble, disassemble, count and actually see the difference between ones, tens, hundreds and thousands led to a real breakthrough. I began to develop visual, hands-on materials for lots of mathematical concepts.”
Could you use similar maths resources to improve your students’ maths scores? How could you adapt them to suit your school’s curriculum? How could you be creative with low-cost resources to bring different concepts and ideas to life?

You can introduce the maths resources in your school in exactly the same way that Devanik did (see low-cost maths resources ‘step by step’ below); you could adapt the resources to fit your school’s context; or you could develop your own low-cost resources to teach particular concepts – in maths or in other subjects.

Over time, Devanik adapted and improved his Maths in a Box by:

- **Regularly testing students in the concepts he is teaching them** using his resources and carefully analysing the test results to see which students need more help;
- **Providing remedial classes** for those students who require additional support
- **Using the internet** to search for new ideas for suitable low-cost resources to be used in class;
- **Developing very clear instructions to explain the resources** and to make sure that the concepts being taught are also related to everyday life (this will be a further support to students in understanding the concepts);
- **Developing a very clear set of expectations and routines** for the use of the resources by his students.

The reason why Devanik’s innovation is successful is because it brings learning to life without the need for expensive, bespoke resources. It also helps you, as teachers, to consider the very essence of what you hope to teach your pupils; developing really great resources requires a really clear objective for what you want to teach your students. If you introduce this micro-innovation in your classroom, make sure that you:

1. **Give students very clear guidance about using the resources** – especially if they are to work in pairs or groups.
2. Allow students **time to play around with the resources** to support their learning.
3. If you plan to make your own low-cost resources, first **develop a very clear objective of what you want to teach your students** and then think about possible resources.

**LOW COST, CREATIVE MATHS RESOURCES**

**STEP BY STEP GUIDE**

**PREPARATION AND RESOURCES REQUIRED**

1. **LOW-COST RESOURCES SUCH AS STRAWS, KIDNEY BEANS, CARDBOARD, EGG CRATES**

2. **A SMALL AMOUNT OF TIME TO ASSEMBLE RESOURCES AND A KEEN EYE FOR A GOOD POTENTIAL RESOURCE**

3. **WILLINGNESS TO EXPERIMENT WITH NEW METHODS OF TEACHING PARTICULAR CONCEPTS**
To help students learn to count, Devanik uses kidney beans. To do this in your classroom:

1. **Teaching Counting Using Kidney Beans**
   - **To help students learn to count, Devanik uses kidney beans. To do this in your classroom:**
     - a. Give each student a pile of kidney beans and slowly begin to count.
     - b. As you count, hold the corresponding number of beans in your hand and show them to the students (for instance, when saying ‘three’ out loud, show the students three beans in your hand).
     - c. Ask your students to repeat the same process. Each student should count out loud and hold the relevant number of beans as they do so.
     - d. As you watch the children, check which students are struggling to understand and make sure you can give the some extra support.
     - e. You can vary the process by shouting out random numbers and asking the children to show you that many kidney beans.

2. **Teaching Place Value Using Straws**
   - **To help students develop ‘place value’ Devanik uses straws. To do this in your classroom:**
     - a. Organise straws into bundles of ten straws held together with an elastic band.
     - b. Show your students an individual straw and tell them that this represents ‘One’.
     - c. Then pass your students the bundles of ten straws and tell them that this bundle represents ‘Ten’. Ask them to count the bundles to check there are ten straws to make it clear.
     - d. You can then ask your students to show you two digit numbers using their straws – for example, ask them to show you the number 38 by holding up three ‘Ten’ bundles and 8 individual ‘Ones’.
     - e. To check students’ understanding ask them to show you the same number without using groups of ‘tens’ by counting the right number of individual straws.
     - f. To further strengthen their conceptual understanding, ask your students to now make groups of ‘tens’ from the individual 38 straws. This will show them that they again get 3 bundles of ‘Tens’ and eight individual straws called ‘Ones’.
     - g. You can add an ‘extension’ to this activity by creating bundles of ‘Tens’ to represent ‘Hundreds’.
To teach children to read time from a clock, Devanik created a clock from a piece of cardboard and straws. To do this in your classroom:

a. Give each student a piece of cardboard and two straws – one longer (for the minute hand) and one shorter (for the hour hand)
b. Ask each student to draw the numbers of the clock around the edge of the cardboard
c. Pin the straws onto the cardboard so that they can be spun around to show different times of day/night
d. Explain how to tell the time using the minute and hour hands
e. Stand at the front of your class and ask them all to show you a particular time on their ‘clocks’. You can do this as whole class or ask individuals to take turns to show you the time
f. This will allow you to see who has and has not understood how to tell the time.

4. TELLING THE TIME USING STRAW HANDS CLOCK

Learning geometry using straws.

3. TEACHING CARRY OVER USING STRAWS

Understanding the concept of carry over in two-digit addition. To do this in your classroom:

a. Write two numbers to be added together on the blackboard and ask your students to represent the numbers with straws (using the ‘Tens’ and ‘Ones’ method described above).
b. Ask them to collect all the bundles of ‘Tens’ in one place and place them to one side
c. Then ask your students to count all the individual ‘Ones’ to see if they could be used make any bundles of ‘Tens’.
d. If there are enough ‘Ones’ to make a ‘Ten’, ask the students to add this bundle to the other ‘Tens’.
e. This shows your students how ‘Ones’ become ‘Tens’
f. Now show them the same sum on the blackboard and explain it whilst holding up and making reference to the straws they have used to bring the sum to life.
g. A similar strategy can be used to teach two-digit subtraction.
In order to show that multiplication is repeated addition (i.e., $5 \times 4 = 5+5+5+5$), Devanik uses kidney beans and egg crates. To do this in your classroom:

a. Ask your students to make (for instance) four groups of five kidney beans each and place them in separate sections of an egg crate.

b. Next, ask them to count the total number of beans and to write their answer in their notebooks.

c. Now ask students to look at their multiplication tables and check the answer to four times five; the students will see that it is the same as the answer they found using the beans and egg crates;

d. Repeat this exercise multiple times with different sums to make sure that your students have mastered the conceptual understanding of multiplication;

e. A similar technique can be used to teach division.
Several of Devanik’s colleagues have begun to use the low-cost creative resources already; these are some of the things they said about it:

**POSITIVE BENEFITS**

“I think the idea has helped me to teach maths visually and has enabled kids to take more interest in Maths. I was initially struggling to explain the concept on the board but now it has helped in teaching better. The low cost maths model should be implemented across all classroom because it really helps.”

“I liked that there is a lot of emphasis on conceptual understanding in this micro innovation and I have started teaching division using Devanik's method in my class.”

**CHALLENGES TO MANAGE**

“It is sometimes hard to get the students to be sensible and to use the materials to help their learning without being silly.”

“The children need really clear instructions about how to use the materials – otherwise they can end up getting confused.”

Devanik has created processes to manage these challenges. How else could you manage them?

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**HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR VERSION OF THE LOW-COST CREATIVE RESOURCES**

Hopefully you will find that once you begin using your own low cost creative resources in your classroom, it will help your students to gain a genuine understanding of mathematical concepts (or other subjects!)

However, it is important to understand the impact of the resources in a more rigorous manner. How will you know whether it is having the impact you want? Think about trying the following:

1. **Conduct regular tests** after teaching children particular concepts using the low-cost resources and use the data to help you see which children require additional support.

2. **Survey your students to find out how they prefer to learn** using the low-cost resources or using just the blackboard.

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Low cost resources at Nigam Pratibha Vidyalya
Alice is the Principal of Ebyon Public School. As well as teaching and overseeing the day to day management of the school, Alice works hard to gain the support of parents and community members for the efforts teachers are making to provide a good quality education to their children.

Ebyon Public School educates about 200 children in standards Ist - Vth living in Khajuri Kas, East Delhi. The majority children at the school are first generation learners whose parents are drivers, daily wage earners, rickshaw pullers and maids in affluent households.

Overall, the behaviour of the students at Ebyon Public School is good. However, Alice and her colleagues were frustrated by the influence that a small number of disruptive children could have; just two or three students could have a negative impact on the learning of the whole class.

Alice knew that if she could identify a way to manage the behaviour and provide support and guidance to these disruptive children, it would benefit not just their education but that of all the children in the class.
“I tried telling the children off, punishing them and speaking to parents about their children’s behaviour but nothing seemed to work. I learned that often the children were in trouble at home as well. But I knew that if we could somehow change the attitude of these children towards school, there would be a positive benefit for all students (and teachers!) at Ebyon.”

ALICE’S SOLUTION: STUDENT CASE STUDIES AND TEACHER DISCUSSION

To help her to develop effective ways of dealing with disruptive students, Alice began to make notes about her efforts to change the behaviour and attitude of a particularly difficult student called Madan¹. Each time she worked or interacted with him, she would reflect on her interaction with him and note down how effective her approach had been. She noticed, for instance, that spending a little bit of time with Madan every day and praising him for his achievements, no matter how small, had a very positive effect on his attitude.

Over time, Alice began to keep notes – ‘case studies’ - on several disruptive students and, encouraged by positive feedback from colleagues about improved student behaviour, decided to share and discuss the technique with other teachers. The idea has gone from strength to strength.

¹ Not his real name
All the teachers now write case studies about their disruptive students and Alice now organises weekly teachers’ meetings for the teachers to share their case studies with each other, learn from each other’s behaviour management techniques and reflect further on how they can help their students develop a positive attitude to school. This teacher reflection not only helps teachers develop their practice, it also ensures that all teachers are aware of the children who are struggling and thus extends their network of support.

Alice now aims to keep case studies of about 10 children each year and is trialling the case study method as a means of supporting not just disruptive children but also some who are struggling academically and some (mainly girls) who are at risk of dropping out of school.

**Could you use the case studies in your school? How could you adapt the idea to suit your school?**

You can introduce the case studies in your school in exactly the same way that Alice did (see case studies ‘step by step’ below) to reflect on dealing with disruptive behaviour; you could adapt the case study idea to support children with different needs; or you could develop your own innovation to help deal with challenging behaviour and provide opportunities for group reflection for teachers.

**ALICE’S ADVICE**

The reason why Alice’s case study method is successful is because it recognises that reflecting on practice is crucial as a teacher – both self-reflection and collaborative reflection – and because it encourages teachers not to simply give up on challenging students but to believe that it is within their power to help the students change.

If you decide to use a version of this innovation in your school, make sure that you:

1. **Build reflection into your routine:** Whether you keep notes or reflect on how to improve student behaviour in a different way, ensure that you build time for reflection (individual and group) into your routine so that it becomes a habit.

2. **Be willing to try different ways of supporting children:** It is very easy to simply give up on disruptive children. Be prepared to experiment with different ways of supporting them – as long as you reflect on your efforts and amend them as necessary, you will gradually learn effective ways of helping all your students.

3. **Share with your colleagues:** Schools work best when all teachers are working together to support their students – the more you can support each other as teachers, the better!
To implement the Case Studies at your school:

1. **Identify the students** (start with 3 or 4) who have been disruptive in class or disinterested in learning for a sustained period of time and require additional support to achieve.

2. Organise to meet with them individually for 10 – 15 minutes every day and, if possible, provide them with some remedial classes as well – very often poor behaviour is a response to being behind in class.

3. Use the 10 – 15 minute discussion to get to know the individual children and to understand their concerns about home or school. Initially, it is useful to ask them simple questions such as what they like to do outside of school or how many brothers and sisters they have.

4. Over time, it is likely the students will open up more and share their worries or concerns with you. Make sure the children know that you will not tell other students about these concerns.

5. If you can, organise to visit the children at home to learn about their home lives.

6. Try to **appreciate and praise the students for small achievements** during every meeting and take a real interest in their lives – this will help them feel wanted and valued at school.

7. Keep a note after every meeting of your thoughts on how you could help the child feel valued at school and ideas for providing additional support. You will **gradually build up a profile** of the child. You may also wish to record any poor behaviour and track changes/improvements over time.

8. **Organise regular staff meetings** to share your experiences with your colleagues. Ask for their advice and whether anyone has dealt with similar challenges before. **These discussions will help all staff develop and consider new approaches** to supporting children to improve their behaviour.

9. You may wish to take it in turns to ‘present’ case studies to the other teachers and gain specific support for how to deal with individual children.

10. **Share any new information** about particular children in order to ensure all staff can be as supportive as possible.
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR VERSION OF THE STUDENT CASE STUDIES

Hopefully you will find that once you begin implementing your own version of the student case studies in your school it will help you and your colleagues to manage and support disruptive children more effectively.

However, it is important to understand the impact in a more rigorous manner. How will you know whether it is having the impact you want? Think about trying the following:

1. Keep careful track of the number of ‘behavioural incidents’ each child is involved in and see if the number reduces over time
2. Track students’ academic achievement and see if it improves as a result of additional support to improve behaviour
3. Ask teachers and parents for regular feedback on the children’s behaviour.

WHAT DO OTHER TEACHERS SAY?

POSITIVE BENEFITS

“It was difficult for me to control some of my students in class and I started taking Alice’s help with a few difficult students. The kids have started taking some interest in their studies but more than that this method is helping me improve my skillset as I am learning to listen to my students more and more.”

“Since Alice has started interacting with my child, he is a lot more disciplined at home.”
Parent at Ebyon Public School

CHALLENGES TO MANAGE

“All teachers need to commit to attending teacher meetings to share case studies regularly. If they are not well attended and the Principal does not fully support the case studies process, it can be hard to keep going.”

Alice has created processes to manage these challenges. How else could you manage them?
FOCUS: STUDENT MOTIVATION
ENCOURAGING STUDENT SUCCESS WITH SMILEY CARDS

IRAM MUMSHAD AND MAJEEDIYA MADARSA-E-JADEED

Iram has been a teacher for last 14 years and Head Teacher at Majeediya Madarsa-e-Jadeed for the past 6 years. Teaching is in Iram’s family and she is determined to give all children, whatever their background, the best possible opportunities in life. Majeediya Madarsa-e-Jadeed is located in the mainly Muslim community of Subash Vihar, East Delhi. The parents of the 400 children attending the school are mainly drivers and rickshaw pullers, daily wage earners, or run small businesses.

Iram awards a Smiley Card to a student at Majeediya Madarsa-e-Jadeed
Iram and her fellow teachers at Majeediya Madarsa-e-Jadeed were determined to provide their students with a rounded education that values the development of the whole child. They realised, however, that there was no specific mechanism in place to encourage and motivate students to work hard and develop positive behaviour and non-academic skills as well as good grades.

“We used to organise various competitions such as drawing and cricket but these were very irregular; the culture of the school did not, overall, encourage the all-round development of students or reward acts of kindness or positive behaviour. We knew that to really change the culture of the school we would have to create an ongoing system to encourage good behaviour and all-round development.”

To motivate children in all aspects of school life, Iram introduced Smiley Cards. These are cards – each worth Rs25 - that teachers can give to students who behave particularly well or work especially hard in either academic subjects or extra-curricular activities.

Students work to collect as many Smiley Cards as possible during each academic session. These are then redeemed at the Majediya Madarsa-e-Jadeed ‘Annual Function’ where students are publicly recognised and celebrated for their positive achievements and behaviour.
The reason why Iram’s Smiley Cards are successful is because the innovation recognises the importance of encouraging all types of student achievement and progress (not just attainment) in creating a positive learning culture in schools. If you decide to use a version of this innovation in your school:

1. Ensure that you are consistent and fair when giving out Smiley Cards. Children should all feel equally able to gain a Smiley Card. It should always be clear why particular children have been chosen to be granted Smiley Cards.

2. Make sure you award Smiley Cards for children’s progress and for working hard, not for gaining the highest test scores – this will help to motivate all children, not just high-achievers.

Over time, Iram gradually developed and improved the implementation of the Smiley Cards to ensure teachers knew when to award them and to encourage parents to value a rounded education.

- To involve parents and to help them to feel proud of children’s achievements in both academic and non-academic work, Smiley Cards now include the names of students’ parents on them. They say, for example, “Mr and Mrs. Mehnaz, your child has demonstrated significant improvement in drawing”.

- To support teachers in knowing which students to nominate for Smiley Cards, Iram provided training for teachers and examples of the sort of behaviour that would merit Smiley Cards. Now, even teachers are excited when their students gain Smiley Cards!

Could you use similar Smiley cards to motivate your students? How could you adapt them to suit your school?

You can introduce the Smiley Cards in your school in exactly the same way that Iram did (see Smiley Cards ‘step by step’ below); you could adapt the Smiley Cards to fit your school’s context – for instance by awarding them for a particular aspect of school life that you are working to improve; or you could develop your own innovation to help motivate students in all areas of school life.

IRAM’S ADVICE

The reason why Iram’s Smiley Cards are successful is because the innovation recognises the importance of encouraging all types of student achievement and progress (not just attainment) in creating a positive learning culture in schools. If you decide to use a version of this innovation in your school:

1. Ensure that you are consistent and fair when giving out Smiley Cards. Children should all feel equally able to gain a Smiley Card. It should always be clear why particular children have been chosen to be granted Smiley Cards.

2. Make sure you award Smiley Cards for children’s progress and for working hard, not for gaining the highest test scores – this will help to motivate all children, not just high-achievers.
To implement Smiley Cards in the same way as Iram has at Majeediya Madarsa-e-Jadeed:

1. Develop very clear guidance for teachers about *when and why they should give students Smiley Cards* – for hard work in academics, extra-curricular activities and positive behaviour

2. Decide *how often you want to award Smiley Cards* – at Majeediya they are awarded weekly – and then nominate one student from each class to be granted a Smiley Card every week

3. *Award the Smiley Cards in assemblies* so chosen students can be celebrated publicly

4. *Make sure all students are made aware of the reasons* particular children have been given Smiley Cards – this will help encourage other students to act in this way and ensure transparency and fairness

5. *Inform the children’s parents* when they are awarded Smiley Cards

6. Organise to *award the children their reward Rupees at the school Annual Day.*
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR VERSION OF THE SMILEY CARDS

Hopefully you will find that once you begin implementing your own version of the Smiley Cards at your school it will help you to motivate your students to work hard in academics and extra-curricular activities and to behave well.

However, it is important to understand the impact in a more rigorous manner. How will you know whether it is having the impact you want? Think about trying the following:

• Organising to interview groups of students to understand whether they are, or are not, motivated by the Smiley Cards and when they are most proud of winning Smiley Cards

• Interview parents to see whether Smiley Cards help them value the importance of their children gaining a rounded education.

WHAT DO OTHER TEACHERS SAY?

POSITIVE BENEFITS

"The students are very motivated and encouraged to work hard to receive Smiley Cards."

"I worked very hard to improve my handwriting and I was very happy when I got Smiley Card."

Student of 5th standard

CHALLENGES TO MANAGE

“Sometimes students moan if they are not awarded Smiley Cards but their classmates are - it can be hard to choose who deserves them!”

Iram has created processes to manage these challenges. How else could you manage them?
Jasbeer has been a teacher for over 20 years and currently teaches Hindi at Deepalya School. Jasbeer is passionate about her subject and aims to bring excitement about learning into her classroom. Jasbeer’s students are encouraged to ask as many questions as they like. *Curiosity is King!*

Deepalya School, Kalkaji has almost 1200 students, the majority of whom are the first ones from their families to go to school. Many of the kids are from families that have migrated from UP, Bihar and Haryana.
Jasbeer was frustrated at the amount of time she ‘lost’ dealing with individual student questions at the beginning of every class. She knew that she has a responsibility to cover the entire syllabus and really wanted to help her students improve in Hindi but students started every lesson by crowding around her asking questions, making complaints and sharing their news with her. However, Jasbeer did not just want to close down discussion with her students. She believes strongly that teachers should know their students well and that students should be given opportunities to discuss topics that interest them, or share concerns about their friendships, school work or home lives.

“Every time I walked into my classroom to begin teaching, my standard 3 students would flock around me and start telling me things of interest, making complaints or asking questions about homework. These conversations would take up a lot of learning time (when I was supposed to be covering the syllabus) but I was reluctant to end them completely – children’s curiosity should be encouraged!”

DO THESE CHALLENGES SOUND FAMILIAR?

To avoid all of her students rushing to speak to her at the start of the lesson, Jasbeer introduced a ‘letterbox’ into her classroom. Students write letters and notes to her to tell her what is on their mind and put them in this letterbox, rather than disrupting lessons and taking up valuable time in class. Jasbeer reads the letters after class time and replies to the students within one week, either by speaking to them during quiet moments in class or by organising to speak to them after the class.

JASBEER’S SOLUTION: THE STUDENT LETTERBOX

Jasbeer developed a SOLUTION that lets her COVER THE CURRICULUM as required and BUILD STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS with her students. IMPROVE HINDI WRITING SKILLS
Over time, Jasbeer has gradually developed and adapted her letterbox idea to suit the different age groups and abilities of the children she teaches.

- To enable Jasbeer to ensure that Hindi writing and grammar improves, students are now asked to write all their letters in Hindi.
- To encourage creative writing and to prevent the children from becoming bored, Jasbeer suggests topics for the children to write letters about. She suggests, for instance, that they also write letters to their Nani and Nanaji or to other family members.
- To teach the important life skill of letter writing, Jasbeer taught her students to follow the formal conventions of letter writing.
- Jasbeer’s idea was a hit, not just in her class, but in the entire school. To manage her time and the number of letters to which she has to respond, Jasbeer only takes letters home with her on Wednesdays and Saturdays.
- To stay in touch with students during the holidays and to let the students experience the joy of writing and receiving actual letters, Jasbeer asks her older students to send her letters through the mail and responds with letters herself.

Could you use the student letterbox in your class? How could you adapt it to suit your class?

You can introduce the student letterbox in your classroom in exactly the same way that Jasbeer did (see student letterbox ‘step by step’ below); you could adapt the letterbox idea to fit your classroom’s context; or you could develop your own innovation to help get to know your students without losing curriculum time.

BE CREATIVE!

JASBEER’S ADVICE

The reason why Jasbeer’s student letterbox is successful is because she recognises clearly that students are much more likely to engage with the curriculum if the teachers get to know them well and find time to understand their interests and concerns. If you use this innovation in your classroom, make sure that you:

1. **Respond to Students in a timely manner:** However you decide to ask students to share their thoughts with you, or build time to learn about their interests (through letters or in another way), you must respond or feedback to them; if you do not, students will not continue to write to you and will keep distracting you from the curriculum during class time.

2. **Manage expectations** Make sure your students have a clear understanding about how and when you will respond to their questions or concerns and stick to what you say. Be sure they understand that you are interested in their questions and concerns and that any information shared will be kept private.
Jasbeer initially implemented the student letterbox with standard 3 children but has since introduced it to all age groups. To implement the student letterbox:

1. **Make a letterbox:** Create a letter box and install it in your classroom, or ask the kids to make one.

2. **Explain the letterbox to your class:** Inform students that the letterbox will be the primary method for sharing their questions, ideas and concerns with you.

3. **Inspire your students:** If necessary, give students ideas about what to write: Ask students to write short stories, express their concerns, or share anything that they want to share and to drop those letters in the letter box.

4. **Collect letters every week:** Collect the letters at least once a week and read them carefully.

5. **Respond regularly:** Respond to the content of letters through personal conversation with students during or after class (depending on the content of the letter) or in writing. Make sure you respond within one week.

6. **Appreciate your students:** Make sure you appreciate and give positive encouragement to your students for the quality of their writing or handwriting in their letters. This encourages them to write more frequently and to open up.

7. **Feedback to students:** Give feedback to students on how to improve their writing as well as responding to the content of the letters – this will help them gain better grades in Hindi.

8. **Be clear about confidentiality:** Make sure that the students know that everything that they write and share will be kept private between you and them only - no one else will get to know about it without their permission. Keep the letterbox in a safe place and seal the letterbox!

9. **Thank your students:** Remember to thank students regularly for not taking up lesson time with other questions – this will reinforce the habit of using the letterbox.
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR VERSION OF THE LETTERBOX

Hopefully you will find that once you begin implementing your own version of the student letterbox in your classroom it will help you to know your students better and have a positive impact on their learning.

However, it is important to understand the impact in a more rigorous manner. How will you know whether it is having the impact you want? Think about trying the following:

• Keeping track of your students’ marks in tests of their writing after introducing the letterbox to see if your feedback about letters helps them to improve their grades

• Use the letters themselves as a means to gather feedback: ask students to write to you telling you whether or not the student letterbox helps them to improve their writing and to make suggestions about how it could be more helpful to their learning

STIR Innovator Bindu’s students proudly show off their classroom letterboxes.

WHAT DO OTHER TEACHERS SAY?

Several of Jasbeer’s colleagues have begun to use the student letterbox already; these are some of the things they said about it:

**POSITIVE BENEFITS**

“My students don’t even realise they’re learning and improving in their work!”

“I am getting to know a lot about my students that I didn’t know before.”

“My students are excited to write letters to me.”

**CHALLENGES TO MANAGE**

“I don’t always get time to reply to my students.”

“My students were excited to write letters to me in the beginning but after a week they got bored.”

Jasbeer has created processes to manage these challenges. How else could you manage them?