

Inspirations from A digital native's remote internship

The Covid pandemic has shifted student learning from classrooms to Zoom. Experiential learning or service-based learning is supposed to involve students working and learning on projects that contribute to the causes of non-profit organizations. But the pandemic confines experiential learning to the laptop screens, not at the workplace or on the field. How can experiential learning be effective remotely? What are the possibilities to maximize learning through internship or field projects, even remotely?

In the past one and half years, educators, NGO practitioners, and students all had to think out of the box and experiment with ways for experiential learning. One of such examples is Aditi Narania, a FLAME University student who interned remotely at Indian Women Scientists' Association (IWSA) this summer. Reflecting on Aditi's experience, a remote internship can help reimagine experiential learning during and post the pandemic.

Learning Garden at IWSA

A group of scientists came together in the 1970s to form IWSA with a mission to promote scientific temper to uplift the less-privileged class, especially women. Over the past few decades, the organization set up eleven branches across India to support outreach activities and programs.

Learning Garden, located in Vashi, Navi Mumbai, IWSA headquarters, is an experiential learning space started in 2018. The goal is to provide a sensory learning environment for students to love nature and appreciate its beauty. The Learning Garden serves as a living museum assembling more than 500 species of plants from various biogeographical regions in India – like Western Ghats, Deccan Peninsula, etc. It offers hands-on laboratory training for students and makes learning experiential, accessible, and inclusive for students across abilities. Since its inception, the Learning Garden has been the destination for science camps, field trips, and workshops. It has hosted hundreds of teachers and school children's visits every year.

The pandemic crisis put physical activities at Learning Garden on halt. Still, the IWSA team had to brainstorm ideas and design projects to further its mission. Typically interns at IWSA would conduct classes or organize activities for kids who take classes at the Learning Garden. With the internships online, IWSA had to take a different approach.

Searching for a remote internship and finding a match

The Development Activity Program (DAP) by FLAME University requires the first-year students to do an internship at a non-profit organization for four weeks during summer break. The fieldwork experience enables students to move out of their social-economic circles, placing them at the forefront to serve the less privileged and instill a sense of social responsibility to give back to the community.



Plantation at Vashi mini seashore of the mangrove saplings nurtured by the Jai hind Interns from Aditi Naranja's DAP report

The circumstances made it challenging for students to find internships. Several NGOs, which initially agreed to accept interns, later rescinded their offers because they were not prepared to work with interns online. Aditi is among a few of the fortunate students. Not only did she find an internship, working at IWSA matches her love for nature, her interest in environmental and women issues. Aditi was determined to make the best use of this internship.

Structuring a remote internship

A remote internship is new to everyone. At first, Aditi brainstormed ideas and had meetings with field advisors, Dr. Suparna Kamath, Dr. Sweedle Cerajo Shivkar, and Ms. Vijaya Chakravarty from IWSA. After a few discussions, Aditi finally confirmed her work scope, which aligns with her interests, the objectives of IWSA, and the DAP requirements. Her project is to prepare online learning modules for children for Ecological Restoration and Food Preservation for 5th graders (10-year-olds).

Creating online learning modules is a daunting task. It requires content knowledge, subject matter expertise, writing skills, and command of digital tools. Aditi is creative, diligent, and a quick learner. After a year of learning at FLAME, Aditi has prepared herself for the challenge. Her exposure to interdisciplinary subjects made her comfortable in taking on a new project independently.

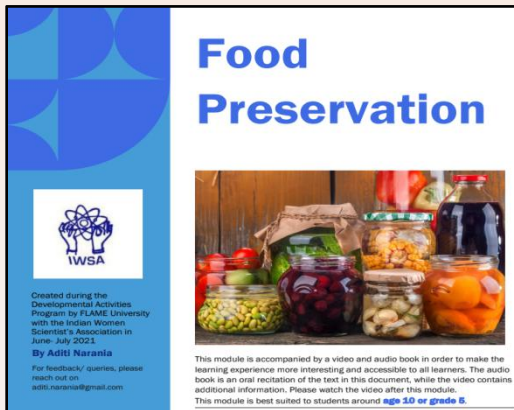
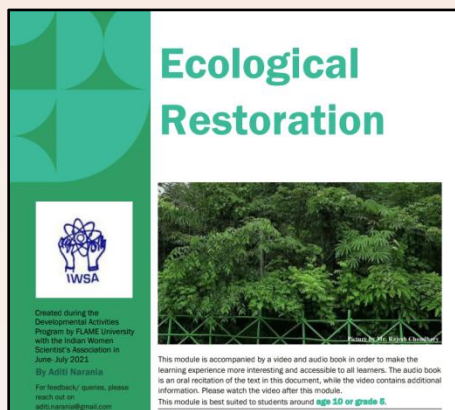
Regular check-ins and meetings with the field advisors helped Aditi understand the mission of Learning Garden better and provide timely guidance. For example, reflecting the values of Learning Garden as a sensory learning environment, the field advisors suggested Aditi include audio guides in the online modules to make learning more inclusive, available, and accessible.

Detailed documentation is expected for all meetings so that others can access the discussions later. Digitized records enabled Aditi to learn about the past workshops held at the physical space. The IWSA's structural internship support system addressed the challenges of a remote internship, such as the lack of a professional environment and supervision.

Additionally, through IWSA's extensive network of experts and professionals, Aditi spoke with several experts, environmentalists, and scholars. Innovative ideas emerged during these interviews and conversations and became engaging learning activities on the modules. Aditi designed the “Ask Your Granny” activity in the Food Preservation module to invite learners to interview their grannies to understand traditional preservation methods.

Finally, IWSA invited a panel of reviewers, including scientists, entrepreneurs, environmentalists, and the university faculty advisor and program director, to review the draft of online learning modules. The reviewers provided suggestions, such as using age-appropriate languages, adding a teacher's guide, etc. After discussing with mentors, Aditi incorporated suggestions and presented the final deliverables in an official project approval meeting. The panelists gave positive reviews on the deliverables and approved that online learning modules will be made available to future visitors of the Learning Garden.

One of Aditi's remote internship highlights is to present at an online event to celebrate World Environment Day. Her creativity and articulation earned her an opportunity to share her learning of Miyawaki Plantations, an effective method of urban ecological restoration.






Experiential learning at scale and liberal education for all


This remote internship at IWSA is a case worthy of further study and exploration, especially in the post-pandemic era. The National Education Policy promotes the adoption of liberal education at the higher-ed level and emphasizes experiential learning. However, access to liberal arts education in a private university, like FLAME, is a privilege to a small set of social-economic classes. Students like Aditi are encouraged to experiment with digital tools for self-expression and exploration. As digital natives, many students are more well-versed in digital tools than

teachers or NGO staff. Through structural, intentionally designed experiential learning projects, remote internships offer students new opportunities to combine their interests, knowledge, and skills to contribute to social, environmental, and civic causes using digital mediums. The output of these experiential learning projects should be online learning materials that are open, accessible, available to all. This approach brings creative online learning materials and in a way cascades liberal education to the young learners who do not have access otherwise. Of course, execution of service-based experiential learning projects at scale requires thoughtful considerations of planning, scope evaluation, and team formation, but this model is worthy of experimentation and investments as it paves a new learning trajectory and transformation for young generations.

An Interactive learning Experience for 10 year olds

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn”
-Xun Kuang, a Chinese philosopher




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Ecological Restoration



Food Preservation



ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION




INTRODUCTION

As a part of FLAME University's Developmental Activities Programme, students intern with NGOs to become sensitised about various socioeconomic issues and understand how civil society organizations work and the challenges they face. This internship with IWSA involved creating two learning modules on the topics of Ecological Restoration and Food Preservation, which are important and necessary for children to learn about. These modules were made in a way that they were a good hands-on learning experience for children across boards of examination, that was inclusive and accessible to children who are differently abled. The modules consist of one text document each, one video and an audiobook.

ASK YOUR GRANNY SURVEY

A survey was conducted to collect information about different household methods of food preservation, and help revive some forgotten methods of preservation




The survey was circulated amongst individuals of several age groups

1. What food preservation methods do you use in your daily life? Please list at least 3.

Method	Percentage
Chilling (Refrigeration)	33.33%
Freezing	22.22%
Salting (Pickling with brine)	22.22%
Spicing (Pickling with spices)	11.11%
Dehydration	11.11%
Other (Sun-drying)	11.11%
None	0%
Other (Pickling with vinegar)	0%
Other (Pickling with oil)	0%
Other (Pickling with lemon juice)	0%
Other (Pickling with salt)	0%
Other (Pickling with sugar)	0%
Other (Pickling with honey)	0%
Other (Pickling with yogurt)	0%
Other (Pickling with buttermilk)	0%
Other (Pickling with curd)	0%
Other (Pickling with milk)	0%
Other (Pickling with cream)	0%
Other (Pickling with butter)	0%
Other (Pickling with ghee)	0%
Other (Pickling with oil)	0%
Other (Pickling with vinegar)	0%
Other (Pickling with lemon juice)	0%
Other (Pickling with salt)	0%
Other (Pickling with sugar)	0%
Other (Pickling with honey)	0%
Other (Pickling with yogurt)	0%
Other (Pickling with buttermilk)	0%
Other (Pickling with curd)	0%
Other (Pickling with milk)	0%
Other (Pickling with cream)	0%
Other (Pickling with butter)	0%
Other (Pickling with ghee)	0%

Responses show the most common methods of food preservation today, are Freezing, Refrigeration, Pickling and dehydration



PURPOSE

To develop a scientific temper and make children aware of important topics, Global Goals, etc. at a young impressionable age. 10 years/ 5th grade is a good age to get students sensitised towards and develop curiosity towards important topics, hence this age group was chosen. This project will provide skill sets to the students to take care of the environment, and help revive some forgotten methods of food preservation.

METHODOLOGY

First, a literature survey was conducted, then interviews with 7 experts. To gather information about household methods of food preservation, a survey was conducted. The material prepared as a result was then reviewed by 5 reviewers. Based on suggestions, some important segments such as a glossary and teacher's guide were added.

ATTRIBUTES

Modules are

- made for 10 year olds/ 5th graders
- adaptable as self-learning or teacher taught material
- Engaging contain activities, fun facts & stories
- Inclusive; audio-visual to make it accessible to children who are differently abled
- Actionable; include small steps to take action
- Have links & sources for further reading
- Glossary with Key terms and explanations at a glance
- K A S H Analysis for self-evaluation at the end of modules

DISCUSSION

- Topics are important to be sensitised to at a young age such as 10 year olds, so they understand their importance and have ways to work towards it
- Independent as a self-learning module, have teacher's guide with a framework for teachers to make it a lesson plan with links and further reading
- Hands on activities to learn through observation and exploration; games, puzzles and fun facts which make learning fun
- Text documents compatible with text reader, narration of text documents in audio book, additional information in videos with subtitles and audio narration
- Problems as well as some simple "solutions" or steps to work towards Global goals, Ecological restoration or learning about their own family traditions surrounding food preservation
- Further reading section with links to additional information & activities
- Glossary section with definitions of important/ complex terms compiled on one page to provide further clarity and act as a summary of important concepts

LEARNING OUTCOMES

KASH Analysis: Knowledge gained, Attitude changed, Skills developed, Habits acquired through this learning experience

Knowledge- Food preservation, Ecological restoration & Miyawaki plantations
Attitude- Realise the importance of Ecological restoration, become more appreciative of traditional food preservation methods
Skills- Interviewing skills, time management, simplifying complex concepts
Habits- Reducing food wastage, gifting plants, etc.

By Aditi Naranja

Prof. Jasmine Hsu is an Assistant Professor at FLAME University, Pune, India. She holds an MBA degree from Suffolk University and a Bachelor of Arts in Foreign Languages and Literature from National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan. She is affiliated with the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, Information Management and Technology Assurance. She started her teaching career in 2015 and brought her decade of life and work experiments to design new learning experiences. She aspires to close gaps between higher education and the workplace and helps students and people to learn with the help of technology. She has pioneered blended learning through her digital literacy course at FLAME University.

