

Editorial

S Mahadevan, Chief Editor

For most individuals, interest in any specific subject can very often be correlated with the quality of teaching during the early days of school. This is true for all subjects – history, arts, literature, mathematics and science. While creative teaching can generate a lifelong passion for a subject, poor teaching can leave a permanent scar, an aversion for a whole discipline. Looking back at my own school days, it was very sad that ‘life’ science was mostly presented as ‘dead’ science. Neither the curriculum nor the teaching could bring out the excitement of studying the living world. Experimental work primarily consisted of observing a leaf, flower or an insect and making detailed drawings and identifying different parts. Though life sciences offer some of the most challenging problems in science, most students including myself had no clue about this wonderful world. Entering the biology lab with its rows and rows of specimens of dead creatures, carefully preserved in formaldehyde, was a spooky experience. If all the dead specimens were thrown away and replaced with a simple fish tank that had live creatures – aquatic plants and animals – it would have done a world of good. Specimen bottles are important in biology, but not as teaching aids in the middle school.



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I was fortunate to enroll for a Masters programme in life sciences in what could be the first interdisciplinary programme in the country that admitted a student with no experience in life sciences at the pre-university or undergraduate level. I still feel the thrill of participating in one of the early lab experiments set up by a very creative graduate student who was given the task of teaching us basic biology. He arranged an experiment that involved fertilization of frog eggs obtained from an ovulating female with sperm derived from a male frog in a Petri dish. It was an unforgettable experience to observe the early divisions of the fertilized eggs under a binocular microscope and watch the emergence of tadpoles. This single experience was sufficient to erase all the negative feelings about biology acquired over ten years of uninspiring teaching of the subject. We owe it to all those creative teachers who do a tremendous job of motivating their students against all odds.

