

Marketplace Activity: Field Report on Activities 1–4

Overview

We have completed three marketplace activities so far: two during the first week and one during the second week. The activities have gradually moved from an open-ended marketplace to a more structured buying-and-selling activity, followed by a no-cook marketplace activity involving budgeting, planning, and food creation.

Across the three activities, we adjusted the structure based on what had worked and what had become difficult to manage in the previous session. This report documents what was conducted, what we observed, the difficulties that emerged, and the changes made across sessions.

Activities will pause during the upcoming festive period and volunteer recruitment, when classes will remain off from Wednesday to Sunday. We will resume the activities in the first week of September.

Activity 1: Introducing the Marketplace

Children: 65

Volunteers: Approximately 8

Duration: 5:35 PM–7:15 PM

What we did

We began by introducing children to the idea of a marketplace and the barter system. Two volunteers spent approximately 10–15 minutes discussing how people previously exchanged goods instead of using money, why this became complicated, and how money eventually provided a more unified system of exchange.

This introduction also gave children time to settle and volunteers time to assemble before beginning the main activity.

Because this was the first marketplace session, children were given considerable freedom. They were allowed to form their own groups, which meant many grouped themselves with friends, while some children included others who had initially been left out.

Each group was then asked to create something that they could sell in their marketplace.

Children used paper and other available materials to create their products. Several appeared to transfer ideas from an origami activity conducted two days earlier. Their

products included paper guns, fans, customised paper items, dolls and doll-storage spaces, paper cameras, butterflies, roses, frogs, games, and other objects.

There were differences between groups based on age and prior familiarity with ideas such as negotiation. Some of the older children's marketplaces became relatively sophisticated, while younger children produced simpler items.

Once the shops were ready, volunteers became customers. Each volunteer received ₹150 in play money and could buy products from any child or group. Volunteers were specifically instructed to negotiate rather than simply accept the first price offered.

The room consequently became a busy marketplace. Children approached volunteers, promoted what they had made, negotiated, and attempted to sell their products. Younger children could also be seen counting money and observing how their older siblings interacted with the volunteer-customers before imitating them.

Children were allowed to participate either individually or as groups. We explained that working as a group could result in earning more money collectively. This idea was not clearly understood in the abstract during the first session, but it became more apparent in the following activity.

Photographs of the bills and the money collected by children, individually and in groups, were recorded.

What we learned

The open structure generated enthusiasm, but it also produced substantial chaos.

Volunteers quickly became overwhelmed because many children were simultaneously asking them to purchase products. This continued even after volunteers had exhausted their assigned budgets. Younger children in particular found it difficult to understand that a customer's money could be finished.

The budget constraint also became inconsistent from the volunteer side. Because additional play money remained available in the bag, volunteers sometimes gave in when children continued asking them to purchase something. We had not established a sufficiently clear system for ensuring that once a volunteer's ₹150 was exhausted, no further money could be used.

There was also considerable paper wastage and mess because children were building their marketplaces from scratch during the session.

Group organisation created another difficulty. Roles had not been assigned within groups, and in some groups dominant children took control of, or took money from, other group members. Some children were consequently left confused at the end despite enjoying the activity itself.

Finally, the volunteer roles had not been divided strategically. Almost all volunteers became customers, which increased their workload and meant that there were fewer volunteers available to supervise groups, finances, and the overall process.

These observations directly informed the structure of the second activity.



Activity 2: A More Structured Buying and Selling Marketplace

Children: Approximately 72

Volunteers: 8–9

Seller groups: 7 groups, ranging from approximately 4–5 to 7–8 children

Duration: 5:30 PM–7:30 PM

Changes made after Activity 1

For the second activity, children were asked beforehand to make or bring something from home that they wanted to sell.

When they arrived, their bags were kept outside and they were not allowed to take materials from them or begin making new products during the session. This decision was made in response to the paper wastage, mess, and difficulty managing children who were simultaneously trying to create products during Activity 1.

Children who had brought products became sellers. Children who had not brought anything became customers rather than being allowed to create something during the activity.

This resulted in two clearly defined groups: sellers and buyers.

Marketplace structure

Buyers received ₹200 in play money: one ₹100 note and two ₹50 notes.

Seller groups also received change. Each group was provided five ₹20 notes so that transactions could continue if customers did not have the exact amount required.

Before selling began, seller groups were given approximately 15–20 minutes to organise themselves.

Unlike the first activity, each group was assigned a volunteer. Roles were then divided among the children. Depending on the group, these included selling, managing finances, pitching the shop, arranging products, and other responsibilities. Some quieter children, for example, contributed by arranging items and helping set up the market.

Each group therefore had a senior volunteer responsible for tracking the children, supporting role allocation, and scaffolding participation so that each child could be involved.

Two additional volunteers were specifically assigned to distribute and track money. They also recorded the amount earned by each group and combined these earnings with the children's money from the previous activity.

This division of volunteer responsibilities made the second activity considerably easier to manage.

How buying and selling worked

The activity was conducted across two rooms.

Buyers remained together in one room with their ₹200 budgets. Seller groups prepared themselves separately and then entered the buyers' room one group at a time.

Each seller group presented its products, explained what it was selling, and announced its prices.

Buyers who wanted to purchase something raised their hands. The first five children selected were given an opportunity to buy. If a child purchased during one round, they had to wait during the next round so that purchasing opportunities could be distributed among more children rather than being repeatedly taken by the same few participants.

Each seller group received approximately 10–15 minutes, with additional time sometimes needed when younger children were involved.

For the first few groups, this system worked smoothly.

Where the structure broke down

One important difficulty emerged from inconsistent instructions.

At the beginning, buyers had been told that they had ₹200 and should try to purchase while also saving as much money as possible. Toward the end, however, I told them that the number of items they purchased would be counted rather than the amount of money they retained.

This changed the incentive within the activity.

Children consequently began trying to spend all their remaining money and buy whatever they could. The final rounds became increasingly chaotic.

This was an instruction-design problem on my side rather than an issue with the children following the activity.

Despite this, compared with Activity 1, the second session was substantially more organised.

Another observation was that many children who had not brought products from home wanted to become sellers rather than buyers. The structure made it clear that bringing something prepared from home was necessary if they wanted to operate a shop during the following marketplace.

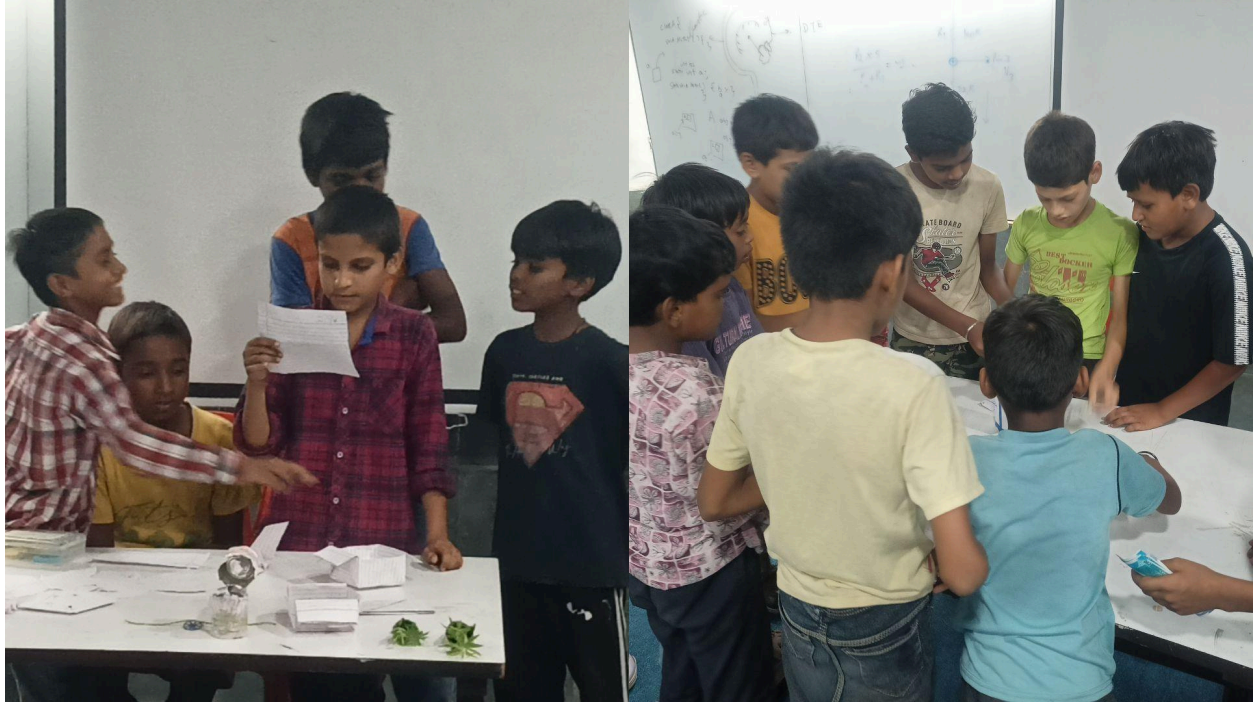
Tracking the activity

After each seller group finished, its volunteer completed a bill recording:

- number of children in the group
- names of the sellers
- roles taken by children
- number of items available
- prices at which items were sold
- money earned after selling
- volunteer signature

These bills allowed us to track participation, roles, products, and money while also making individual volunteers accountable for their assigned groups.

There was considerably less mess than during Activity 1. The final two groups became more chaotic, but overall the structure was much more manageable.



Activity 3: No-Cook Marketplace and Budgeting Activity

Children: 43

Core volunteers: 7

Groups: 13

Duration: 5:30 PM–7:40 PM

We had originally planned two activities during this week, but orientation and fresher events resulted in a shortage of consistent volunteers. We therefore conducted one activity instead.

This session retained the marketplace and play-money structure but changed what children were purchasing and what they had to produce.

Group organisation

Each group received a budget of ₹200.

At this stage, we no longer needed to assign children to groups ourselves. Children had repeatedly worked with similar groups during the earlier activities and had developed familiarity with one another. They also increasingly organised roles themselves.

Where children were younger or clearly required assistance, a volunteer supported the group. Other groups selected a leader among themselves.

We intervened when necessary but did not see a need to micromanage group formation or role division in the way that had been required earlier.

The task

Each group received a sheet containing food items divided into four categories with predetermined prices.

I had initially prepared 10 sheets, but 13 groups were ultimately formed. Groups without a printed sheet photographed one and recorded their selections separately on paper.

The children had to use their ₹200 budget to purchase ingredients and create a no-cook dish.

The four categories were priced so that each group could purchase at least one item from three categories. If they budgeted and planned carefully, they could also purchase something from the fourth, special category.

The categories included:

1. a base, consisting of different forms of biscuits;
2. a spread;
3. a main ingredient forming the larger part of their creation; and
4. a special category available if their budget allowed it.

The reverse side of the sheet recorded:

- team name
- members' names
- items selected
- money spent
- money remaining
- signature of the group leader/student leader

Each group received ₹200 using one ₹100 note and two ₹50 notes. Volunteers responsible for distributing ingredients also held change and tracked transactions.

Activity organisation

Two rooms were again used.

In the first room, children discussed what they wanted to make, selected ingredients, worked within their budgets, and completed their sheets. Volunteers answered questions and provided support where necessary.

The second room contained the food items and materials.

Groups entered this room one at a time and submitted their completed sheets.

Volunteer responsibilities were clearly divided:

- one volunteer tracked the money;
- one placed the selected ingredients onto the group's plate;
- one opened food packages;
- one distributed sanitiser and gloves.

Plates, spoons, tissues, gloves, and sanitiser were provided to keep the activity hygienic.

Volunteer roles were therefore clearer than they had been during the previous two marketplace activities.

Groups with money remaining could purchase a refill for ₹20. I had initially intended ₹20 to purchase a refill of an individual item. However, because fewer children attended than expected and a substantial quantity of food remained, we allowed ₹20 to purchase a refill for the plate instead.

This remained supervised because some older children attempted to take advantage of the refill system. Volunteers managed this through control of the money and distribution of ingredients.

Completing the activity

Once groups had made their dishes, I visited each table and asked children what they had made and which ingredients they had used.

Many groups asked me to taste their creations. I tasted a small amount and then asked them to divide and eat the remainder themselves because the food belonged to their group.

Children also repeatedly asked for their dishes to be rated out of ten. Rating had not been planned as part of the activity, but they appeared to want some form of score after investing effort into their creations, so I gave them ratings when they requested them.

After eating, children were given a large waste bag for used plates, spoons, and other waste.

Although this was another potentially messy activity, the mess remained manageable and the activity was completed on time.

Observations from the session

Many children were unfamiliar with several of the spreads available. Ketchup and jam were the two most familiar options and were therefore selected by most groups. These were consequently the first spreads to run out, while much of the other material remained unused.

The activity had originally been planned for approximately 70 children, but only around 40 attended. We therefore had substantial food left over.

Portion sizes could potentially have been increased because of the lower attendance. At the same time, larger portions may have made distribution and mess more difficult to manage, so this remains something to consider rather than a definite change.

Some creations were repeated across groups. Three groups made bhelpuri and two made Oreo sandwiches. Even when groups selected similar overall dishes, however, the contents and combinations used within them differed.

One useful observation occurred during the planning stage.

Initially, several children selected ingredients simply according to what they liked from the sheet. After asking questions and understanding that they ultimately had to produce a concrete dish from those ingredients, they reconsidered their selections and changed them according to what they intended to make.

Children also appeared particularly interested in being able to purchase food using play money because, unlike ordinary purchasing outside the activity, they did not need real money to participate.



Cross-Activity Reflection

One pattern has appeared repeatedly across all three activities.

Once children understand the structure of an activity, they adapt to it very quickly. At the beginning of a session, the activity is usually organised and manageable while still allowing substantial freedom. As children become familiar with the rules and complete the part assigned to them, however, some begin wandering, developing their own games, or finding ways around the existing structure.

This has become particularly visible toward the end of activities.

The progression across the three sessions has therefore not simply been about increasing control. Greater role clarity for volunteers, clearer financial tracking, and stronger group organisation have reduced some of the management problems from Activity 1. At the same time, the children themselves have become increasingly familiar with the marketplace structure and increasingly capable of organising their groups without continuous adult direction.

The next challenge is therefore to design activities that remain open and enjoyable but also contain enough challenge to sustain children's involvement after they have understood the basic rules.

Activity 4: Our City

Children: 29

Volunteers: 4

Groups: 8

Duration: 5:30 PM–7:00 PM

What we did

Based on the feedback from the previous activities and our own observations, I wanted to see how children would work together when given a **team-level goal that was culturally relevant to them**, while adding a small brainstorming nudge before the hands-on activity.

I wanted the task to be slightly outside their comfort zone so that it pushed them to think and communicate, but not so difficult that they lost their excitement.

Each group was given an “**Our City**” sheet. The prompt was deliberately more open-ended than the previous activities. There was no fixed model of what their city should look like or exactly what they needed to create. Instead, their city had to include five broad features:

- a place to live
- a place to learn

- a place to play
- a place to eat
- a place or way to travel

These five features worked both as requirements and as ideas that could help children begin brainstorming.

Each group first chose a team name and a name for its city. They then discussed what they wanted in their city, drew it, and wrote what it contained.

Planning had already been introduced in Activity 3, but this time I used it more deliberately. The children could see the clay, but they would receive it only after they had completed the brainstorming stage and included all five features.

I wanted to use the more exciting hands-on part as a way of practising **planning, patience, communication, and delayed gratification**. They first had to explain their idea and show that they had fulfilled the basic requirements, and only then were they given the clay.

All groups were initially given approximately 15 minutes. However, I did not wait for every group to finish before distributing the clay. Once a group had completed its brainstorming and fulfilled the requirements, it received its clay and could begin building.

Seeing some groups receive the clay also prompted the other groups to continue working on their sheets. This did create some rush toward the end of the planning stage, particularly because some groups were finished while others were making final changes, but we were also working within a limited amount of time.

I introduced this partly because of what we had observed in the previous activities. Once children completed their assigned part and had nothing else to do, some began running around or creating their own games.

The wandering problem was therefore not completely treated as something to be controlled through volunteer supervision. Instead, we tried to change the **design and pacing of the task itself** so that children continually had something meaningful to return to.

The checking stage also developed through trial and error during the activity. Some children would say that their group was finished, but one of the five features had not been included, part of the drawing had not been completed, or one child had done almost everything while others had not contributed.

In those cases, I asked the group to go back and complete that part before giving them the clay.

Once groups received their clay, they were given a packet containing 12 colours. It was largely up to them to decide how the clay would be distributed, what each person would

create, whether they would make separate components or work together, and how those pieces would form their city.

Younger groups received more supervision from the available volunteers. Older children generally preferred dividing the materials and work among themselves.

Interestingly, siblings also joined hands during this activity. This had not been as visible in the previous activities.

Even though groups had 12 colours of clay available, children continued asking one another for colours and sharing clay across the group. They were repeatedly creating something, destroying or changing it, creating again, and asking one another for more clay.

What we learned

The activity remained considerably structured even though only four volunteers were available.

Children who had participated since the first activity appeared to understand this type of activity more easily. I could see growth particularly among children who had been present consistently across the activities. Even the older children remained interested and involved in the building process.

One useful outcome of placing the thinking stage before the clay was that children were not immediately jumping into the material. Every group understood that the clay would come only after the five features had been considered, and this kept them engaged in brainstorming.

At the same time, this created another question for me.

The decision about whether a group had actually completed enough depended partly on my judgement or the judgement of the volunteers. A group might think it was finished while I might notice something missing or think that another child should contribute.

This means our own biases could enter into deciding whether children were “really done” or whether they could do more. I want to think about how this can be reduced in the next activity, particularly when we are working under time constraints.

Another observation concerned how children organised participation inside their groups.

In one group, one child was approaching the task almost as though the work needed to meet **her standard**, and she began doing most of the drawing herself.

I then added a condition that everyone in the group needed to contribute something to the drawing before they would receive the clay.

Once this condition was introduced, she began involving the other children.

This is something I still need to figure out. I want children to have the freedom to organise themselves, but there may still need to be some small conditions that ensure that one child does not end up completing everything for the group.

Another child has shown a different pattern across the last two activities.

When she forms a group, she does not necessarily choose only children she already knows. She is willing to make a group even with relatively unfamiliar children because she appears to want to lead and do the activity well.

I have now noticed this in the last two activities. I am still thinking about how this tendency could be used more effectively in future activities.

Individual observation

One child in particular has also been interesting to observe across the activities.

The child comes from a family background involving domestic violence and abuse. I have permission to include this context here.

Across previous creative activities, he has repeatedly used a large amount of black and has described black as his favourite colour.

During this activity, an older child who had not originally been part of the activity also wanted to participate. One group shared three of its colours with her: black, red, and purple.

Because of this, black was no longer immediately available within the group's main set of colours.

The child did not begin by searching for black. Instead, he chose a **bright yellow colour** and began creating with it.

Later, when he heard about the black clay, he said that he would still use it, but only in a small amount this time.

Using the yellow clay, he created one of the most detailed and creative pieces in the activity. In particular, he created **Ganeshji (Hindu God)**, along with several other things connected with the city.

What made this observation stand out to me was also what I had been seeing from him across the previous activities.

Initially, understanding the activity instructions itself required more support. Across the activities, I have seen him gradually understand the instructions better, form and remain with a team, try to work with other group members despite being bullied considerably by other children, take more initiative, work together with peers, and now begin leading and helping some of the other children.

This activity therefore gave me another opportunity to see that progression within a different type of task.

Completing the activity

Once a group had finished creating its city, I visited its table.

The children explained what they had made and showed how their city contained the five components from the original prompt.

We did not ask them to compare the final creation with their original plan. Since this was their first time doing an activity structured in this way, I did not want to introduce too many new requirements at once.

However, among children who had been present throughout the previous activities, both younger and older, I noticed that they were able to say more about their creations than they had during the first activity. Their storytelling while explaining what they had made had started becoming more detailed.

Once the group had finished making and explaining its creation, I considered its activity complete.

At that point, children were given the freedom either to **preserve their creation and take it home or mix all of their clay together again.**

Interestingly, many children were immediately excited to destroy what they had made and mix all the clay together.

Some children did preserve their creations, but many preferred mixing everything once the activity was complete.

This stood out to me personally because my own instinct, and what I often associate with children from more privileged environments like ours, would be to preserve a model after putting substantial effort into making it. Here, many children seemed equally excited by the process of breaking it down and mixing the clay again.

I do not yet know what to make of that difference, but it was noticeable enough that I want to observe it again rather than assuming what it means.

Overall, the activity had more structure and sustained involvement despite having fewer volunteers. The children were continuously brainstorming, creating, changing, sharing materials, rebuilding, and finally explaining what they had created.

The planning requirement, staggered movement into the clay stage, and team-level goal also meant that there was less time in which children had simply completed their part and had nothing left to do. The activity therefore built directly on one of the main difficulties we had observed in the previous sessions while also giving us several new things to watch in the next one.

