

Questions were asked by Jayashree (Asha Seattle) and answered by Subash and Loudes.

Unlike our earlier reply, this time we have answered ALL your questions super-fast !!

>0) I have one question for you from your papers themselves - you mention a higher secondary school in Andhra Pradesh by Ms. Ratna Reddy, which uses the thematic project methods to run the entire school? What is the name of this school? They have managed to make the entire state curriculum into this method?

CHIREC Public School, Hyderabad. They have a website on the same name which can provide you with detailed information.

>1) You had mentioned that you have formed a council of 25 teachers from schools in and around Auroville - from the write-up it seems that this council will conduct the training courses in the different methodologies. Am I correct in this understanding?

You are partially correct. Some of these members (about 10) are capable of giving training to others in one or other of our methods. Some 6 take care of teachers' magazine in Tamil. Some others take care of the administrative side of AERC.

>2) Have you already discussed the internships with schools like Vikasana, Mirambika, Anugriha and Poorna? Each of them has their own specialty, so this means each intern will learn a few but not necessarily all 9 methodologies?

With Mirambika we are doing it already. Steve will be arranging for such internships with Vikasana and Poorna. We will arrange one with Anugriha.

Some of the schools, Vikasana and Poorna for example, have quite a lot of overlap with what we are doing. Teachers going there would be more for cross-fertilization, exposure, and establishing stronger links, more than basic training in methodologies. Where the school has methodologies different than ours, we would see the teacher sent there as a 'bee' to bring back some pollen, and they would be expected to turn around and teach us what they have just learned. In this way, each of the programs will benefit more intensively.

>3) As I was reading through your brochures idea - it also occurred to me that this information should be made available through a web site. Asha volunteers could potentially help with creating websites with the content you provide? What do you think of this idea?

Of course, yes ! We would see this as a good addition. Brochures are effective, because they give an immediate reinforcement to what someone has just seen, by helping them to organize the information and to see it a second time; thus imprinting it more deeply into their memory. A web site is good for people who do not have physical access to us, or have never heard about us. Many people in India still do not have access, or very limited access, to the Internet. So, at this time, having the possibility to leave some concise, printed information with them would probably be the most useful. But, particularly for ASHA people and other's interested in linking more deeply with us, a web site would be of great benefit. We could post answers to Frequently Asked

Questions (FAQ's). (ASHA's questions are good one's, and they would be of value for others)

>4) The teachers micro project portions were not entirely clear to me. Could you give me some more basic info? It looks like this is something you are already doing? I'm confused as to where funding comes in? These are projects teachers take up and complete as part of their training?

Micro-projects empower teachers to design learning-related projects that THEY feel are important for their students. With a specific learning outcome in mind, they write a proposal to the AERC Management Group in which they describe the project that they wish to design, implement, and assess. For each project an amount of Rs.1000/- and Rs.2000/- is generally given. They get feedback on their proposal within 2 to 4 weeks. (This 'immediate' feedback is essential to capture enthusiasm and initiative. This is simply not possible in a funding environment that takes 3 to 5 years to respond with the funds; especially when people's participation in the project formulation is usually a requirement.) So, basically, the micro-project program addresses this problem of time-lag by forming a small corpus fund controlled by the project leaders. (Note: A sample report of a micro project is enclosed with this mail)

As a trial we enabled 14 micro projects to get implemented by the AERC forum teachers; which was an eye opener for us. For this we got funding from FEW (Foundation for World Education functioning in U.S.), an Auroville-friendly organization. FEW gives some small amount for specific short-duration projects to Auroville schools every year. We received (Rs.25,000/- US\$500) for micro-projects last year. This year they did not allot any amount for this.

>5) Just curious about your experience with this - the adult classes in the evening sound very good. You have mentioned that many govt school children attend the same. How do the adults react to studying with the children?

I think you refer to the Night Schools in Auroville area. If so, we have not made our point clear. No adults study in the night schools. But apart from the night school teachers, college-goers and other educated adults help the students in the night schools in an impromptu manner. What we want to do with the education in the night schools is to make it a learning centre whereas it is now mainly functioning as a tuition centre helping the children in understanding their lessons in the schools and in removing the difficulties felt by them in learning their lessons. In the regular government school setting, it is very difficult to implement our methods whereas in the night schools it is possible.

We are discussing an idea of converting all the night schools in Auroville area (about 45 schools) into learning centers.

(Note: We have enclosed a suggestion given to Auroville Village Action Group to convert their night schools into learning centers and on how that suggestion can be worked out.)

At first, it will not be a community learning center for all. It will be a learning center for the school going students and young adults. Maybe after some years, and better resources, it may evolve into a community learning center for adults as well.

>Coming to the budget -

>6) One point I wanted to clarify is that Asha can fund items in the budget that specifically target teachers/aids/education for the economically poor sections. So I'm correct in assuming that most of the work you have described will benefit children from economically poor sections?

Yes. All the Auroville Tamil schools cater to the educational needs of students from very backward villages. For the last 30 years the students coming to Auroville Tamil schools were first-generation learners. Only now, we are beginning to see children, coming to be enrolled in the crèche and kindergarten, who have parents that have studied a few standards in public and private schools.

>7a) Will the two rooms and bathroom be added to an existing building? Which one and where?

It will be a new building.

>7b) Is it within or outside the Auroville campus itself?

It is within Auroville campus itself.

>7c) Have you already drawn up a plan for this?

Yes. The main building will be in New Creation premises. This building will be a multi-purpose one; which will be used for Teachers' meeting, training, children's camps, visiting teachers' stay, etc.

>8a) Do you intend beginning the internship in the first year itself? What will the intern's background be?

We have already started with one internship as an experiment, with the amount needed for this expenditure drawn from some small sources. The internship, going on now in New Creation School with the trainee student from Mirambika School in Delhi, is faring very well. We intend to do the same type of internship programme again in the coming years.

>8b) How will they be selected? Do you already have any in mind?

Basically we invite the applications from the teachers. The applicants have to tell briefly why they want to do the internship in Auroville. Finally the AERC Management Group will select the people for the internship.

>Where will the interns be seeking employment in the future?

Recently, we were approached by a school in Avaloorpettai of Tamil Nadu to get a suitable person as their headmaster in order to implement new, child-centered innovative methods. Since need for child/student-centered education is growing, we expect the interns trained in our methods and our institution will be sought after by needy educational institutions.

>8c) The reason for this question is that we would love to provide access to such internships to teachers who may teach in schools for the economically not well off children.

We will be only too glad to receive such internships.

>9) It sounds like approx \$6300 in the beginning will help the construction get done and once this is done you will need the remaining amount. Would this be correct? The reason we ask is that we will raise the money here from different donors and wanted some idea on whether we can split this into 2 phases.

You are partially correct. The amount can be raised in 2 phases. However, the amount needed in the first phase will be more than you have mentioned.

Some 4 to 5 months will be needed to complete the construction. Even while the construction is going on we can continue with other programs such as the Teachers' micro-projects, two Teacher's exposure trips (out of 5 such trips), Programme development for the night schools to become community learning centers, Preparation of the brochure (only), Documentation of the Programs which we will be doing in this period etc.

Hence apart from the construction amount of \$6300/-, \$3600/- will be needed for program activities.

So, the first phase would require \$9900/-. The next phase of activities will require the rest of the amount, that is, \$6400/-. For a total amount of \$16,300. We hope that this is manageable.

>10) Total number of AERC and non-AERC teachers expected during the first year? You had ans a question on this in our initial correspondence but it seemed the ans was for teacher workshops? Sorry if I appear confused.

I think you mean by this the total number of teachers expected benefit in the first year. In the initial answer the number of people to be benefited were calculated on the assumption of giving a 3 or 5-year proposal, and on our deeper wish to be of benefit to as large of a number of teachers as possible. But afterwards we felt a need to strengthen our base and we started working towards that end in our mind. That process is now going on, but not very fast. So it is difficult to say how many will be benefited. But once this is achieved we expect the number to be large.

In the first year we can train 75 teachers in all four of our methods. We could not conceive how many in the next year, even though we expect the numbers to increase.

Warm regards to all your Asha members and volunteers,

Peace, Truth, Love and Joy.

Subash, Lourdes, and Steve