

Report on Madurai Seed activities

(A broad perspective based on our 6 months experience)

A small introduction about ourselves-

I am an engineering graduate with long years of industrial experiences. My wife, Viji, has masters in Child care and Education. She worked with a leading international play school in Coimbatore for almost four years until we migrated to Madurai on account of my job in 2008. For the past 2 years, I work as a freelance technical consultant. Viji stays back at home and we continue to live in Madurai.

How we landed in Madurai Seed-

It was a sheer coincidence when Viji stumbled upon Madurai Seed (**MS**) website. She grew interest and persuaded me to visit and find out what was happening here. That was because we both had time and wanted to do something in this line but did not know how to go about it.

It was a hot afternoon in the beginning of August 2013, when we found our way to MS. Karthik was warm and enthusiastic as he welcomed us and briefed about the history and motive of his after-school learning centre.

What made us associate with Madurai Seed-

Initially, as it happens in any new venture, we were apprehensive about the whole idea. But, on the contrary, in just a couple of visits, we started feeling more comfortable. This was basically because we could observe and understand the following

- Karthik's principles and ideologies for MS and his efforts in implementing them.
- Systems and integrity followed in the functioning of MS as a whole.
- Good support team with true dedication (esp.Mr.Mansoor, Mr.Arun and Mr.MuthuPandi)
- innovative activities (conceptual activities, summer camps, savings bank etc)
- Karthik's respect for guests visiting MS and his hospitality.

To crown it all, last but not the least, it was the kids' love, affection and enthusiasm that were the driving force behind our continuous involvement in MS.

What we are trying to do in Madurai Seed-

We were conversant in English and hence preferred to teach English to the children. We scheduled our visits on Mondays and Thursdays every week. Viji handled Vaandugal and Vergal arangam. She introduced play-way method of learning the language (with rhymes, actions and games). She also blended teaching with practicing values and good manners. This is one grey area that we really wished to make a change. The children (and many times even volunteers) either feel shy or lack attitude in expressing minimum levels of courtesies (like wishing or thanking for something they have received etc.). If we can cultivate good manners in

the younger minds, it will certainly yield remarkable results as the kids' blossom and they will experience a smooth sail in the main streamline as they grow.

I started teaching the 9th class in one session and 11th and 12th (put together) in another. Though, teaching was absolutely new for me, I quickly settled down with teaching grammar close to their school syllabus. Thanks to our ELT teachers, (Mrs.&Mr Potts, Ms.Kenworthy and Mr.Rossborough) we were introduced to newer teaching methods which we earnestly tried to adopt in our classes.

As we experienced teaching in MS, we realized that there exists a larger scope with the younger ones and by spending more time with them, they could have a better future. Therefore, in coming days, I plan to share work with Viji in Vergal Arangam so as to give an extra thrust to the learning process.

Viji's cousin, Mrs.Arthi Srinivasan, a special educator in Chennai visited us in September 2013. She readily accepted our request to do a workshop for the 'teacher-volunteers' of MS. Karthik responded with a well arranged one day seminar at CECSI campus on 'Understanding different learning abilities and right teaching methods'.

Come December, it was an 'English Christmas' for the first time in MS. Viji and I taught the kids many Christmas carols / skits and they readily delivered them with great passion and enthusiasm to the absolute delight of the guests from Switzerland.

A word about

Karthik- He is a wonderful organizer, great orator and a man of patience. He has extensive experiences and has proved his undisputed leadership qualities steering MS for so many years to what it is today. I only wish and pray he continues to receive physical, moral and most important-economical support to carry forward this noble work.

Arun- He is the backbone of all MS operations. He has amazing writing skills in English, but keeps a low profile. He could be in demand in the 'employment market', but needs to put efforts in finding greener pastures. If he does, I am sure he will go places.

Ilavarasi - 'Ela' (as fondly christened by our ELT teachers) is basically a science graduate but has a good blend of English too. She is very unassuming and dedicated and has experiences teaching in leading schools in Madurai. Her talent has been well harnessed by MS, as she has been aptly assigned to teach the higher classes (10th, +1 and the +2).

Volunteers- The 'teacher-volunteers' are supposed to be the 'brain' in the whole system. To begin with, Viji and I were greatly impressed with the concept of the MS children returning back as volunteers. We interacted with almost all the volunteers and many of them were very committed and sincere - especially the girls. But ironically, the ground reality (at the class room level) looked astoundingly different. Given their age and the background that they carry over with them, the 'teacher-volunteers' lack the necessary maturity in handling children; neither do the children look upon them as teachers owing to their mutual familiarity. This kind of situation results in conflicts and we fear it may not yield expected results.

It is our humble observation and we profusely apologize if we have offended someone in conveying our views. Karthik has been trying to do his best whatever he could in this context, but there is still a long way to go.

What needs to be done-

Short term goals

-MS has a wonderful collection of books; our hearts go out to its sponsors. It will be nice if the books are indexed and categorized into a well organized library.

-A few selective books can be assigned to 'lending library' and the children can be encouraged to borrow books for themselves. I used to tell children that howsoever and whatsoever we may teach, learning is complete only if they cultivate reading habit.

-It will be good if Vergal arangam is also equipped with basic audio-visual facilities (may be a TV) as it can cater to meet the requirement of young visual learners.

Medium term goals

-to look into resolving the issues related to 'teacher-volunteers'. Viji and I come for 2 days in a week. If it could be possible for MS to allure a few more special volunteers, they can fill the gap and their presence will be felt by children as well as 'teacher-volunteers' throughout the week. This way, we can fine tune the system to a certain extent.

-Alternatively, MS can look into the possibilities of employing paid-teachers serving as team leaders thus bringing a more professional touch to the whole show.

-MS needs to look into making the learning centre more attractive so as to retain the already enrolled children as well as bring in fresh enrolment.

Long term wish

MS should have an integrated building with 5 floors-one for each of the 4 arangams and the fifth should house a staff room, library and a mini-conference hall. I think there is nothing harm in wishing, as wishes may be granted and someday it could happen to be true. After all, who can refute the famous adage 'where there is a will, there is a way'.

Muruges and Viji