THE SHIRPUR VISHWAMANDAL - UEP MODEL

I Introduction: Our Basic Assumption

Educational systems or models emerge from efforts to enhance human capability. To answer human needs like food, clothing shelter; going on to intellectual, emotional, spiritual - both individual and social - needs.

Society represented by the State attempts to standardize education. Yet varying intensities of human need constantly modify any system. Sometimes the standardized system is rejected by sections of society that do not benefit from it.

Alternative educational systems emerge in answer to needs of particular social groups by developing relevant educational content, or communication methods, or organizational strategy. The experience of these alternative systems or models can enrich the standardized or formal educational system.

In the same way, the standardized or formal system may develop some educationally useful component that the alternative systems could beneficially include.

Thus all educational models or systems can mutually enrich one another for the maximum realization of human potential.

II Characteristics of the Model

This model or system of education has been consistently developed in Shirpur by The Shirpur Vishwamandal Sevashram and shared with other social centres in four other districts of Western Maharashtra with special focus on tribal learners who are alienated from the standardized or mainstream formal system. Its characteristics are as follows:-

1. Learner Centred
    Any learner can participate in the programme of the learning centres. Young or old have contents of learning provided which are based on their life situations. Since learners have little or no grasp of literacy a maximum use of illustrated learning material is made use of to ease the burden of literacy from learning. The learning materials are also designed to endure harsh weather conditions and rudimentary class infrastructure.
    An important aspect of learner centredness is the placing of learning centres within easy reach of child-learners. This contrasts with the prevalent model of school education for tribals: little children are sent far away to government or privately managed Ashram Shalas for formal education, severing them from parental care, and alienating them from their livelihood context. Our model seeks to remedy this almost cruel practice by giving the child a chance to learn from home, close to livelihood activity.
    Further, learners and their communities take pride in having an educational programme that asserts the possibility of systematic learning when perhaps the formal system does not deliver. This strengthens the self-image of the learning and the

community, even more when the teacher herself or himself hails from that very community.

2. Accessible
   Learning centres are located in the hamlets or villages of the learners. So reaching them is not difficult. Class timings are adjusted to the learners' convenience. While a more focused group is required to attend regularly the learning centres are open to any interested person to take part in the learning programme.

3. Participatory
   A definite option must be made by the local community to host a learning centre. This option is expressed in the following support:-
   3.1 Paying a commonly agreed upon fee to the teacher in cash or kind besides what stipend is paid by the NGO to the teacher.
   3.2 Purchasing individual learning materials, like slates, books, pens, pencils, etc.
   3.3 Maintaining an attendance of 75% of the listed names in the learning centre
   3.4 Providing free or subsidized classroom space

4. Close Supervision and Logistical Support
   The learning centres are closely supervised and monitored with a ration of 1 supervisor for upto 10 learning centres. The supervisor being an experienced teacher his or her role is not just disciplinary but exemplary – she or he must also teach, motivate and promote the programme.
   Logistical support in the form of teaching and learning material is regularly provided.

5. Evolutionary
   The model or the learning system is constantly adapting to needs and possibilities within the local milieu as well as incorporating ideas and methods from other systems.

III Implementation of the Model

1. Outline or Reference Syllabus
   The syllabus takes into account the following needs:
   1.1.1 <u>Literacy and Numeracy</u>
   For functions of recognizing alphabets, words, sentences going on to reading a simple notice, bus board, shop price list, information on a government scheme, etc. In numeracy the recognition of numerals, numbers, simple addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

   1.1.2 <u>Teaching Aids</u>
   Specially designed basic alphabet and number charts, handbooks for teachers, select methods for higher literacy and numeracy levels are used for teaching.
   1.1.3 <u>Purpose</u>
   This part of the syllabus gives the learner a better self image vis-à-vis

wider society with particular reference to the more literate sections that dominate employment opportunities and command high remuneration for clerical skills. Although it is extremely difficult for rural tribals to achieve literacy levels for gaining significant knowledge and skills since their local languages are not always similar to the state language. Their culture of oral communication of important data or decisions does not necessitate literacy and numeracy of the type that formally educated society demands.

We hope at least to begin a literacy and numeracy base with the syllabus.

1.2.1 <u>Common General Information</u>

This section is especially for children: The knowledge of natural history like birds, animals, trees, crops, etc..

1.2.2 <u>Teaching Aids</u>

Market available coloured pictorial charts covering various general information like crops, wildlife, domestic animals, transport, etc..

1.2.3 <u>Context Information</u>

This section specializes in environmental, occupational, information and related activity. It is treated differently according to age and responsibility of the learners.

1.2.4 <u>Teaching Aids on Context Information</u>

Two series of flip charts have been specially designed for context learning. One series has very elementary information basically for children on environment, local self government, crops, treeplanting, etc.

The second series is more developed to tackle social issues while giving information and suggesting action programmes on natural resources, women's issues, health, organic farming, animal husbandry etc.

1.2.5 <u>Purpose</u>

To equip learners with information and skills for occupational productivity and Socio-political participation in wider national concerns.

1.3.1 <u>Aesthetics and Skills</u>

Here the subjects of drawing (art) and craft based on simple materials like chalk, or clay, or leftover from harvest, leaves, twigs, etc. No papercraft is encouraged since such material is costly and environmentally destructive.

1.3.2 <u>Purpose</u>

To develop motor skills, aesthetic expression, visualizing skills, symbolic familiarity (it takes much mental development to depict reality in symbol) as a prelude to alphabet or numerical familiarity.

This exercise humanizes, helps conceptualizing, emotional release.

1.4.1 <u>Self-Expression</u>

Songs sung individually, with the teacher, in groups. Stories told by the teacher, by children themselves. Enactment of skits and action songs.

Besides songs, stories and skits, teachers are guided to conduct question and answer sessions so that learners develop confidence in articulation. Wherever there is no particular advantage in using the state medium the learners use the own languages for discussion, story telling, and have their own

language songs as well.

1.4.2 <u>Purpose</u>

These exercises are for enjoyment of learning, acquiring information and skills spontaneously, confidence building in 'public expression'.

1.5 <u>Correlation with the Formal System</u>

This Model correlates to the Formal System. So that the learner who is from an educationally varied context can choose to go to a formal school. In the treatment of literacy and numeracy most of all the maximum correlation is maintained between the Model and the Formal System since those two subjects are more important for transistion from one system to another.

The syllabus offers a basic or foundational content focused on rural and especially tribal needs. It can also be adapted to urban contexts.

The syllabus is concentric - the content can be discussed at basic and more active stages of development.

2. Local Teacher Activists

We rely on the skills of the local (adivasi) youth whether they be academically titled or not. These youth hail from the adivasi community itself and know the language of the learners. They need some familiarity with the state medium. To connect the local learners with information from the outside. They must be willing to learn a little ahead of their learners.

Example: Suresh began teaching after dropping out of Std.IV. He then learnt as he taught to be able to reach Std.VII externally. He went on to complete Std.XII and is now a Government teacher.

Karamsing, a night literacy class learner is now a teacher of two hamlets under the programme

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3. Inservice Training - Ongoing Training

The teacher activist is trained in stages. The training content is sufficient for a month or two syllabus. Besides the main course of language and maths the teacher is exposed to community development topics with practical action components. Watershed development, legal education, health information, organic farming, are some themes introduced to the teachers with   action plans for local implementation.

4. Selection of Hamlets or Villages for the Programme

Criteria for selection of hamlets or villages to hold the learning programme are as follows:-

4.1 Where no educational programme functions

4.2 Where a government school is established but does not function to the satisfaction of the community.

4.3 Where a government school functions but the community asks for supplementary educational support to their learners.

Where in addition to the above criteria:-

4.4 The learners or their parents pay a commonly agreed fee per learner in cash

or kind.
4.5 The community offers free classroom space
4.6 There is about 75% attendance of learners
4.7 The community cooperates in other development activity like
- Organic farming
- Health action
- Credit groups
- Watershed development
- Women's associations

5. Logistical Support
Remote learning centres have special need of morale building for teacher activists, motivation of parents and community members, timely provision of teaching and learning materials.
Absence of logistical support leads to the collapse of village programmes.
The frequent visits of the Supervisors and the Programme Coordinator reaching supplies to remote villages and hamlets are crucial to the Model's functioning.

6. Interactive Networking
The overall coordinator as well as the teacher-activists keeps in touch with the government school system as well as with similar learning centres in other areas. This free flow of information and at times mutual support results in the Model being free of isolationist trends and becoming receptive to positive developments elsewhere.

7. Research and Production
This Model has always been evolving new contents matched with communication aids. From handmade alphabet charts to printed flipcharts and audio or video CDs there have been a range of teaching learning material produced. This material has also been shared with other learning centres beyond Shirpur.

8. Funding Support
Regular efforts are made to raise funds in support of the Model. Single source funding is not easy to find. However, the Model has attracted the attention of several supporters whose help provides sufficient resources to operate.
If further funding is obtainable more learning centres, better equipment, research and production of communication aids, inter-state partnerships in alternative educational models or systems, can flourish.

IV Influence of the Shirpur UEP Model

This Model has been a reference point for other learning centres in Raigad, Thane, Nashik, Nandurbar Districts in Maharashtra and some centres on the Madhya Pradesh border. Learning materials, patterns of organizing the learning centres, teacher training and remuneration, wider community development activities, etc. are some of the areas where the Model has contributed to the development of other such learning programmes.

Unofficially, the learning materials and learning systems have be taken up by a few zilha parishad teachers. However much has to be done in this regard to share the strengths of the Model with other agencies.

 Although the Vishwamandal UEP Model has had wider usage than just within Shirpur it has acquired many variants depending on the contexts. Hence it remains a reference model beyond Shirpur's villages.

 The future of this Model lies in the direction of setting up a well-equipped Resource Centre with training and extension service facilities. But along with this wider development one cannot bypass the necessity of constantly testing out the Model in a local network of learning centres for sustained credibility.

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