

Asha Report Jan. 2010 –May 2010

The school was working from the beginning of January until mid-April. The children attended regularly and there were no problems over attendance.

We welcomed Rebecca back to work in January after she had taken three months maternity leave. Divya Jothi worked only part time from February because of family problems. Bina Pacholi the volunteer from the U.S. who was expected in March was finally unable to come. Santhosh and Preeti continued to come regularly. They spent more time in March as they were engaged in translating and reviewing Kamala's report. We were very grateful to a number of volunteers who translated Kamala's report into English.

In April Santhosh arranged a meeting with the Director of Ankura foundation, a centre for children with learning difficulties in Bangalore. This meeting was to review Manoj's progress and assess his competencies in order to plan for the next stage. Manoj and his parents came for the meeting and it is hoped that in the coming year there will be a close collaboration to support the teacher to design a more effective programme tailored for his particular needs.

We had several groups of teachers visiting from the UK including one group who were focussing on sustainable schooling.

During the summer holidays Santhosh came and did computer classes with a few children. The response was not as enthusiastic as we had hoped but nevertheless a number of children came twice a week and

among other things worked with the educational CDs which were supported and produced by the Azim Premji Foundation. We used this time to explore various activities that could later become a part of a structured lesson plan for basics in computer usage. The activities were designed around concepts in other areas – science, maths etc. and not seen as compartmentalized skills. A few ideas that have come about –

- Take digital images of various spots in the school to design a virtual tour by adding a voice over.
- Record various sounds from the outdoors and create a slideshow to have other children guess what the sounds were.
- Build a theme around activities such as collect images of various trees in the school – get their common names in Kannada/English and create a virtual herbarium.
- The Azim Premji foundation CDs already are designed by specific themes and can be put to good use as part of a structured lesson plan.
- Interview students of various age groups in the school, teachers, staff, parents to make a short movie about the school.

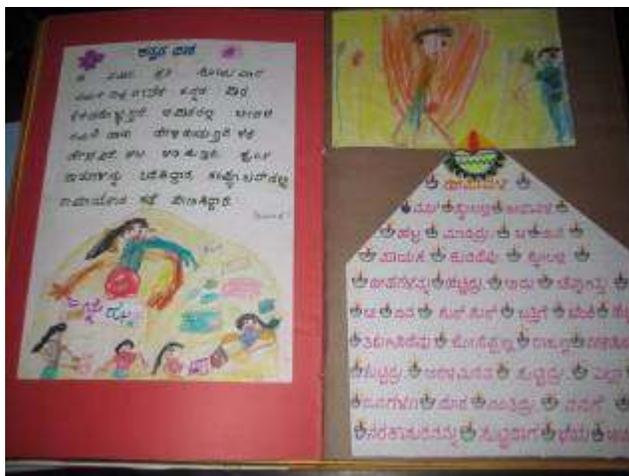
A good mix of fun activities to do, games (both outdoors and computer based), some independent research and coaching in various skills– typing, using a word processor, paint etc. can make it interesting and lively for the children.

Innovative methods

Diary writing

The daily diary writing continued as mentioned in the earlier report. We tried to introduce some variety by asking the children one week to write as though an object in the school observing what was happening. Another week the children wrote the diary as though a living creature and these included frogs, butterflies and rats. On another occasion the children wrote about things they just imagined might have happened in the school and these proved lively, humorous and original pieces of writing. At the end of March the children and teachers each chose one entry from their diaries to write for the school magazine.





Stories with the computer

Santhosh had started on the idea of using the computer sessions to animate stories in English in the month of September

(<http://runnershighkids.blogspot.com/2009/09/sep-4th-week.html>).

We continued the effort and the kids made many more stories. Arun and Karthik finished a second story about 'The Foolish Crocodile' which was taken from the 7th Standard text book. A crocodile tastes mangoes offered by the monkey living in a mango tree. The monkey gifts a few mangoes to the crocodile's wife. The crocodile's wife thinks if the monkey lives on such sweet mangoes, its heart must be very sweet. She forces the crocodile to get the monkey's heart. The

Crocodile cunningly convinces the monkey to come with him, but lets out the truth midway in the lake. The monkey says that he has left his heart in the tree and requests the crocodile to take him back. As soon as they are back, the monkey makes a quick escape! Karthik and Arun did most of the tasks on their own and did a lot more independent work than in the first story. An interesting aspect was an interview with them at the end of the movie using a webcam. They shared their opinion on what was good and not good in the movie they made. The movie and the interview were shown to the rest of the children in the school. The kids are starting to become more comfortable with the keyboard and the mouse with this exercise. They are also made to think about 'timing' dialogues to coincide with the animation; they get creative in designing the characters and really enjoy the idea of bringing life to a story in their own way. It was also an excellent way of making the learning of English enjoyable and purposeful.

We have uploaded the movies made by the children on the scratch website:

'The Hungry Wolf' –

<http://scratch.mit.edu/projects/scpadman/1107508>

'The Foolish Crocodile' –

<http://scratch.mit.edu/projects/scpadman/1107501>

Wisdom of the hands

There were a number of different projects done over the three months including making a siphon and also inventing a machine. It was

particularly interesting that the children recorded their experiments by drawing.*

Here is an extract from Lavanya's notes about a class in January on sound.

Today we continued to explore the idea of sound.

The children made "roaring cups".

A straw is attached to a cup and with wet fingers the straw is pulled it makes a sound...

There are two variables... the length of the straw and the height of the cup.

The children tried to get in order of the pitch of their sound first with varying sizes of the cup and then with the straws.

The next experiment was with a straw and a balloon.

Here the balloon is attached a straw and filled with water.

The straw is used like a whistle and as you blow the balloon is squeezed...

The idea was to see when there was a higher pitch. When there is less water in the balloon or more.

The Children are encouraged to keep a note on what they did and what they observed, some of which is done during the time they spend here but also after they leave.

Another exercise in inventing a machine was taken very seriously and each student's drawing was reviewed and critiqued by the group. Santhosh joined the group and did a dressing machine. However the children had plenty of questions as to how exactly it functioned including 'What happens to the old clothes? '. Another question was.

“What if you are scared of going in the machine?”and another anxiety was. “ Can you choose the clothes that you are dressed in? “
Santhosh was taken by surprise by the seriousness and challenging nature of the questions as it had up until then been a rather lighthearted, entertaining activity!!



Pairing support

From February the older children each took responsibility for one younger child to support them for their reading. Time was allocated for this activity each afternoon. It proved very helpful and a good training in responsibility for the older children. Guidance was given as to how to support early readers towards increasing autonomy and not to create dependence.

Teachers Fellowship

Kamala completed her report and sent it by the beginning of April to the Centre for Language, Literacy and Communication in Phaltan, Satara District in Maharashtra. It was presented at a seminar at the CLLC at the end of April. (See Appendix for full report.)

The revision on health and exercise was of particular significance and Kamala evolved a more meaningful way of asking questions that stressed on the understanding of concepts not just memorizing of information. The children also made up some very original riddles as a way of re-defining certain scientific terms. The children greatly enjoyed a new role in the class of peer review, making presentations and asking each other questions.

This is what one of the children wrote about her experience of the classes.

Medini's diary entry for the school magazine.

Last July Preetiakka and Santoshanna came to our school. To teach about health and exercise. We already knew about their coming so we were curious to meet them.

First of all Santoshanna taught us six exercises which we did with our feet and legs. Afterwards we ran to the nearby mango grove. After we returned we did more exercises. Sometimes Santoshanna taught us new games and we liked those games. Santoshanna gave us white shoes, socks and also white T-shirts. Now he is taking computer classes also.

Preetiakka is helping our teacher to teach about parts of the human body. This was partly revision of things we had done last year.

This year Preetiakka helped us to know how exercises are important for our body. She also showed the parts of the body on the computer and explained which helped us to understand more clearly.

Now each of us is acting as a teacher and teaching about the parts of the human body. While teaching we can do experiments or we can show pictures on the computer so that we can make others understand well. Also so that Preetiakka can see whether we understand or not. It also helped us to know how we should start and to explain step by step the lesson and how we can teach properly.

While acting as a teacher we felt as though we are teachers. Of all the lessons I really liked and enjoyed this lesson.

Special celebrations

Puppet Show

In February about fifteen children went to see a puppet show performed by Ananya. They later visited Lal Bagh, a public garden and very much enjoyed the sights of the gneiss rock and the Kempegowda *goparam*, the fountain and the rose garden.

Farewell party

At the beginning of April the older children prepared for a small function as a farewell for Karthik and Arun who are leaving to join the nearby High school in the eighth standard. All the children contributed towards a tasty meal which was shared in the garden. The children had also collected some money to give some small stationery items to Arun and Karthik. It was particularly memorable to

see the way the children – quite unprompted – made origami boxes to pack the small gifts in

Meetings

At the end of January Jane went to Sevagram, near Wardha for a three day meeting of the Alternative School Network. This year the theme was on the role of work in school. It was particularly inspiring to see the role of work in practice in the Sevagram School itself in craft, gardening, cooking and school maintenance.

In February Jane went for one and a half days to the Learning School Network Conference at Timbuctoo Collective in Anantapur District A.P.

Outreach

Language Publications

Everyday English Teachers' Manual Book one has been published by Jyotsna Prakash in Pune.

An Introductory book for EE will be printed in July for a limited circulation to Government school teachers in Satara District and the same book will be presented to BGVS in Karnataka for publication.

The drawings for EE Book Three are presently being done and the book will be ready for printing by the end of September. The *Teachers' Manual* for Book Two will also be ready for print by the end of September.

The additional drawings needed for *Everyday Kannada* are being done and we are now negotiating terms for printing and distribution with a publisher.

It has been decided that the book *Reading and Writing for Meaning* will first be published in English and that will be ready for print by November.

Art

In March the educational Marathi magazine *Palaknitti* published in Pune began serializing a part of *Learning through Art* and will continue to do so over the next year.

Ekalvyas are at present finalizing a Hindi edition of the book .

Peace Studies

The NCERT have recently published a Teachers' Manual on Peace Studies. One chapter on relationships in the classroom has been contributed from Sita School.

Teachers' fellowship

Kamala's report was submitted to the CLLC and presented at a seminar in Phaltan in April. It is hoped that this fellowship will continue in the coming year.

IGNOU Course Writing

In April it was confirmed that Jane will be writing three sections of the first and Second Language Pedagogy for the Diploma in Early Childhood care and Education.

Other Concerns

The recent Right to Education Act has caused some concern among the alternative schools because under the present ruling no school should function if it is not recognized. There is a three year 'grace' period and there are efforts to try and respond as a group. A number of meetings have been held all over the country including two in Bangalore both of which Jane attended.

A group have come together and drawn up a petition with the intention of making the Ministry aware of the problem. Several options are being explored:

1. To strengthen the Basic Education Scheme under the NIOS which already exists under the Central Government and to see whether this could be made flexible enough to include different kinds of schools.
2. To set up a National Council of Alternative schools which could monitor such schools.

A position paper has been drafted and will be presented to the Ministry in Delhi in the coming two weeks. See appendices 1 and II.

Future Plans

In the coming year there is a plan to develop an integrated project on Food across the school. This would bring together issues on environment, health and science. Madhavraj, an Asha Fellow will be spending a month with us and will be particularly developing the practical side of the project in the garden. He will also be working with Kamala to show how to make careful and detailed observations of plant growth.

We plan to continue the Wisdom of the Hands project which has proved a meaningful way of bringing together craft and science. It has been important to give enough time for children to really explore the subject and not to restrict it to a single lesson. The children spend two to three hours one morning a week in this activity.

We are also planning to organize materials in Kannada particularly in such a way that children work independently but nevertheless within a structured learning environment.

There has been a promise of the donation of the more computers from Infosys and we are hoping in the coming year to include other children. We are planning to make the computers available for children who were with us and are now in the High School and we hope they will come once a week in the evening for a class with Santhosh.

Of the older students that we continue to support financially five students passed SSLC, the 10th Standard exam and three of the girls have subsequently joined St Josephs Community College in Bangalore to do a six month course in language and computer skills under the auspices of IGNOU. Five students have successfully passed the 8th standard and are now enrolled in the 9th Standard.

Jane Sahi
May 2010.

See separate attachments:

Appendix I

**Concerns about the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory To
Education Act 2009 (RTE)**

Shared with the Asha Bangalore Chapter in May 2010.

Appendix II

A SPACE FOR ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Position paper to be submitted to HRD Ministry in Delhi