

Sita School Report August 2012 through March 2013

Time has flown! Things at the Sita School are flying as well – from kites to projects to new ideas.

Here are some of the highlights since the last report.

Our Friday free choice period continues and some new interesting activities have been happening. Cooking, science experiments and rangolis have been some of the favourite activities that have been happening. In the picture below Madhu and John Peter are showing their windmill.



Village history project continues

The village history project, which was already underway during the last report, has become wider and richer with every month. Children chose their favourite place in the village, and used that as a centre for observation – listening, looking, and imagining what that same spot would have been like in the past (as well as what it might be in the future). When all the favourite spots had been thoroughly investigated and described, the children made a map of the village that incorporated all of them.

Another focus of the project has been people and memories. Interviews with long-term residents of the village and other memories and stories were written up, richly illustrated, and collected in a book.

In this picture Sarojini is showing a book that children made more than 25 years ago about how the school was built.



The next stage of the project will be focused on understanding differences within the village, as well as what connects us despite differences. Each child will be invited to find another child in the village who comes from a different background (e.g. religious, socioeconomic) and to explore and capture their story.

Before the end of the school year the children will be reviewing the village history project and will be preparing a small exhibition of objects that describe our present style of life – a kind of ‘time capsule’. The children were asked to choose an object that might disappear in a hundred years and to discuss why it is significant now, why it might disappear and what might take its place. The children are still working on this project but the objects selected include a plough, our language. A kerosene stove and money. This discussion will build on a the time line at the beginning of the school year and through it will hopefully give children a perspective of history and our place in a changing world.

Workshop

In September there was a one week workshop on puppetry and here there is just one picture of one of the many characters that were made.



Visit to Thulir

The children had a wonderful visit with another Asha-funded alternative education project in Tamil Nadu last August. Despite language barriers the children found much in common, and shared games, songs, and ideas for handcraft projects. The song about ways to cook a tomato is still a popular number back at Silvepura!

The visit was also a marvellous opportunity for the children to take a comparative look at village infrastructure and culture, using their work with the village history project at home as a springboard. Among other things, they investigated how people in this new setting are getting energy, what food they grow and what food they eat, what their houses are like, and what games they play.

Creative writing –

Recently, children have been engaged in creative writing where they were asked to speak in the first person from the perspective of a person, animal, or object - during the night. Children chose subjects such as rats, lorry drivers, and, in this case, an unwashed pot. Sruti writes about a cooking utensil in a shop, shining in the evening sun seducing passersby to come and touch her silver surface. The utensil dreams about the home she will be taken to, the hands that will cook delicious meals inside her. But in the end she is bought by a drunkard, who cannot cook – and as soon as she is taken to his home, he is rough with her and manages to dent her shape. The man cooks the food for the dogs in her, and then leaves her out in the night. She cannot bear the stink of the food inside her; she cannot defend herself against the filthy tongues of dogs who lick her.

Celebrations

As usual, the end of the year provided many opportunities to celebrate together.

Teachers' Day

In September we celebrated Teachers' Day. The children took responsibility to organize a small function. The only constraint was that everyone should be included! Below is a picture of some of the preparations. One of the most significant aspects of this is that the children work together and almost independent of adult supervision.



Diwali preparations included lantern-making, choreography and dance practice, rangoli in the courtyards and leaf garlands in the classrooms. On the second night of Diwali the children performed a story about a poor woman who skilfully takes advantage of her opportunity to ask a boon of the goddess Lakshmi – and then became participants in the celebration, enjoying ladoos and crackers!



At **Christmas**, the children put on another play, this time using a modification of Tolstoy's story about Papa Panov. The children welcomed their families to watch their performance of this fable about providing welcome to everyone who comes along your way.

In August 2012 Sanjeev arranged for us to receive three new lap tops from Shell Company. We are very grateful that Sanjeev went to so much trouble to face all the bureaucracy of the Shell Company to make this possible. The computers were finally installed in October. At present Abhilash is busy preparing for his 10th standard exam through NIOS on Data Entry Operations. The new computer has enabled him to have plenty of practice. He is due to take his practical exam on the 22nd March and

the theory next month. Santhosh has been supporting him throughout his studies. Abhilash has both a vision problem and mild learning difficulties. The older children have also been using the new computers to prepare a news programme.

Visits

Sita School continues to host a wide range of visitors. Each enriches our experience in some way. Here are details on just a few of the visits that have happened in the last few months.

- **Azim Premji Foundation** – Jane continues to teach and advise at the APF. This time, APF visitors came to Sita School both to observe and to talk about possible use of Jane’s newest Everyday English textbook.
- **Asha Team runners** – A group from Team Asha visited in December for a fun day of running and games. The children also reported on some of their favourite projects.
- **Autistic Section of the Spastic Society** – A number of kids with autism had a great time with Sita students, sharing in a clay workshop and playing non-competitive games with a colourful silk parachute.
- **RVEC Teachers’ Training College** – Staff and students of the RVEC visited for a discussion about inclusion (from a language perspective). They are in the process of designing D Ed & B Ed programs, and were grateful for the opportunity to learn and witness the language learning process at Sita School.

Staff changes – There have been a few staff changes. When the children protested that the cook was not treating them respectfully, it was clearly time for a discussion. Ultimately, the cook was asked to leave. While the change came with some heated emotions, the result is that food preparation is now more integrated into community life. One of the teaching assistants now takes some of that responsibility along with continued teaching help, and children are also taking more responsibility for meals.

Joseph, who has carried out odd jobs for many years, also recently decided to leave his post. Again, the community has responded by sharing responsibility and covering the gaps.

Chula – There’s an exciting brand new piece of infrastructure. An expert from Kerala made the trip to Sita to work with the children and build an energy-efficient Chula stove from a mix of white ant earth and rice husks. The end product works beautifully – no more stooping down or breathing smoke, and it burns far less firewood!







Open Basic Education Accreditation – Jane learned through a connection at the Alternative Schools Network that it is possible to seek alternative school accreditation from the National Institute of Open Schooling. This is now in process (documents are being collected). Accreditation through the NIOS OBE program would illustrate that Sita School is glad to be transparent and open about its activities, even while RTE registration has requirements that do not make sense for a school of this size and with this philosophy.

In addition one development has been that the Government has officially approved of the idea of home schooling. See the link <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/rte-not-against-home-schooling-and-alternate-education-mhrd/976880/> for a report on this on this decision.

OTHER NEWS:

- Jane wrote an article on RTE which was included in the recent edition of Teacher Plus which was focused on the role of Alternative Schools. The notes are attached.
- **Filming** of the students (for a documentary about how children learn) is continuing, and samples of the footage have received a good reception in workshops thus far. The project is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

1st March 2013

Appendix: Some thoughts on RTE