

Sita School Report for Asha for Education

June 2010 - January 2010

In the last six months there have been 30 children regularly attending the school. Unfortunately Dharmaraj dropped out in October following some mental health problems. Despite efforts to persuade him to return to school he was very reluctant to do so. Finally in January we took the step to support him in a sheltered workshop situation nearby where he is doing craft activities especially pottery along with two other boys who were formerly in the school. We have agreed to give him a stipend for three months as a trial period and if he is keen to continue and his work is satisfactory it is hoped that he will continue independently.

Two students Arun and Kartik are enrolled to appear for the 7th standard exam.

In June the mother of Stuti, a nine-year-old girl, died. Stuti's mother had not been caring for her for some months and she was living with four boys between the ages of 14 and 30 who are technically her uncles. However he is now staying with an aunt from a neighbouring village but she continues to come to school regularly.

The same teachers have continued. From September to December Rebecca took maternity leave. One of our former students helped out with the younger children for this period.

We have greatly benefited from the support of Santosh, an Asha volunteer who has come regularly twice a week over the six-month period. Preethi has also been of assistance in the science classes. (See below on Health and Exercise.) Imogen Sahi, a biology teacher has also guided us in the development of the curriculum.

We have had a number of visitors over the last six months including a number of the Asha volunteers. Sanjeev and Anita have also visited. In December we were happy to welcome Meenakshi from Silicon Valley although this was the last working day of the school term so she could not see the school in session. We have also had group of Teachers from the UK visiting. Two of the M El. Ed. students came and visited as part of their Field Attachment. Below are outlined some of the special events and changes of the last six months.

Innovative methods

“ Sharing diaries

Since June we introduced the idea that everyone including teachers should spend fifteen minutes at the end of the afternoon writing a diary. On Fridays we sit together and everyone shares something memorable of the week. The children are free to write what they like and this work, unlike all other writing in the school, is not corrected and remains a personal record except for what children choose to share. The youngest children often share a picture of some event of the week.

There are a number of reasons for introducing this. One is that it is important for all of us to reflect and remember what has been significant to us. The children have written on very different topics but quite often it is about something that they have enjoyed learning about

whether in math or craft, science or social studies. Sometimes it describes the sense of achievement such as reading a particular book, getting some math problems right or sometimes about a special event such as someone visiting. Teachers also share their experiences mostly positive such as expressing surprise at a child's particular interest or something particular that they have noticed but occasionally an area of concern. It is also a way of sharing of teachers and children together. Many of the children come from homes where literacy is not part of the culture and they would rarely see the purpose of writing or reading so this provides an opportunity for writing for a real purpose and also to share with an audience. On the whole this has been a positive experience and something that the children look forward to and we feel will be worth continuing.



“ **Running and exercise**

Since the end of June we have been extremely fortunate to have Asha volunteer, Santosh Padmanabham coming twice a week. He has brought fresh energy to the school and the children have greatly enjoyed having running practice and exercises that strengthen the muscles and help co-ordination.

In October sixteen of the children participated in a run hosted by Prakriya School and had the opportunity of joining in an event with children from other schools and adults.

The following week the older children organized a mini Marathon for all the younger children and were highly motivated to follow the pattern of organization that they had seen including timing, providing drinks and measuring the distance.

Basic running shoes were provided and following the run the children were each given a special T-shirt which is worn twice a week for the running exercises.

In addition to running a number of new games have been introduced. There has been an effort to find games where there is not so much emphasis is on competition and winning but more about including children of different abilities.

To see some pictures of these events please see the blog created by Santosh.



“ Health and exercise

Since July there has been an effort to integrate the practical activities of running and exercises with the science classes. Issues of health have been looked at and how exercise helps fitness. In addition the effects of exercise on the heart, lungs and muscles and joints.

This report will be submitted at the end of the school year but Santosh has also documented some of the activities on his blog.



“ **Teacher’s fellowship**

Kamala Vasudev has been given a fellowship from CLLC to look particularly at the language of the classroom way in the science class and to record and reflect the way language is used to facilitate children’s understanding. She is just now in the process of drawing up her final report, which will be submitted by the April to the CLLC. It is hoped that this may be the basis of sharing this whole experience with other teachers.



“ **Stories with the computer**

Santosh has been working with some of the children on the computer since July. There have been a number of discussions as to how the children could learn more by applying what they know in a real and purposeful context. This method of doing a simple animation with a dialogue of a story has proved to be a very effective way of learning because it involves a number of skills and also is a great incentive because there is an in-built purpose and at the same time is enjoyable

It also improves the children's spoken, written and reading competencies in English and ensures that they have understood the vocabulary and story. So far the older children have worked on two stories from the 7th standard Government textbook. The younger children have selected their own stories.

There has been an effort to scaffold their learning so that they become increasingly independent. It is also hoped that they will in turn act as teachers to introduce other children to the skills and techniques required to make an animated story.



“ **Time Line**

It is often difficult for children to have a sense of history and to have the tools to build up a sense of a picture of the world. How, when, why things change are some of the basic questions and to fit fragments of information into the larger framework is often

problematic. Something that we are exploring is making a time line which is on the wall which a teacher can refer to in much the same way as a geography teacher might refer to a map. This is now in place and includes some of the information that children know but also needs to be added to. The activity was introduced by asking the children to first make their own time line of things that have happened in their own lives. This is a way of understanding that we can represent visually the concepts of before and after,

“ **Grandparents’ Day**

Another way of making history more meaningful is to relate to change in the immediate environment. We invited the grandparents of the younger children and a number of them came. The children prepared a number of questions to ask them about their lives and how things had changed such as the kind of games they played, the clothes they wore and the food they ate. The rapid pace of change in the village in the last ten years raises many questions about the positive and negatives aspects of the impact of development.

“ **Ramayana**

This year for Diwali the children and teachers worked on a small shadow puppet play of the basic story of the Ramayana. The children made the puppet by drawing and cutting out shapes and designs and then applying coloured kite paper and glass paper. The teachers performed it as a small drama on the night of Diwali.

The story aroused a great deal of interest and the following six weeks saw a lot of activity in the language class where children wrote collaboratively dialogues, character sketches and the outlines of different parts of the story. They also learnt some songs and *slokas* about Ram and Sita.

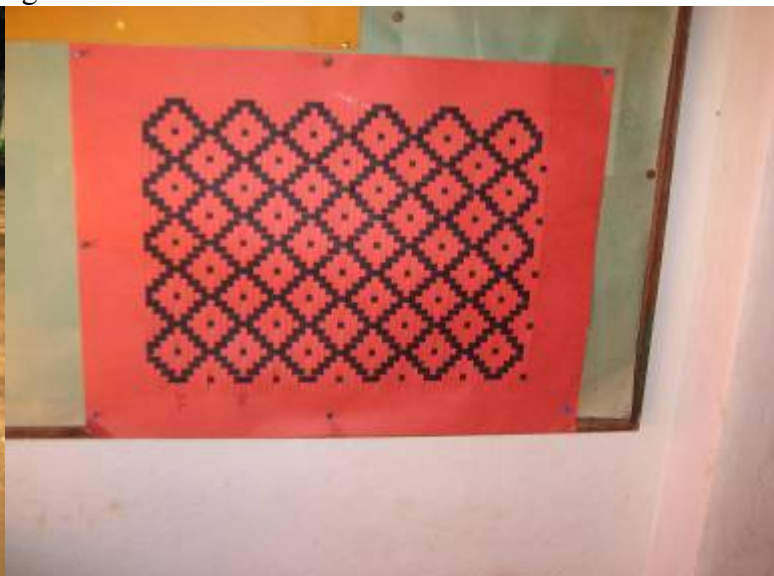
Although at present the majority of the children do come from Christian families all the children are encouraged to celebrate festivals and learn stories and songs from all religious backgrounds. Sometimes practices are adapted and given a meaning for today so that for example on the festival of Rakhi Bhandan the children exchange friendship bands that they have made and also tied a thread to one tree in the garden that they would take special care of. It also became a focus of interest across the school for children of different ages and abilities and something that could be shared at many different levels.



“ Weaving

One of the activities in addition to the usual craft lessons has been weaving. In June we acquired six small wooden looms. The younger children used strips of old nylon and cotton saris to make small purses.

In addition different groups of children did some elaborate paper weaving which required not only working together co-operatively but considerable skill in working out mathematical patterns to produce a complex design.



“ Using a magnetic board

English was taught by the use of a magnetic board. Two groups of children worked at the re-telling of a story in simple rhymes using cut out figures which were then laminated and a small magnet was attached. The story is then built up by placing these figures on a metal board. These materials are a flexible resource and could potentially be used by teachers in schools that have limited funds and resources.



“ Wisdom of the Hands

It has always been a policy of the school to try and integrate learning through art and craft. However this has become more explicit in the way what we are beginning to explore ways that math and physics can be taught through craft activities.

Since the beginning of November we have introduced half a day to such activities where the children have an extended period to work on a particular project and also to write down the processes and what they have observed and thought about.

The children began by making *'kandils'* paper lanterns using a framework of sticks joined by string and learning about the different shapes that can make up a three dimensional structure. It was notable how different the shapes were and how complex some of them were. The exercise included measuring, learning about shapes, and understanding three dimensional structures.

The children have also made mobiles using a variety of shapes.



Celebrations

Celebrations and festivals have always been an important part of the school's life.

“ **Independence Day**

A frieze that a group of students made some years ago was used as a visual aid to highlight the events leading up to Independence.



“ **Teachers’ Day**

Teachers’ Day is a day when the children organize a small cultural programme independently. Over the years certain norms have been accepted so that for example all the children should be included in some way, expenses should be minimum and there should not be anything hurtful to anyone’s sentiments. It is always impressive how children work together so efficiently and how motivated they are to do something well. This year among other things the children decorated the school courtyard as a surprise with saris brought from home, mango leaves from the garden and kolam pattern on the floor. The children’s excitement as they led the teachers into this unexpectedly colourful and beautiful decoration was palpable and the teachers’ appreciation was equally felt.

Raksha Bandhan was mentioned above and was also celebrated with meaning and enjoyment.

Diwali

For Diwali in addition to the puppet show of the story of the Ramayana children prepared dances and some songs.



Children's Day

Children's Day included the learning of some new games and in the afternoon the children were shown the animated film of *Up*. The teachers also put together a number of riddles to ask the children and prepared an elaborate treasure hunt which included everyone from the youngest to the oldest.

Christmas

The children spent about ten days practicing a dance drama of the Christmas Story which was presented to some of the parents and family members of the children. It was a little disappointing that not so many people came but it was fixed for the Saturday evening before the feast and there were many other activities going on that day in the community. It was felt that next time we should make effort to ensure participation and that we should find ways to help parents recognize how important their involvement and appreciation are.



Calendar making

In September the children, teachers and some Asha volunteers helped to make 600 calendars round the theme of exercise and health. The pictures included themes such as yoga, running, dancing, work round the school and exercises. The format was simpler than most years and the use of colour limited. This was done because there are less older children and the workload should not be too heavy. It was also decided for the first time to get the screens of the dates made commercially. We were fortunate that Santosh organized this for us and at almost no extra cost. The teachers, volunteers and children did all the printing.

It was a great support that Asha volunteers did help in the work.

However it was sometimes difficult to meet the different expectations of the Asha group as different suggestions were made. At one level there was the suggestion that children should be more closely involved in learning about the printing process itself and certainly pedagogically this is very much in keeping with the school's philosophy. However, there were serious practical constraints such as the time factor and also personnel which made this impossible this year. At another level there was some criticism that we were making too many demands on the children and they were being expected to work too much. This question of children's work raises a number of questions but I think that it is important for children to take responsibility and work co-operatively and this is a learning experience in itself. It is a question of balancing the time and strain of work with positive aspects. I think that anyone who saw the children at work would mostly have felt this was positive and enjoyable and not tedious. It was also a meaningful experience for children and adults to share in the work together .



Outreach

“ Publication of *Learning Through Art*

In September Nav Karnataka printed the third edition of *Learning through Art* (*Kalikeyalli*) in Kannada. It is heartening to note the interest in the book and that it has reached a Kannada speaking audience. So far there has been very little published in Kannada on this particular topic.

In October Eklavya in Hoshangaad, M.P. printed the English edition.

There have been suggestions that it will be translated and printed in Marathi.

Publication of *Everyday English Books*

In June the third edition of *Everyday English Book One* was printed. In November the first edition of *Everyday English Book Two* was printed by Jyotsna Prakashan in Pune. The Teachers' book and a CD are about to be published and the Teachers' Book for Book Two and *Everyday English Book Three* are presently being prepared for publication.

The text of *Everyday Kannada* has been prepared and Nav Karnataka has been approached for publishing in the coming year.

.. **Teaching Spoken English to 10th Standard students**

In July we were asked to conduct a course for the 10th Standard students in a local Government Aided Kannada medium school. For six weeks a daily class was organized for 80 students and three other teachers were involved in support teaching.

.. ***Visit to CLLC - Teachers' Workshop***

In September Jane spent 10 days in Phaltan, Maharashtra at the Centre for Literacy, Language and Communication, (CLLC). Visits to two Government schools that are using the *Everyday English* series were made and informal discussions were held with teachers.

In addition there was a workshop for teachers on teaching English as a second language to young learners.

.. **M. El. Ed. Teachers Programme**

In November Jane spent two weeks in TISS, Mumbai and was one of the two teachers conducting the First Language Pedagogy Course as part of the M. El. Ed. Programme.

Future Plans

.. We are hoping to evolve a more comprehensive plan for physical exercises and will be working on that in the next month.

.. Following a visit to Anand Niketan in Sevagram, Wardha we would also like to see more clearly how gardening can be integrated into the whole curriculum.

.. Jane has been asked to contribute to developing course material for the language component for the IGNOU .B. Ed. course.

.. Divya and Jane are working on a book *Reading and Writing for Meaning* in Kannada. This would be a teachers' resource book for helping children to become independent and critical readers and writers and will include a variety of samples of children's own writing.

.. In March Bina a volunteer through Asha is coming for a one-month period.

We would like to express our appreciation for the active involvement of Asha Volunteers not only for the generous financial contributions but also their concern, interest and practical support in a number of ways.

Jane Sahi

January 2010.