

## **Sita School Report for Asha**

**June- November 2010**

### **Children**

The number of thirty-four children who enrolled in June has continued throughout these six months. There have been some problems with S\*\*\*\* over irregular attendance but after a home visit there seems to be some improvement. The fact that she is now staying again with four uncles - boys between 15 and 30 years is a point of concern and we have to consider possibilities for finding residential accommodation from next June.

D\*\*\*\*\* has returned to school and has a part time job but will be taking the 7<sup>th</sup> standard examination in April which will give him a minimum qualification as he looks for full time work.

A\*\*\*\*\* who dropped out of the local High School in the 8<sup>th</sup> standard is now doing work to prepare him for the Open School exam in three subjects: English, Kannada and Computer Studies. Santhosh has been a good support for him to pursue his interest in music along with computer studies.

M\*\*\* has shown a distinct improvement over the last six months and following the visit to Ankura it has helped to work out more clearly specific challenges that we need to work with. A major change came when he was able to represent experience through pictures and name his drawings. Simultaneously he has been much more talkative and often initiates conversations and is ready to share events that have happened at home.

Three of the children who joined in June are settling down. A\*\*\* who had some behavior problems and was quite aggressive towards other children has become much more responsible and when given challenging tasks has a capacity for concentration and absorption. K\*\*\* shows signs of being a slow learner in some areas and we are trying to identify particular areas where he needs support.

In August the children were provided with uniforms consisting of red and purple T-shirts and black track pants for boys and girls alike. Parents have contributed to half the cost. The children have been very happy about the uniform and it has gone some way to help the children to come to school more neatly. However there has been a discrepancy between the estimated cost and the actual expenditure. (See note at the end.)

### **Teachers**

Following Divya's departure some reorganizing of classes had to be done. The teaching of Hindi has needed particular attention. We have had some support from Nikita Ramachandran who

helped Sarojini to use an innovative method of teaching Hindi developed by Chandrika Mathur from Rishi Valley School. Recently we have been given some graded readers from the Reading Cell in Delhi and these are a good resource to support independent learning.

In June Madhavraj, an Asha volunteer came and spent five weeks in the school. He proved a good support in a number of areas and especially contributed to the gardening aspect of the Food Project. (Please see report.)

In October an experienced English teacher, Rebecca Brandt came as a volunteer for two months. She has worked mainly in English. It was a timely support because Jane was on leave for three weeks teaching at TISS. (See her report.)

S\*\*\*\*\*, a student from Gudulur arrived recently. He is primarily interested in learning woodwork but it is hoped that he will also be involved in the school in physical activities and games over the next few weeks.

### **Curriculum innovations**

#### **Interaction through computers**

#### **Sudhi (news)**

Rumors and superstition can very easily entrench themselves as strong beliefs in children if not addressed properly. Rumors about a small girl turning into a lizard because she kicked the Quran started doing the rounds in Silvepura and even in the city. A local news channel covered this biased viewpoint playing on the fear of the viewer. We realized that just discussing this with the children might not be enough for them to think rationally. With the eldest group in the school (Chetana) and the High school kids (who graduated from Sita School and come for evening sessions with the computer) we decided to do our own news channel. The ONLY condition was that no news should be true or real! The children had a great time coming up with creative news reports (Sita School being submerged in a flood, Santhosh turning into an elephant, dinosaurs resurfacing in the earth, an aeroplane crash near the school etc.). We then went about substantiating the news by morphing images of the school to make the news real. We also added audio recordings from the 'news scene'. We used a web camera to change the computer room into a news room. We also carried interviews of the children and teacher, reporting what happened. The children also came up with ideas for exaggerated and false advertisements for products. The children learned how to combine videos, images and audio clippings to make a movie using 'windows movie maker' software. We then screened the movie for the entire school. After the movie we had an interesting discussion. The children realized that news can be concocted. But, they still liked doing the 'Sullu Sidhi' (False news) because it was a lot of fun! As a follow up exercise, we did real news related to the school with the slightly

younger group (Chandana). The children loved the experience of making their own movie and had a lot of fun making false advertisements again.

### **Stories through images**

The children were made into groups of 2 or 3. With a digital camera they had to take pictures of any living organism that was not a plant. With four of the organisms they captured on camera as central characters, they had to create a story. They were asked to first write the story in Kannada. They then drew and colored an image depicting the story. Once they had their own work on paper, they were enthusiastic to bring it into the computer. This helped in building their typing skills and also control over the mouse, while using common office software to type and paint. Some children liked the idea of typing so much that they preferred to type more stories from their texts. The children's work was displayed for everyone in the school to see.



### **Games for skills**

With the younger group of children, we used various educational games (thanks to a friend from Australia) to improve typing and mouse coordination skills. A little bit of time was set aside for games in each class. We also gave them time to use educational CDs in an independent manner. The teacher is more of a mentor or guide in the process.

### **Scratch**

Scratch was introduced to more children and the kids who already knew a few aspects helped the others with their work. Smaller tasks were given first. Later, kids came up with their own short stories or sequence of scenes for an animation. One of the High school kids wanted to know more about what is below the earth (i.e. under the sphere called earth) – this led to a

discussion where we viewed various images and short videos of the earth and outer space. An interesting video was downloaded from 'Youtube' – it was a homemade video made by a father and son team who sent a phone to outer space with a hot air balloon. After the discussion and viewing, we used scratch to animate the revolution of the earth around the sun.



### **Internet and conferencing**

Rebecca, a volunteer from England helped facilitate a conference and interactive session with children from St. Marks School, Salisbury, England. We first prepared the children with various questions to expect and also helped them organize questions they would like to ask. We also gave them an overview of the internet, how communication happens through it and how video conferencing works. We fixed a date and time and the children had a great time being part of the conference. The children shared information on various aspects of their daily lives and also things they learned in school. It was also nice to see Sita school kids perform dance and music for children from England. The children later wrote about their experience. This was a wonderful opportunity to work on their English writing and communication skills. It was also a nice opportunity to learn about a different country, culture and people.

Rebecca's note on the same topic was as follows:

Using a combination of 'Skype' and 'flashmeeting', Santosh and I have been communicating with St Mark's Junior School, Salisbury, England. This has brought many benefits for different people – Santosh has been able to share his excellent use of the Scratch program; the English IT coordinator has introduced us to 'flashmeeting' as a way of video conferencing that records the meeting for playback in the future ; the English children have learnt a little about India (fruits and flowers, jewellery and instruments were shown and songs and dance were performed) and the Sita students here practiced speaking English for a real purpose and learnt about the country too. The link will,

hopefully, continue to develop with meetings planned for the teachers to talk to each other to find out about the job in each country and more students 'chatting' which provides a real focus for their English language development.

## **Running and Games**

### **Training and games**

Due to the monsoon rains the training for kids and outdoor games could not go as regularly as planned. The children did do few runs and we tried out many new games. Children from Ananya came to Sita School for a performance of Kabir Songs by Prahlad Tipanya. In the morning, we started with breakfast and a group games session. The objective was to get the children to interact and break any hesitation in knowing each other. We played various games and slowly paired the children from different schools together. We then made them teams for the day. The rest of the morning they were going to do craft and art work. As they spent time together, they were also given the task of knowing three different interests/aspects of their friend in the team. By the end of the day, the children made great friends with each other and knew a lot about each other's lives. They also expressed a desire to meet more often in Ananya or Sita School.

### **Team Asha 8K**

On October 30<sup>th</sup>, about 17 children from Sita School participated in the Team Asha 8K run hosted by Ananya. There were close to 300 runners and more than 150 children who participated at the run. It was a nice opportunity to learn more about Ananya and interact with kids from various backgrounds. There were children from Spastics Society, Thulir, Kaigal Sanctuary Schools, Ananya and Thai Mane. All the children completed their 4km run and looked forward to more such events. We feel this event was a good beginning and can lay a basis for a more sustained and deeper interaction between schools. We are planning for longer trips to be hosted by schools, taking turns and organizing sessions for all children. You can read more about the event here - <http://teamashablr.blogspot.com/2010/11/team-asha-8k-ananya-oct-30th-2010.html>



## Food project and gardening

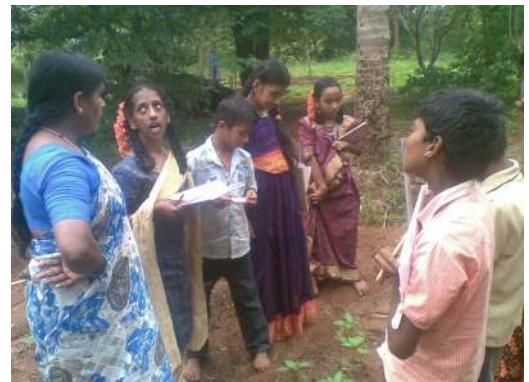
Part of a Report from Madhavraj

### My contribution:

**Organic farming:-***Extension and integral part of the food project and an understanding of how practical work links to classroom learning.*

### Need for an organic school garden

Sita School is going to concentrate on food as a project in Environmental science this year. This activity is a part of that project. The children will be designing their gardens and will decide what to grow on their plots. They are also going to record every activity like how they prepared the plots, the growth rate, the rate of survival and recording their general observations. They will grow fresh vegetables organically for the kitchen. This will give children an idea of what are the activities involved in producing food and the practical knowledge about how to do it. This is not only to grow an amount of vegetables. It's more about the practical knowledge of how a plant grows and the stages of plant growth.



### Pre plan & Discussion:

We had preliminary talk with the children about the organic garden. They seemed to be so enthusiastic; each one suggested planting different seeds. We told them the various aspects involved in the activity and I showed the record book in which the children at Puvidham wrote

their observations. It was decided that we would divide the Chandana and Karuna group's 11 children (The age group of 8 to 12) into four vertical groups and we would prepare four different plots. I had a talk with Jane about the plot preparation and the methods that I was planning to do with the children. She suggested the Key-Hole method which people are practicing in Kenya and she gave me a video to watch. Having my own experience which I practiced at Puvidham I decided for four different types of plots including the Key-Hole method for the children at Sita School. When I told the children about the different methods of plot preparing they were eager to do a lot of hands on work. Kamala teacher helped a lot from the beginning to the end of this activity and she decided which group will do what kind of method. The different methods are: the normal raised bed, bio-dynamic, box garden and Key- Hole method. We also discussed that we should keep the activities recorded and gave each one of them a record note book. Before this we had a discussion about choosing the different sites and where to do this activity.

#### **Preparation for the plot:**

We decided about the different methods before starting in the class room itself. So it was easy to work according to the plan. We decided to make changes only in the plot preparation and the rest of the activities like composting, water and applying the organic manure would all be the same. We advised the children to note if they found any difference by following these methods. The children and I cleaned all the weeds and we dug the soil. We made them mark where they are going to plant the seeds and after marking used a tape to measure in meters the area. They drew a rough diagram. They marked four corners and named them as A, B, C and D. They marked the direction of the plots which are rectangular shapes. They measured the lengths on the sides and wrote in their rough notes.

The key-Hole plot is a bit different, it is round in shape and they could measure the circumference. As it needed more hard work for the plot preparation I and Joseph, the gardener did most of the hard work. It is a good experience for Joseph also because he is the gardener so that he could continue these methods in the future. We also included the children where there was less hard work.

#### **Different types of plots:**

##### **1. Bio-dynamic plot: (P\*\*\*\*\* , A\*\*\* and S\*\*\*\*\*)**

This is a method we practiced in Puvidham with the children which they adopted after hearing about it. This is basically a pit, with three feet wide and one and half feet deep. First we took out the top soil about four inches. Then we made a pit for one and half by one and half wide and one and half foot deep. We kept the soil in a separate place to use later. Then we dug the soil the same one and half feet deep but for about six feet length. The soil was put in the pit

which was already made in such a way that the bottom soil comes to the top. It is just to loosen the soil and bring the minerals and other matters to the top so that the plant will get these materials easily.

## **2. Raised bed plot: (H\*\*\*\*\*\*, M\*\*\*\*\* and N\*\*\*\*\*)**

This is the normal method we do in general. This is a rectangular shaped plot in which we made 5 lengthy raised beds. After making the plot the children made a drawing of the plot and measured the lengths of each raised bed and recorded it in their notes.

## **3. Box type plot. (R\*\*\*\*\*, J\*\*\*\* and S\*\*\*\*\*)**

We learnt about the Box type gardening through Preethi a volunteer from Bangalore in which her father is practicing. We had not seen the plot but we wanted to try out. We made four separate box type plots measuring 3 feet by 4 feet using the old Mangalore tiles. We gave space between each box to walk freely and to do weeding and watering. We filled the boxes with compost and soil layer by layer. We asked the children to record the activities and they drew the picture of the plot on their record.

## **4. Key- Hole method. (A\*\*\*\* and A\*\*\*\*\*)**

This is a different method and will be a good one for a long time gardening. If we prepare once it will last for a long time. The basic measurement is 6 feet diameter circle and from the center there is a divide like a V shape to the outer circle. It looks like a key-hole so they could have named it as Key –Hole gardening. It's basically prepared by making a circular shape by stacking available stones around the area until it is raised up to 3 feet. We have to put a layer of soil and mud alternately. Where there is a V shape divide, one can walk in for watering and weeding. This is the way people have done in Kenya which we gathered as we watched the video. We adopted only few ideas which we thought would fit for us. We made 6 feet diameter circle but not for 3 feet height because it will be a problem for the children to fill up so much mud and compost. We raised it for 1 foot. We used the Mangalore used old tiles to make a Key-hole shape. Everybody was impressed by the shape.



### **What we found later:**

In the beginning we were not sure what kind of difference these plots would show. But after planting, the major difference we found was the water holding capacity. The box type and

the key-hole method plots held the water for long time. It remained damp for a long time, whereas the other two plots left the water on the other four sides.

### **Preparation for planting the seeds and plants:**

We had a discussion with the children what kind of seeds or plants they wanted to plant. Before that we asked the children to find out in their home what kind of vegetables would be good for this area and at this season. They came up with different suggestions like radish, tomato, chilies, brinjal, corn, cucumber, carrot, coriander and many more vegetables. We decided on certain vegetables for each group as follows.

Bio- Dynamic plot: Cucumber, brinjal, chillies and radish.

Raised bed – plot: Tomato, chillies, cabbage, lady's fingers and cucumber.

Key- hole method: radish, brinjal, beans and methi greens.

Box type plot: Corn, tomato, beans, methi and coriander.

After deciding on the vegetables we asked the children to draw a diagram of their plot and mark in symbols, how they want to plant each bed and how many.

### **Panchagavyaa:**

As part of the organic school garden we made Panchagavya. This is a solution which is organically made using 5 main products from the cow. This is practiced in many places over many years. As a part of organic garden, we felt that the children should know that these materials are available in our farm itself and we don't have to spend money on chemical fertilizer and it is bad for the soil and the health also. The children collected 5 kg of cow dung, half liter of ghee, 1 kg of Jaggery and put these three things in a plastic bucket and mixed well, kept this mixture for 4 days in a cool place covering the bucket's mouth with a wet cloth. On the 5<sup>th</sup> day we mixed 3 liters of cow urine, 2 liters of milk and 2 liters of curd with already prepared solution and stir it well. Later they mixed 10 liters of water. This solution was kept in a cool place for more than 15 days. This can be used as a pest control also as a good food to the plants. This solution was applied to the plants in the ratio of 1: 10 (1 liter of Panchagavya and 10 liter of water) as pest controller and manure.

### **Amruthjal**

We prepared Amruthjal with the help of the children using 1 kg of cow dung, 1 liter of cow urine and 100 gram of Jaggery. We asked the children to measure 1 kg of cow dung, a liter of cow urine and 100 kg of Jaggery using the proper weighing machine and a liter measure. They mixed these three things first in a plastic bucket and measured 10 liters of water to make

a solution called Amruthjal which we kept in a cool place for 3 days to get ready. Children took turns to mix it well every day once in the morning and once in the evening. They felt little sulky because of the smell but we told them the uses like how it works as a manure and it gives urea and other minerals to the soil. We have to apply this solution to the soil before planting the plants. This solution was mixed in water in the ratio of 1:10 and applied to the soil before planting as urea.

### **Composting:**

We collected the compost from the compost pit where the school collects a lot of compost. We made the children to remove the plastic and the unwanted garbage from the compost and they applied it to their plot. Composting is the same for all the plots.

### **Planting:-**

All the plants we got from a nursery nearby and the other seeds we got from Goutham's farm. The beds were watered in the previous day itself and they made marks on the plots where they want to plant. The children carefully took out the plants from the trays and planted on the bed. They were advised not to press it hard because if we press it a bit hard it may die. We told the children not to pour water from a vessel or from a bucket directly to the plants because the soil will run away. They used the sprinklers to pour water.



### **Record work:**

#### **1. Site map**

Each child drew their site map which has the direction, the identification mark, which are their neighbors and the path to their plot from one point.

#### **2. Activity chart**

They drew the everyday activity chart in which they recorded the activities what they had done and they left a column for their comments like how they felt about the garden or the plant that day.

#### **3. Map of the plot:**

They drew their plot in their record note and marked the direction. They named as ABCD and measured from side to side in meters. The idea is to find out the area of the plot, but as the children are too young it was not possible with all the children. But a few children could find out the area of their plot.

#### **4. Observation chart for each plant.**

To record the growth rate, the girth and the number of leaves, the date of planting and the date of sprouting, they drew an observation chart for each plant separately in their record note. They also learnt about averages.

#### **5. Drawing of the different stages of the plants.**

Once the seeds germinated children drew the pictures of a plant by looking closely at the different stages - young plant, when it flowered and when it fruited.

#### **My view:**

It was a good experience for me to work with such nice children. Though it was hard for them to do certain physical work they tried their best. They could follow the instructions properly. I thought that language would be a problem for me to communicate with the children, but it was not like that. They could understand my instructions with a little bit of my Kannada. It was a bit hard for the teacher, Kamala who corrected all the writings of the children and kept the record note in good shape. Now the children are having an experience of growing a vegetable by using the organic methods. It was a good thing for the children to grow your own vegetables and they could connect the activity to their project on food. Joseph the Gardner was there from the beginning, so that he could continue the methods in the future. Children got an idea on the organic pesticides like Amruthjal and Panchagavya. By doing the organic garden children acquired various knowledge like measuring and drawing the plot as geometry, by writing the observation they could develop their language skills, by measuring the length and girth of the plant they are learning maths. Also they found average height, girth and number of leaves. The follow-up instruction was given to Kamala teacher, so that she can take up the gardening activity here after.



### **Food project**

Following the Fellowship last year Kamala has worked over the last six months on a project about food. Kamala has planned the classes and conducted the classes but there have been observations, and discussions along with Santhosh and Preeti who supported the work last year.

A range of topics have been discussed with the children and through well thought out questions and a number of activities the children have been encouraged to explore many aspects of food. Brainstorming, categorizing food items in an open ended way. analysis of our daily food intake, costing food and questions asked about what was edible and inedible and what was it that made some things inedible were discussed. .Questions were asked that relate food to the children's environment such as " What did your grandparents eat? Why? How have eating habits changed? Where does our food come from now? What can't we grow locally and why? What do we mean by'good' food? This last question led to a number of slogans about healthy and nutritious food which just now decorate the school. One of them reads "*If you want to eat the best Horlicks and become strong join Sita School for breakfast!*" Horlicks here refers to the nutritious drink that children are given daily which is a mixture of grains, dals, groundnuts and soya beans.



As part of the food project, we also made a visit to Ashok Balaji's Farm (Preeti's Dad). They have their own organic farm and grow vegetables for their own consumption and sale. The children had a great experience and could discuss directly with an organic farmer about their own challenges with pests etc.



### **Wisdom of the Hands**

Wisdom of the hands or thinking hand is a class that many of the Sita school children really enjoy.

The children start with a five minute meditation or quiet time where they take their eyes for a walk -

they see and draw and give themselves time to just observe small details in nature that catch their eyes.

This is followed by an activity in which the children make and do things. Here a topic is chosen and it may continue for two or more Tuesday afternoons.

This bustle and active part is often followed by a more reflective and thoughtful part during which the children think about what they have observed by annotated drawings and notes on why they think something happened.. or interesting facts ... what they think

Some of the things they have thought about are

sound

siphons

valves and pumps

wind socks and rain gauges

spinning and creating an experiment

making structures with sticks and string to become kandeels

### **Language Teaching**

There has been an effort to give more choices in the language class and to provide and arrange materials so that children have easy access to a variety of activities that include reading material, phonic games, independent writing and work cards that ensure the basic skills are covered. Records have been kept and shared with at least some of the children so that they become aware of the progress that they have made and what is expected at the next stage.

### **Sharing ideas**

In August we had the visit of five teachers from an innovative school in Pune, Akshanandan. We have had a long association with this school. There was a good exchange of ideas including kamala's presentation of her Fellowship on classroom discourse in the science class. The children also shared the work they had done on the computer in animating stories.

In September ten teachers came from schools in Maharashtra including Sevagram in Wardha, Kamala Nimbkar Bhavan in Phaltan and two from other educational organizations in Maharashtra. There was some discussion but a particularly interesting short workshop was given on how effectively we communicate with each other. This was demonstrated through an activity of teachers working in pairs, sitting back to back each with a set of identical shapes. The two teachers of each pair took it in turns to give instructions as to how to how to arrange a pattern with the shapes while the other without looking tried to listen and follow the

instructions. There was an interesting reflection on this task and its implications on classroom practice.

In August Dr Mythili Ramchand, Director of RV Educational Consortium and her colleague spent a day in the school. They were particularly interested in Kamala's work and have invited her to give a presentation to teacher trainees before the end of the year.

In July Jane spent ten days in Phalanx working on a film about introducing new vocabulary in English to 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> standard children. The film was supported by the Centre for Language, Literacy and Communication in Phalanx. She worked with two Government school teachers and the film was shot in two rural schools in Samara District in Maharashtra. The film, "Here is a tree..." has just been completed and it will be used for teacher training.

An introductory book for the teaching of oral English has also just been printed.

In October-November Jane was away for three weeks at TISS, Mumbai co-teaching the First language Pedagogy course for the M.A. (Elementary Education) course.

Writing has begun for the language component of the IGNOU Diploma course in early education. The final draft is to be submitted in April 2011.

### **Visits and Visitors**

In September Kamala joined the group from Maharashtra on an educational tour which included visits to Vikasana, Bangalore and Accord in Gudulur, in the Nilgiris. She was away for a week and it was a good opportunity for her to become acquainted with work going on in other organizations and centres.

In September the school was very fortunate to have the visit of the well-known singer, Prahladji Tipanya. He was accompanied by Chintan from the Kabir Project which has been working to introduce children to the thought and poetry of Kabir. Even the youngest children sat and listened with rapt attention. Twenty children from Ananya also joined the school for the day and through sharing together some well thought out introductory activities the children from the two schools quickly bonded.



In October Yashodara spent a couple of days with us and shared her experiences of working on an environmental project about Ladakh through some pictures, posters and books.

Also in October Anuradha from Ananda Bharati in Hyderabad shared some of her insights about creative writing and particularly the issue of including dialect forms within the language class. She shared with the teachers how standard language users dominate because the usage of standard language in the text book form privileges high caste and economically better off groups. She gave examples of the rich and vivid writing of children who were able to share their experiences more directly and passionately when supported to write in their home language. She spoke of her own experience and the discrimination against Telangana in Andhra Pradesh.

### Celebrations

Independence Day was celebrated in August. The youngest children were asked what they could do to make the village a better place to live in for everyone and the oldest children were asked what they felt they could do to make the country a more just and happier place for all.



In September the children prepared a programme for the teachers and friends to enjoy. The children worked together with great enthusiasm and everyone had a part to play from the oldest to the youngest. There was some worry when the children performed a small drama about a mentally ill person that was “cured” by an electric shock and there was a feeling that we should do more to discuss with the children what the causes and effects of mental illness are. However it was thought that this should be done indirectly and not as a direct response to the children’s drama.



We also thought that it would be helpful for the children to have more social interaction with children who are differently abled and that there could be more contact with the children of The Spastics Society for example.

### **Older students**

Altogether five children are continuing their studies in the High School. One boy dropped out last month but it is hoped that he can do an apprenticeship as a carpenter as he has not been happy in school and formal studying.

Three girls are continuing an IGNOU course in a Community College in Bangalore which will end in December. It has to be decided what each of them will do next.

### **Concerns about the Right to Education Act**

In August the India Literacy Project held a meeting entitled ‘Understanding RTE Act 2009’ to discuss the implications of the RtE Act. Jane gave a short talk on the effects on alternative schools. (See Appendix). In July Jane also attended a meeting in Pune with a number of people who had been instrumental in passing the Act. It became clear in the course of the meeting that there was not much sympathy for the idea of an alternative recognition. The question of whether the Open School providing an umbrella for such schools remains open. For the present there is a three year ‘grace’ period to adjust to the demands of the Government.

Several articles have been published by Teacher Plus concerning this including one by Jane which has been circulated to Asha friends.

A further brief note was also written on the question of following a prescribed curriculum as mentioned in the Act .(See Appendix)

### **Forward Planning**

In the remaining months before the end of the year it is hoped to work out a more effective way of teaching algebra. It is so important that children feel well grounded in this aspect of math or they will always feel hampered.

There are plans to have some craft and drama workshops in the summer holidays both for some of the children of the school and for others from the nearby villages.

### **Estimated Budget**

There has been a discrepancy between the estimated cost of the children's uniforms and the actual cost. This has meant that we had to pay \_\_\_\_\_ more than expected.

### **Appendix ONE**

#### **Brief comment on the understanding of curriculum in relation to the Right to Education Act**

There are some concerns related to this issue which I feel should be addressed.

### **Relation of syllabus to curriculum**

There seems to be confusion in differentiating between curriculum and syllabus. These obviously are not synonymous though they are, nevertheless, closely interwoven.

Curriculum is to do with patterns of learning as distinct from the content of different subjects. Examining the framework of the curriculum answers the question “why” we choose to do things the way we do and the reasons for our selection of “what is worth knowing.”

Syllabus on the other hand is more about the details of the content of different subjects. The ‘how’ and ‘what’ of teaching must stem from our understanding of why we are doing it and whether it is helpful for the children that we teach.

A curriculum framework is in danger of being mis-understood as a prescribed syllabus, and this means in practice the likelihood of prescribed textbooks, a prescribed pattern of periods and prescribed systems of assessment.

### **The interpretation and curriculum in practice**

Changes in the recent guidelines of the Curriculum Framework of the NCERT have opened up many possibilities in innovative and creative ways of teaching. However textbooks and guidelines in reshaping curriculum will only come to life through the active engagement of teachers who are conscious and aware of what they are doing.

A view of curriculum also determines a method and a reason for evaluation. Some views of curriculum can result in a very narrow syllabus that works towards a reductionist, minimal level of learning as a goal in it. Evaluation should rather be a way of gauging what a child is moving towards in making knowledge her own.

### **Unfeasible pressure of time and pace**

There is a flawed assumption that all children of the same age should be working at the same pace and will have reached the same levels of competency within the same time. In the Right to Ed. Act it specifically states that children must be” in a class appropriate to his or her age’. Further that special training will be provided to ensure that he/she is “at par with others”. This is blatantly not possible given the diverse interests, capacities and levels of motivation of different children.

There is a stress on the pace of teaching that certain portions must be completed within prescribed times regardless of children’s actual understanding or levels of achievement. It would be more realistic and appropriate to outline stages of development that cut across age distinctions and are concerned with acquisition of skills and mastery of concepts.

### **The limitations of a uniform curriculum**

There is a concern about the concept of a single curriculum which would be appropriate for different contexts. I quote from the Act itself.

"The curriculum and the evaluation procedure for elementary education shall be laid down by an academic authority to be specified by the appropriate Government, by notification".

An understanding of a shared life in a particular place, time and social context is what grounds curriculum in practice. This cannot be standardized or universalized.

### **Teacher's autonomy**

Recently the role of a teacher is becoming increasingly viewed as a technician, a manager or just a deliverer of ready-made goods. The teacher as thinking, critical and competent person is in danger of being eroded by forces that seem beyond control. The constraints of a curriculum as defined by a syllabus can be oppressive and that is why it is all the more important for teachers to critique the textbooks and syllabi that they are expected to teach.

Some years ago much was written about 'a hidden curriculum' which essentially meant structures and systems that maintain the status quo and if we are to make our schools more inclusive then it is necessary for teachers to take on a very critical stance in order to bring about changes.

'Curriculum' comes from a Latin word which means the course of a chariot race. However curriculum must come to mean much more than a prescribed one track race and calls for a search for an understanding that gives meaning to education that is both functional and ethical. This is an evolving process and not something that can be definitively fixed.

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