

Chiguru

Learning Network Newsletter



Dear Readers:

We are pleased to bring you the December issue of "Chiguru", the Learning Network newsletter. The newsletter includes a medley of readings. We hope you find it enjoyable and resourceful.

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The *Viewpoint* section contains two articles discussing the roles of parents and the state in children's education. We look forward to your perspectives on these. The *Learning Spotlight* contains profiles of two new members active in the area of environmental education and community empowerment. In the *Sharing Corner* we have a delightful account of the partial solar eclipse viewing at Hyderabad in October. If you are interested in directory of resources for government schools improvements, do check out the book announcement featured in here. As always we have updates of some of the network activities. *Do not miss the inset flyer with details of the upcoming 4th Annual Learning Network Conference.*

We thank the contributors to this newsletter and look forward to your contributions, comments and feedback for the next newsletter. Please email us at info@learningnet-india.org. The newsletter is also available on our website at www.learningnet-india.org

Wishing you all the best for the upcoming year!

Sincerely,
Newsletter Team
(Reshma, Meenakshi, Veena,
Vignesh and Anita)

4th Annual Learning Network Conference

27-29th January 2006
Ahmedabad, Gujarat

Join us for workshops,
presentations, teachers forum,
exhibits and discussions


see inset flyer for details!!
or write to
info@learningnet-india.org

Viewpoint

Parental Role in Education

Rajaram Sharma of Vidya Online, provides a summary of dialogues on the parental role in school and homework. Send your feedback and further dialogues to info@learningnet-india.org. Contact the author at admin@vidyaonline.net

The home, the school, religious organisations and the state are agencies of education. Each agency performs its unique role while together they are expected to contribute to the overall development of our children. But each agency appears to be more than eager to absolve itself of its responsibilities. Be it personal hygiene or manners, be it sound ethics or behaviour, be it patriotic fervour or democratic ideals, is the school is expected to take it all? This leaves the school little time to do what it is expected to do - teaching the three Rs.



“In our schools the primary role of teaching in the classroom is given to teachers. Parents are expected to help at home. What if parents are also brought to school to help teachers in the classroom and teachers help parents in getting the homework completed right in school. This will help build a community. This community will be able to share their knowledge with children.”

- comments by discussion initiator, Raj Gandhi

Helping children at home with school work, providing for extra tuitions, unquestioningly accepting the various requests of the school and even accepting the blame for a “poor report card” are considered “proper” parent behaviour. Is it not important to clarify the role of each of the agencies mentioned above with regards to the development of our children and a healthy society? Should we not find ways and means to reinstate the responsibility to these agencies? Will this allow every citizen to contribute to society in his/her chosen domain? Will it allow every functionary an opportunity to grow - become empowered? What then are the parental responsibilities towards their children’s education? And what are the roadblocks?

It was heartening to note a heightened awareness among the participants about what their children need and what parents and schools need to do. But, there was a tendency to blame the teacher and even express helplessness in fulfilling parental roles. There was a general agreement that parents are the first teachers for a child and have a significant role in their child’s development (which includes education).

“Yet, the moment a child reaches a certain age, we all feel the need to send him to a formal system of education (defined as Schools)- for the simple reason that it is more structured, well-researched, predefined, specialized”, felt a parent. Besides, for a child, schools were also listed as the first encounter with the outside world and hence the child’s future learning and his contribution to the community would be based on this interaction. Schools or teachers were expected to have an equal responsibility to share, to help a child to grow into a balanced individual - competent, confident and capable.



Some participants felt it’s high time both parents and teachers re-orient themselves and take charge of the situation. They believe parents play a great role in creating the atmosphere for their children’s learning.

Parents need to keep in touch with the school all the time. A frank discussion between teachers and parents about the differences in home and school environments is a necessary step in this direction

There were also participants who asked “Why give homework that has to be done with the help of parents?”. They suggested that only home work that the child can do on her own be given. Home work, they said ‘is an assignment to evaluate the grasp of what the teacher might have taught and not a work for the parents’. Further they argued that homework needs to be a pleasurable activity unlike today’s pressure for both the child and the parent. It can be a small research work where both the parents and the child learn together and not a repetition of what’s learnt in school.

One participant in this discussion frankly said - “A child will attempt his homework when his concepts become clear. When the child goes to the cricket field after the class, he gets automatically involved in that and he automatically counts the runs, complain to umpire, etc. There he does not take the help of his father or teacher. When a child is involved himself or understands concept of the subject, then he doesn’t require any help for homework. Nowadays teachers (I am not saying all) do not know the concepts themselves and pass on the burden to the children as homework. Some even help children with their homework for a consideration (tuitions).” Further some schools lack proper vision and have degenerated to “business centres’ rather than ‘learning centres’, rued some participants.

At the same time some participants felt parents can be brought to school periodically to share the experiences/discuss about the homework they helped their child with.

This will nurture the love for learning in the child and also motivate the parents to be more involved in their child's learning and this will open up avenues for the teacher to be more innovative. This way the education system can help build a community.

The influence of media and the harsh world on the young minds was a point of concern. The need for a loving and caring environment for their children was suggested. The role of the parent in ensuring this and providing constant encouragement in their studies amidst various distractions was stressed.

If parents are not literate, they generally have no time to oversee their children's education as they are otherwise engaged in meeting life's basic requirements. Teachers' support in helping parents was also sought. One participant narrated an experience.

Today, are 'child' and 'learning' two neglected words? What roles to parents and teachers play in education? The discussion remains open - and your comments are welcome!

He reported, "We can in fact ask the parent to attend the adult education classes which will be conducted in the school premises for the convenience of the parent. After acquiring enough knowledge we can request them to assist their child in its academic development. Community building can be done by the teacher by devoting her time and using the creativity in building up the rapport with the parent before asking her/him to assist their child. Recently in our School we have conducted a computer awareness programme for the mothers of preparatory children. All those parents who attended the workshop were reluctant in the beginning but later showed tremendous interest in learning it. It is only due to the motivation and congenial atmosphere created by the teachers. Mind you these mothers are not literate and felt that computer is a very advanced thing which they cannot handle without knowing much of English language. Once they get enough knowledge automatically parent will thrive to learn more and share with their own children which will be an achievement for the teacher and the school."

Discussion participants: *Vijivenkat, T. Sudha, D K Mohanty, Suchita Shah, Bhargavi Rao, Anuradha Gupta, Annapurna, Sushant, Girija, R. M. Bhatt, Goh.* You may view the entire transcript www.vidyaonline.net.

The "Viewpoint" section in this newsletter is a common space to express your views and ideas and further thread conversations featured in this and previous issues. We welcome you to write to us at info@learningnet-india.org

Learning Network Workshops

Mathematics & Storytelling

The Learning Network organised workshops in collaboration with Anand Niketan at Ahmedabad and with Muskaan at Bhopal. A Mathematics workshop was conducted by Sabyasachi and Sonali of Jodo Gyan and the Storytelling workshops were conducted by Geeta Ramanujam of Kathalaya. Here are some highlights. Detailed reports are available at www.learningnet-india.org.



Experiencing Math

A two day mathematics workshop conducted by Jodo Gyan at Ahmedabad in July 2005 was highly interactive and interesting. 25 participants from local schools attended the workshop. The workshop was geared towards pre-primary, primary & middle school math.

Jodo Gyan has drawn on latest mathematical research and their experiences of the teaching learning process to develop their educational materials and teaching techniques. These materials are produced with the participation of community members in Shakurpur, a resettlement colony in Delhi.

The materials addressed a wide range of concepts - Spatial sense and Geometry, Measurement, Early Number sense, Number & Number Operations, Place value, Algebra and Fractions. Basic mathematical concepts including addition, subtraction, multiplication, division were introduced in simple ways using teaching-learning materials (TLM). To make math simple and interesting, the creative use of TLM plays an important role. Participants were grouped and given different TLM to explore. Each group activity was followed by personal reflection that made many concepts clear. Majority of the participants found this a relearning experience. One of the interesting things about the workshop was the use of different, thoughtful anecdotes and stories linked to different mathematical concepts. Practical demonstration with children classes 4th and 5th at Anand Niketan

Participants Feedback

“Overall a very enjoyable session - had so many ideas to make mathematics all the more interesting and simple”

“The Jodo tools are excellent material for teaching multipurpose concepts -gives a freedom to explore and go deep into mathematical thinking”

“They stressed on making the concepts clear to the students rather than the use of mechanical methods”

“With the help of number string the children will be able to gather a good sense of numbers and also the place of zero”

We are hoping to organise workshops by Jodo Gyan in Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad in February 2006. If you are interested in attending, please contact the Learning Network at info@learningnet-india.org. Watch for announcements related to this.

school gave new insights to the participants for teaching least common multiple and fractions. Children not only enjoyed but also were able to digest basic concepts easily. During the workshop participants were asking questions and sharing their personal life experiences in context of how mathematics was made difficult by their teachers. Participants left feeling the need for longer workshops and greater time with the resource persons to engage in more activity based learning! You may contact Sabyasachi of Jodo Gyan at E/12-13, Shakurpur, Near Britannia Chowk, Delhi 110034, Tel: (011) 27102820, Email: jodogyandel@yahoo.com

Storytelling at Ahmedabad

Kathalaya conducted a two day storytelling workshop for 35 participants for teachers and educators from Ahmedabad schools in July 2005. Participants were energized to learn the educative and communicative aspects of storytelling. The participants presented excellent stories, with original creation, musical

Kathalaya, a Bangalore based organization, was established in 1999 with a vision to "Make a positive social change in education through storytelling." Kathalaya reinvented storytelling to integrate the same to classroom teaching and hence, to the curriculum.

and dramatic performance and a positive spirit. With different ideas of voice modulations, physical exercises, facial expressions, body language-attitudes, and listening styles, each participant was exposed to the vast canvas of story telling. Participatory approach of the facilitator energized participants to be creative and natural in expressing personal experiences that opened up the communication. Exchange of personal life story experiences brought everyone closer to each other. With the creative rendition of wisdom stories everyone felt touched and a closer look back into their own childhood. Participants developed different ideas on how to integrate story telling into curriculum and subjects. Every one felt that two days are not enough for such an interactive workshop. You may contact Geeta at kathalaya@vsnl.net or visit www.kathalaya.org for more information.

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Learning Network

Online Resource

The Learning Network is three years old and its website is fast expanding! We have taken some concrete steps in improving the website. This is an ongoing process and we need your input!



Please visit our website - <http://www.learningnet-india.org>

The learning network members featured on the website, emphasize on making quality education & resources available to communities and children. Many of these efforts have demonstrated unique and sustained efforts towards providing meaningful learning experiences. In addition to organization profiles, the website also features event announcements, articles of common interest, and reports on Learning Network's conferences, workshops and seminars. If you have articles or upcoming event announcements, we welcome your submissions.

Please do take a look at your organization's profile and send us your feedback. If you would like to contribute to the website, please write to Swati Sircar, at info@learningnet-india.org with your input.

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Storytelling at Bhopal:

Kathalaya's two day workshop at Bhopal in September 2005 was attended by a total of 35 participants from various NGOs in Bhopal.

The workshop had an interesting start, which also makes an interesting read. Each participant was given a bookmark on which they had to make a symbol of any story they had liked along with writing their own name and organization. The bookmarks were then collected and then re-distributed in a manner that no one got their own bookmark back. Each person then imagined a story of the symbol on the book-mark that (s)he had received, and also mentioned the book-mark's actual owner's name. This latter person also joined in to say what his/her story was. The participants also mentioned his/her expectations from the workshop. In this way, each person's story came in the discussion, and different participants interacted with each other. This captures the essence of the workshop in a nutshell!

Learning Spotlight

Kalpavriksh

Kalpavriksh is a small and focused non-profit organization. Started 22 years ago with a campaign by students to save Delhi's Ridge Forest, it has since taken a strong position on several environmental and developmental issues. Kalpavriksh was founded on the philosophy that a country can develop meaningfully only when ecological sustainability and social equity are guaranteed. Kalpavriksh's founders are ardent nature lovers, but their involvement with people's movements has helped them integrate issues of conservation and livelihood.



Green Alternatives: creating awareness around use of natural holi colors

Kalpavriksh organizes education and awareness activities by engaging in talks and slide shows in schools on topics such as organic food, biodiversity. They conduct educational workshops and assist in development of teachers' manuals for education in Karnataka, Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep.

Kalpavriksh networks with communities, local NGOs, social activists, conservationists and forest officials to initiate dialogues and resolve conflicts in protected areas, and co-ordinates a National Conservation and Livelihoods Network. It has representation in international networks and groups such as Global Biodiversity Forum, Earth World, World RainForest Movement and participates in movements against the processes of destructive globalization.

Some of their publications include a bimonthly feature called '*Protected Area Update*' focusing on development in wildlife sanctuaries and national parks across South Asia, a series of lectures - '*Signs of Hope*', showcasing efforts in ecologically sustainable living. One can visit them in Pune or their website for their excellent reference documentation centre. Kalpavriksh also provides training in the following subjects: Biodiversity Conservation, Community Conservation, Protected Areas and People, Environmental Governance and Safe Festivals. At least 3 months notice is required for training requests as several members are often traveling. A deep love of nature and a belief in a just and equitable society is the focus of this member of the Learning Spotlight! For more details contact:

Sharmila Deo, Kalpavriksh,
Apt 5 Shree Dutta Krupa , 908 Deccan Gymkhana
Pune 411004, India
Ph: 011-20-25654239/25675450
Web: www.kalpavriksh.org



Learning Spotlight

Barefoot College

Nestled in the village of Tilonia near Ajmer, Rajasthan, Barefoot College is a proven way to better lives. Innovative, yet traditional in its approach, the 'Barefoot College' aims to improve the quality of everyday life among the rural population using the practical knowledge, skills and talents of the community.

From the very beginning, the practice here rests on the belief that development programs need resources mobilized by para-professionals and not urban professionals. The Barefoot College was started in 1972 with the main campus in Tilonia, constructed by 12 'barefoot' architects. Today there are 20 such colleges across 13 states! Although local priorities may be different, the fundamental principles remain the same – people in the colleges are from the villages, who live there and work on developing skills to improve their lives.

The Barefoot College is both a place of learning and unlearning, where the teacher is the learner and the learner is the teacher, and where all are equal. No degrees or certificates are awarded. People are encouraged to make mistakes as a means to learn humility and curiosity, develop the courage to take risks, improvise and constantly experiment. This faith in the capacity and competence of the rural community has made Barefoot College the success that it is.

The College addresses a whole spectrum of rural problems – drinking water, girl education, health & sanitation, rural unemployment, income generation, electricity and power, social awareness and the conservation of ecological systems. The concept of 'night schools' enables students, including children, who work during the day to attend school at night. Here we see the true Children's Parliament - which regulates the night schools, making children aware of political structure and processes. The Barefoot College also promotes rural handicrafts as a means of income generation.

Interested in participating in a Barefoot program or developing a Barefoot approach to your program? Create an environment where a community's skills and resources can be used for their own development. The Barefoot approach will work in any rural community in the world. More details at:



The Barefoot College, Village Tilonia
District Ajmer, Rajasthan 305816, India
Ph: 91-01463-288204 Fax: 91-01463-288206
email: barefoot@sancharnet.in
web: www.barefootcollege.org

Sharing Corner

Viewing the Eclipse

When the partial solar eclipse occurred on Oct. 3rd, 2005, there were many viewing programs organized in Hyderabad. Shreekumar and Lakshmi of Ananda Bharati share some perspectives from the event. You may contact the authors at srissl@sol.net.in for more details

With a passion to share the science and mystery behind eclipses, informative viewing programs were organised at many locations in Hyderabad in time for the partial solar eclipse on Oct. 3rd of this year. We arranged one such viewing at our school in Tarnaka and another at the Wipro office.

We experimented with three methods of viewing. One of them was quite intriguing and is called the mirror projection technique. We used a mirror to project on to a white paper. We used a thin small mirror with stand that helped adjust its angle. We covered it with a dark paper with a hole the size of a two rupee coin. Viewers could sit back and observe the eclipse.

Children plotted the sun's disk every few minutes using this technique and recorded the progress of the eclipse. However, the clouds reduced the brightness of the sunlight and we could only do this effectively for the last 10-15 minutes of the eclipse. We contemplated that a bigger hole in the mirror may have helped in getting better results. We also tried a direct viewing using solar goggles. This was better, especially when there weren't any dark clouds and after the eclipse was at 5-10% .

A more detailed technique we used is called telescope projection. We projected the sun's image using a 60 mm refractor telescope on to a white paper. This had the best results for viewing. We plotted the eclipse as it progressed. This was not easy as the telescope had to be adjusted every 2-3 minutes to bring sun within view!

At the Tarnaka school, 25 students, all teachers, and a few visitors participated enthusiastically. At the Wipro office, around 20 participants attended the session. Even though the clouds played spoil sport, on the whole, actually seeing the eclipse was a rewarding experience.

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Sutradhar, a Bangalore based resource center, has published a book titled “Improving Government Schools - What has been tried and what works”. Here is a brief write up about the book.

Government schools serve the majority of children in our country. Across India, a handful of committed individuals have led efforts to improve government schools, in the belief that they could institute an enduring change in the system. This book profiles 23 such efforts from across India. These are stories of inspiration, insight, and of interest to practitioners engaged with ideas of innovation and school reform. There are efforts to improve the teaching of curricular areas such as language, math and science; as well as attempts to introduce new ones such as health, peace and environment education. Some efforts have focused on the role of textbooks, radio and computers in the classroom, mobilising communities and energising teachers. The book includes an all-India resource directory of non-governmental organisations engaged with ‘improving government schools’.

The book is available for Rs. 300/- Contact: *Indra Moses, Sutradhar, 599, 7th Main, 17th A Cross, Indiranagar Stage 2, Bangalore 560 038, Tel: 080-25288 545 / 25215191, Email: sutra@vsnl.com, Web: www.sutradhar.com*



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Viewing the Eclipse

There were many questions - Why are the images different from the different techniques? Why can't we look at sun during eclipse? Why do we have to constantly adjust telescope/mirror to have the image on the white paper? Why does not eclipse happen on every amavasya? Write to us with your ideas! Although the media publicity for the partial eclipse was poor, The Hyderabad astronomers association was vital in providing us the necessary details. Interestingly, as by popular belief, streets had less traffic, many offices/schools were let off early, shops, temples closed at Hyderabad. The eye doctor we went to meet for a retinal check up had not come, due to eclipse!

Learning Network

Conference 2006

We are pleased to announce the 4th Annual Network conference to be held in Ahmedabad in January 2006.

This yearly conference has proven to be a fertile ground for new and existing members to share experiences and create awareness on innovative ideas and sustainable education methods and resources. Please the reverse page for more details.

We invite your participation at many levels.

You are also welcome to participate as a listener or observer.

****Keynote address by long term educationist Jyotibai Desai****



Venue: Anand Niketan School, Near Ambali Road Crossing, Thaltej-Shilaj Road, Ahmedabad 380053

Dates: 27th, 28th, 29th (Fri-Sun) January 2006

Attendance for the conference is by **RSVP** only to ensure accommodation and food arrangements

Registration:

Rs 300/- for members (Rs. 150/- for additional participants)

Rs 400/- for non-members (listeners and observers).

The fees include food and accommodation and is subsidized.

(We welcome you to consider the full cost at Rs. 600/- per person)

Contact Information

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more information on our website at www.learningnet-india.org

Every year, the learning network conference features the release of "Revive", a resource book containing information on various organizations and articles relevant to holistic learning.

To receive a copy write to info@learningnet-india.org

We thank Goodbooks Teachers Centre and Tulika Publishers for helping us bring you this year's Revive.

What's happening at the Conference?

Presentations

Topics range from philosophies of education, specific methodology or pedagogy, concept papers and work experiences. Some of these are:

- Educational Model Implemented in Shirpur by Fr. Godfrey Lima*
- Project Work In Schools: Prospect and perspectives by G.S Jayadev*
- Videotaping classrooms for reflective pedagogy by Beena Choksi*
- Pedagogy of Science Classroom Practices by Prakash Burte*
- Children's' Parliament of Night Schools by Barefoot College*
- Impact of Television on children by Jayashree & Anita*

Display and Exhibition

We invite you to setup a display of your resources and ideas. books, learning aids, teacher resources, poster displays on various methodologies are welcome. We would provide a table for your exhibits. Please confirm in advance to make the reqd. arrangements.

Workshops

Join us in hands-on and interactive workshops. These include:

- Using alternative materials for science experiments and conceptual learning by Shishu Milap*
- Teaching 1-5th standard mathematics using bottle caps and sticks by Sundaram Subbharatanam*
- Activity Based Learning by Ravi Aluganti*
- Life skills curriculum by Pravah*

Discussions

We invite you to lead a discussion relevant to current needs in education or co-lead with other members. Time allowed- 1.5 hrs.

NEW!! Teachers Forum

The teachers forum is a new session at the conference for teachers from schools in and around Ahmedabad seeking answers to academic and educational questions. This will be an open forum for teachers to share their concerns and get support from resource persons and peers on topics related to Mathematics and Science.

Viewpoint

Child Rights and Education

In our second "Viewpoint" section, Shivani Taneja shares perspectives on the universalization of primary education based on Muskaan's experiences in promoting education amongst working children (out of schools) in the slums of Bhopal city. You may contact her at shivanit74@yahoo.co.in for correspondence. Send us your comments on this topic to info@learningnet-india.org



"Patli, 25 years, is a tribal woman living in Ganga Nagar slum since birth. When her children, Lalita and Kublu, study, she is usually quite happy and keen about it. She does get help when her son collects 'pannis' and 'loha' and sells them for a few rupees and gives this money to her. Her husband, being a daily wage labourer is not able to get work every day. Lalita often helps her in getting water from the pump. They need to go to two hand pumps – one for the drinking water and another for their washing. Three times a week, Lalita goes with her friends looking for wood or dung cakes to be used as fuel in their cooking. The days they are unable to do this, Patli will have to spend a precious Rs. 5 for buying wood."

When we are beginning a discussion on child rights in context of universalization of elementary education, the children in reference are those who are deprived of these rights. These are primarily children from poor backgrounds and are out of schools.

Several studies show that more than 20 percent of the children of the age-group 6 – 11 in urban areas are not even enrolled in schools.¹ Specific area reports from within the state show a dismal picture. A study carried out by Aarambh, a Bhopal-based NGO showed about 55 percent of slum living children out of schools in the city.³ The tribal families with whom Muskaan began work had 100 percent children out of school.⁴

The Constitutional Amendment, 2001 says that 'the state shall provide free and compulsory education, in such manner as the state, may, by law, determine.' Even as it sets a mandate for education for all, the wording of the amendment does not set a standard for quality allowing for low quality education. Availability of school and a teacher has become the focus point in terms of implementation by the state towards universalization of elementary education.

1 Govinda, R. (1999). Status of Primary Education of the Urban Poor in India. Available at: www.un.org.in/janshala/mayjun99/primedu.htm 2 Pratham Resource Centre. Status of education among urban poor children of Northern and Western India (2004). Available at www.pratham.org 3 '55% of Bhopal slum children engaged in labour', Article in Hindustan Times, Bhopal 14.02.04 4 Muskaan's Annual Report 2003-04.

Thus we are in a situation where technically only 8 percent of urban children and 10 percent of rural children do not have access to a school in our country.¹ It is apparent therefore that we need a closer analysis to understand the people who are the 'guardians' of education.



Education and the “slum” community / family: The guardians of the children (parents and their larger communities) want their wards to study and are not bereft of ambition. While this ambition is constant, the helplessness of the parent amidst utter poverty brings general apathy and fatalism. This brings about a cultural state that reverts on itself - the grand promise of education may not excite, the dreams are too far-fetched (and their failings are enacted every day) to be believed. We could say that not enough “radical” effort has been made in evolving a “model” of “education” that suits this setting.

While we see that over the years this model is not working in an academic pursuit or in enabling people to progress, we have continued to hold onto this ‘model’ as an instrument of a social structure. We have evolved ways by which children can be brought into this ‘model’ – opening up bridge courses, remedial classes, pre-school centres. All to prepare the children suitable for a ‘model’ that does not suit them.

Problem of Schools: Looking at what is happening in classrooms today, it is difficult to say in an absolute tone that this is the course of schooling and a definite input for our children. It is the state’s responsibility to provide for education for the children. The strategies defined to fulfill this objective have been misinterpreted as the objective! For e.g. opening up schools and having people in charge of teaching has become equal to provision of education and fulfillment of children’s rights. This strategy does not work for either the slum children and drop-outs or those part of the system. When children reach a school (through an admission drive or out of parents’ own efforts), they are grouped into classes, but what constitutes this class? Infrastructure data for urban areas² show 28% of primary schools are not conducted in a proper building, 50% do not have toilets and 25% do not have mats or furniture, and with an average of 1 teacher/64 children but an average of 4 teacher/school.

¹ Ramachandran, V. (2003). ‘Backward and forward linkages that strengthen primary education’. Economic and Political Weekly, March 8, 2003. ² Govinda, R. (1999). Status of Primary Education of the Urban Poor in India. Available at: www.un.org.in/janshala/mayjun99/primedu.htm

Provision of rooms and infrastructure for human development centres (HDC) is proposed to be fulfilled from 'community participation'. Within the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the expenditure budgeted for these HDCs is an annual Rs. 33,000 (about Rs. 660 per child per year compared to Rs. 4393 spent per child in a primary school of Mumbai³).


In 1998, as 7 year olds, Chandni, Geeta, Pooja and their friends and cousins living in the slum of Ganga Nagar used to rag pick. None of the members of this Gond community has ever been to school. The children started studying in the room where the collected packets and other recycling stuff was kept on an hourly basis. As months have gone by since their first class, the children have academically progressed much beyond the elementary level of school. While some of their friends have dropped out for different reasons, many of them continue to aspire higher in studies and also in not accepting specific ways of living.



They have stood by a woman in their slum when she was being beaten up, in some moments of adolescent crushes wanted to get engaged and in other moments withstood parental and community pressures to get married. They have written to the Chief Minister requesting an appropriate method of relocating residents of another slum under threat of eviction. These three girls are in Class 9 today, and have dreams of working in an office and as a doctor. For each child, the fears of not being able to fully utilize the options of education are an everyday threat that needs to be handled by them and their teachers. At times the parents are with them in their struggle, & at times the parents have their own struggles to cope with.

There is a lot more to discuss in terms of the problems within the schools: relationship between children and teachers, attitude towards the parents (who come from deprived backgrounds themselves), content of education, the alienation of a child's reality from the events of a classroom and the methods through which education is transacted. Culmination of the above factors is reflected in the low academic growth of the children. Studies show that nearly half of school going children (age 7 - 14 years) from low-income urban households cannot read simple sentences, and are barely able to read the alphabet.² A study of the level of achievement of students in Grades 3 and 4 in 20 municipal schools of Mumbai found that less than 10 percent have mastery over the expected numeracy skills.³

1 Expenditure by Brihanmumbai Mahanagarpalika Education Department, quoted in International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO (2001). Juneja, N. Primary Education for all in the city of Mumbai, India: The challenge set by local actors. 2 Pratham Resource Centre 3 International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO (2000). Chavan, M. Building societal missions for universal pre-school and primary education.



Why is it that a slum as Sanjay Nagar is living under the threat of eviction? The people in the State behind this move are people who are 'educated'... yet they are unable to see or act on the fact that the poor are also people. Sending them away without a constructed shelter, in the midst of the school term will push them further into poverty. Guardians of education, what is their voice on this matter? Why is there no policy on this matter? That re-locations would not be done until adequate arrangements are done on all ends, that re-locations will not be done in between the school terms, that there will be permanent solutions for the poor's residential needs.....

Hypocrisy of the 'state': The state is the guardian that promises with phrases like 'best education', "the child's best interests". At the same time this 'greater good' manifests in giving notices for eviction within one week to residents of over 40 years for commercial interest. Residents are evicted outside the limits of the city, dispossessed of livelihoods, without any educational facility. This state provides for the set up of educational centres within the slum when there is a discussion of 'Universalization of Elementary Education'. It then dislocates the slum residents when there is an (unstated) 'greater good' than the lives of over one-third of its city population. As per '91 Census, Bhopal had a 3.99 lakh slum population; this is (officially) down to 1.26 lakh slum population as per census 2001. How can one expect that the very state with the callousness of throwing slums out of the city inheres a concern for the education of the children of these slums.

Education and Child Rights: 'Child rights' should be seen from poor children's perspective, and not 'schooling'. Are we willing to respect the poor? Are we willing to give space to people? Are we willing to let people participate and have a say? Do we want people to be educated? For education to be the tool which delivers children their rights in its essence and an option that is realizable by the very poor, there needs to be more steps taken in addition to the availability of a school facility, and the basic requirements of children (free textbooks, free uniforms, mid-day meal). Children's rights towards education cannot be isolated from their rights of life, distanced from their parents' rights to growth and opportunities. Education is not literacy, it is participation. Participation is independence and space, and this implies respect.

The "Viewpoint" section in this newsletter is a common space to express your views and ideas and further thread conversations featured in this and previous issues. We welcome you to write to us at info@learningnet-india.org

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About the Learning Network

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