



Dear Readers,

This issue of Chiguru brings you new avenues being explored by several network members. We often wonder how to engage children in the realm of social sciences above and beyond rote learning of facts. Puvitham and Shikshamitra share their efforts to motivate children by bringing the local realities into their teaching of social science. Sujit Sinha of Swarnirvar talks about his vision for a social studies textbook for this purpose. Reading the e-media efforts of Janseva Mandal for learning in Adivasi communities, you may want to consider how it can have great potential to revolutionize learning in remote areas. Many of you will be stirred to be a part of a collaborative and dialogue based space such as the PaataShaala initiative that Priya describes.

We thank all of you who have contributed to Chiguru in the last 5 years. Many of you have sent us your appreciation for the articles in Chiguru and the sharing space it provides. This time we ask for more! We want you to write back to us with memories and experiences that surfaced for you upon reading these pages in the

same spirit of sharing. As we prepare for the upcoming conference at Swarnirvar in December, we invite you to ponder over these contributions and discuss with others at the conference.

Best Wishes,
The Newsletter Team
(Reshma, Meenakshi, Anju, Anita)

Register for the 6th Annual Learning Network Conference, Dec 27-30th, 2008 at Swarnirvar, West Bengal. Details inside!

Contribute to Revive 2008. Share experiences, journeys, reflections, analysis, children's work and so on. See Revive guidelines in this issue for more details. Due Aug 31, 2008

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Viewpoint Social Studies Pedagogy

Any mention of the subject social studies, conjures up images of our traditional schooling with the branched studies of geography, history and civics pursued via different textbooks in isolation. It was a hard challenge to learn history and civics lessons as the reality of one's surroundings was far removed from that in the prescribed textbooks. In its 2005 position statement, NCERT recognizes social studies as a way to get children to think and seek knowledge from their own surroundings and asks teachers to discuss social reality in learning environments to allow children to relate their present to the past and societal changes.



Many educators and policy makers advocate a thematic approach to content (threading the areas of social sciences and humanities by engaging in geography, anthropology, political science, and sociology at the very least). Further, the curriculum content and practice needs to be informed by multicultural needs, human behavior and nature interactions, societal organization, and current events (local, national and international). The practice needs to emphasize on enabling children with strategies on “how to learn”, develop ways of inquiring, researching, processing, writing and presenting information in dependable ways. This goes beyond passively accepting and memorizing the content in history, geography and civics textbooks. Successful social studies pedagogy encourages children to research, and analyze sources of primary and secondary sources of information; organize and classify data; make and defend their claims; and create, acknowledge and discuss different interpretations and representations. This also leads to possibilities of integrating peace education, science and mathematics with social studies.

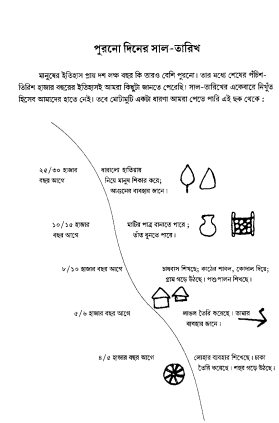
There is no dearth of information that a teacher can provide. Children need to participate meaningfully in today's social realities and enjoy

becoming life-long learners with open mindedness. We need to rethink social studies as a way for children to understand how historians, sociologists, climatologists, anthropologists, and geologists work and process ideas instead of just being a storehouse of historical and geographical facts. - Editors

We present below two case studies – one from Shikshamitra and one from Puvudham that follow an inquiry based social studies pedagogy. Following this, Sujit Sinha from Swanirwar shares a few seeds of imagination for a dream social studies curriculum and textbook. As you read through, if various personal experience cross your mind and you have ideas you would like to share to take this discussion further along, we encourage you to write to us and we will continue this thread in our next issue of Chiguru.

Children write the history of Shikshamitra:

Shikshamitra’s idea of teaching history right from the beginning has been not to burden the child with huge amounts of information, de-emphasize history as an exclusive subject and think of it as part of integrated social studies.



In 2007, a senior group of 5 children were given a one-month project of writing the history of Shikshamitra that culminated as their final exam in March 2007. The children decided on methods they could use to collect information from primary and secondary sources: interviewing students, veteran teachers, interviewing people from Swarnirvar (the parent body), investigating old exercise books, collecting and writing stories, making timelines, looking at photographs etc. Each person had a specific assignment and they met

Historical Chronology at Swarnirwar—created by students at Shikshamitra

regularly to present their findings, assist and critique each other. After a month’s work on their own with little help from adults they presented their work with questions, stories, pictures, timelines, and interviews.

The final oral exam examined their individual and group work. When Sudeshna (the teacher) asked what was different about this exam, Shajahan said that they have learnt and shown how history is created in a miniature form. Pradip said, “We became historians and found many things which were not there in our original questionnaire. We also learnt what our teachers had thought while starting the school.” Annu said, “evidence did not remain as some bits of information only; we actually used them to write our history.” Mohan commented “our history exam was not just a one day event but we spent a month collecting history”. Biki said, “In other places people just memorize something from a book but we have created our own book and it is also a document for Shikshamitra.”

Sudeshna challenged the children that a conventional history teacher may say that they do not know anything about the larger history given in the books and question the point of knowing a small school’s history. The children argued that a) normal history books

Biki said, “In other places people just memorize something from a book but we have created our own book and it is also a document for Shikshamitra.”

only have loads of information and there was no scope to verify or engage with that text, b) they now know how to ask questions and form their own opinion and not rely on the opinion of one author only, c) what they learnt is that history is a continuum that came right up to the present and they also got some hints about the future and d) they created their own knowledge and can do it again in different circumstances. Finally she asked each child why they had chosen a particular method or tool. It turned out that children chose from their own strength, weaknesses and likings. Shajahan likes writing stories; Pradip has writing problems so he chose to work with pictures; Annu said that timeline is a way of telling many things in a very short space for people who do not have much time and is mid way between written narrative and pictures.

Social Studies at Puvidham

For the communities near Puvidham, farming is the most important occupation but is not considered worthy and the community sees a high rate of migration

of locals to cities. The school treats farming as a very important activity and its importance in the village's life is discussed..

Puvudham's middle school children engaged in a study of farming and their ancestral history as connected to their lives and settlements. They researched when and why certain crops were grown in the region and reasoned why certain farming practices and seeds faced extinction. With no real formal textbooks the children talked to the village elders, inquiring about the living conditions, rainfall, vegetation and wildlife of the past. They used the process of scientific inquiry and research via various interviews, interpretations, and surveys to lead their own inquiry.



A student at Puvudham shares his family tree

As the process unfolded, they learned the connections of farming to topography, climate, and location of industries.

On a connected cartography study, the children mapped their house/ street, with details like the houses near their house, the number of rooms in their house, if they had a well, what kind of roof, doors, windows, TV etc. To understand their interaction with their environment, they surveyed the entire village, drew scaled maps and a model of the village. They noted details like the number of houses on a street, kinds of houses, wells, schools, temples, roads, etc.

While on the study of their societal diversity and personal history, the children wrote in their words about how their parents met and got married, the happiest moment in their parent's life, the saddest moments in their parent's life, accompanied with illustrations. The process also took them on the path of creating a family tree and tracing their roots back to their great grandparents. They presented their understandings as poems, stories and even books of the same.

Seeds for a nurturing social studies curriculum

Based on his experiences, Sujit Sinha of Swarnirvar proposes a dream social studies curriculum outline for primary classes (6-8th) and invites interested members to discuss these ideas and generate some action out of this.

Sujit Sinha proposes creating material keeping in mind children who may not study social studies after Class VIII, may quit school or join a vocational course. The question we have to address is what social studies skills and knowledge should every person possess. The material has to create a love of the work. And if one



Map-making at Swarnirvar

wants to pursue advanced Anthropology, Geography, Political Science, Economics, Sociology, it would have helped imbibe both the basic concepts and the enjoyment of inquiry. Textbooks must focus on developing concepts and skills through limited number of episodes, areas, topics covered in some depth, rather than trying to cover almost everything sketchily.

Upon completing the material, one will have developed an understanding a) of how hypothesis, theory, and knowledge is generated (b) that there can be multiple explanations, unresolved issues, disagreements on competing ideas and existing ideas can be replaced with newer ones. The material can be a combination of inquiry based open ended questions, workable projects for individuals and groups, comparison of one's own demographics with others or an ideal, discussion of current issues along with sufficient scope for questions and debates. The printed matter can have stories, quotes, poems, songs, pictures, cartoons, illustrations, audio, videos, films and a reference list of materials for readers who would like to know more.

References


National Focus Group 2005, position papers:
http://www.ncert.nic.in/html/focus_group.htm
Shikshamitra: <http://shikshamitra.kolkata.googlepages.com/>
Puvidham: www.puvidham.net
The Ancona School, Chicago: www.anconaschool.org

Sharing Corner

Technology Support for Adivasi Learning

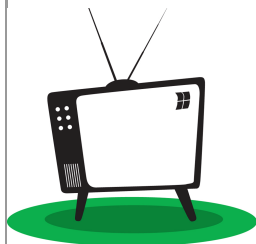
Fr. Godfrey D'Lima of Janseva Mandal, Maharashtra shares their experiences with electronic media for learning activities in remote adivasi areas of Nandurbar district. He invites others to share similar approaches and exchange expertise, educational software and ideas. As a next step in this project, the group plans to document success and challenges in this process. He can be contacted at dlimagodfrey@gmail.com.

Urban-elite sections of society can often enhance their children's learning and provide a supportive learning environment that relates to the formal syllabus through access to travel, electronic media and tutors. In contrast, often the standard syllabus is too complex for rural teachers and learners. They have very slender chances of using the bulk of formal syllabus for any advancement of productivity or earning capacity.



With the development of electronic media that is now becoming economical and user friendly it is becoming possible to create a wide range of effective learning situations.

Rural India's education needs new investments in educational utilities that will enrich both knowledge and communication methods to make education a meaningful experience. The teachers need supportive materials to grasp educational contents to be able to teach effectively. It is a lifetime quest for educators to supplement or complement the formal standardized system of education with new educational utilities that can provide a more relevant context to rural learners.



This quest can express itself in many ways - such as teachers' trainings, parent motivation, providing basic needs like food, clothing and classroom shelter, etc. With the development of electronic media that is now becoming economical and user friendly it is becoming possible to create a wide range of effective learning situations. Visual

images can supplement learning in diverse languages and can directly impact learning situations where teachers have limited mastery of the formal syllabus. In practice however, using electronic technology for learning in remote rural areas has several hurdles such as erratic electricity, wear and tear, bulky and immobile equipment, limited classroom space, storage space for such equipment, difficulty of accessing educational DVDs or CDs, and apathetic teachers.



In the adivasi villages of Nandurbar Taluka, where we work, one comes across TVs and VCDs provided by the state for school learning. But maintaining this equipment in villages is proving to be a very difficult. While the state accepts in principle the vital role of the electronic media for learning, there is a need to supplement and complement the state initiative is necessary for electronic devices to be used at all. And NGOs can play an important role here.

Initially we considered introducing an Audio Visual Mobile Unit consisting of a jeep with a TV, DVD Player, Generator, Sound System. This would have involved hiring a driver, diesel and maintenance costs, and transportation time. We finally decided to use compact DVD player with a 12.5" screen with inbuilt rechargeable batteries. This system does not require a TV screen or a generator and can play at any convenient location.

In May 2008, Janseva Mandal provided 8 learning centers in adivasi villages of Nandurbar and Navapur Talukas, Maharashtra with this equipment to test run them for endurance and educational feasibility. Our initial reports suggest that small groups of rural adivasi children are gathering at these learning centers to watch the educational DVDs/ CDs. We have provided a system of rotating libraries of educational software and have appointed one of our adivasi teacher activists visit the 8 learning centers to initially support the teachers with this equipment. This additional infrastructural and technological support will hopefully make up for the deficiency in the state's attempts to make TV



or Computer available without a service system in place to back up the investment.

Providing equipment and software must be accompanied by monitoring of its use over a prolonged period. This is our next step given the spread of our 25 odd learning centres. We have to observe the durability of the equipment. The software must also pass the test of immediate obsolescence for the electronic media is not in the slightest way capable of a human agent's versatility and variation in setting up contents and learning methods. Hence along with trying to acquire relevant software for the feeder library we must make a realistic appraisal of the experiment over time.



Natural Learning Materials and Design Kits

*Children will enjoy these learning materials
made with palm leaves and sea shells!!*

In Kanyakumari, after the tsunami, The Covenant Centre for Development (CCD), focused its efforts on neglected communities involving seashell, palm-leaves and other natural fibre based craft persons whose collective was later registered as a federation. The initiative, Kanya Kumari Kalai Koodam has been working with rural women artisans who are skilled in Palm leaf weaving. They have made functional and decorative accessories and many educational learning materials.

Kits such as the "Form and Design Kit", "Palm Leaf Box", "Number Boards", "Tic-Tac-Toe" and "Shells and Counters" nurture the feeling of care and respect for the raw material and the ecosystem. The materials offers an opportunity to feel natural materials and see various textures, colours and shapes. The kits encourage a child to understand pattern making, spatial compositions, classifications, and constructions.

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Sharing Corner

PaataShaala - Changing Realities of Education

Priya Nagesh from Samanvaya, Chennai shares with us the vision and reasons for the creation of an education study group called Paatashaala. Please send your questions and comments on this to priya@samanvaya.com

Today, education is a commodity. We have “good” education and “bad” education. The sellers with the label and guarantee of “industry” on their packages win high numbers of scapegoats who will be skinned, bleached, cut, processed standardized and packed to make the finished products – money-making machines.

Today, there is also an “alternative” education movement in India that is making its presence felt. Innovations are crossing over to the “mainstream” to make little changes here and there. A case in point is the spread of Activity Based Learning (ABL) in the government schools in Tamil Nadu. An awareness of alternative frameworks of learning is touching the fringes of the public consciousness. A case in point is a movie

*“We are changing the system, we are also resisting the change”
– Ranjan De*



like *Taare Zameen Par* becoming a commercial success. Today, we also have technology and the internet which has redefined the conventional meaning and visuals of “teacher”, “student”, “lesson” and “school”. Technology has made learning environments and the parameters of education as we know it today very fluid.

PaataShaala was started by Samanvaya (www.samanvaya.com) to bring together parents, teachers, educationists, learners...to comprehend this complex environment and its various aspects - by exploring openly and thinking critically. The purpose and process of PaataShaala is to go beyond mindless consumption of what the media

is dishing out, to go beyond unquestioned, devoted listening to expert lectures and to get onto a track of learning, understanding and applying / expressing this understanding. PaataShaala is a space for understanding, exploring, learning, sharing and doing all of this organically. Each of us is a practitioner here with valid contributions for a collective growth. The participation of different social groups enables the group to explore an issue from different perspectives and experiences.

“The child learns what he wants to learn – he may not learn what you want him to learn” – L.S. Saraswathi

Samanvaya has always been concerned with creating and evolving spaces where dialogue and learning can happen. We have been pursuing such a purpose in the education sector as well, through both our corporate as well as voluntary activity. PaataShaala evolved out of a few informal discussions in early 2007 with friends who were parents, and concerned with the current education scenario. They shared these concerns with us – about values imbibed in schools, pressure of performance on children, the high suicide rates among 10th and 12th Std. children of Tamil Nadu, the current education process and society which seems to treat education as a product to be bought off the shelves.


We were a small group of around 10 that started gathering once in a month or two in May 2007. The group numbers have waxed and waned according to the subject matters of the sessions. We have amidst us concerned as well as spirited parents striving to identify different ways of meaningful education, professionals who have voluntarily started their own education initiatives, wise and experienced teachers, learning activists, NGO workers and audiences interested in education related issues.

Since our beginning we have had some intense discussions on education that have spilled onto the online medium (<http://paatashaala.blogspot.com>), reviews of content in school and





*“Here and now, what is it to be happy and being the best?
Education should give children this” – Akila*

university education today, informal chats about learning and teaching various aspects of life, spontaneous crafts and learning sessions, and a serious exploration of the ABL (Activity Based Learning) methodology introduced in the government schools in Tamil Nadu. The ABL exploration continues. We have visited an urban and a rural school to try and understand the changes brought about by ABL. Further sessions on ABL are planned.



“There are neither ready-made problems nor ready-made solutions, so we have to go with new and different” – Ram

The PaataShaala space is defined by the people who come in to share and make it a joyful and learning experience. The qualities that have stood out through our gatherings are spontaneity and commitment. Each member of PaataShaala takes back with them the group's collective insights and experience to share and apply within their own worlds. If each of the PaataShaala members carried this space with(in) him / her to question, explore, be open and yet think critically, then the spirit of PaataShaala will be satisfied.



Readers are invited to join the discussions at <http://paatashaala.blogspot.com>

Your Feedback on Revive



We want to hear from you! Give us your feedback on Revive.

- ▼ What do you like about Revive? What do you find valuable in Revive?
- ▼ Any specific article that you recall being useful to you.
- ▼ Did you find Revive useful to connect with other groups and organizations? If so, in what way?
- ▼ Do you subscribe to or know of any other magazines or journals for teachers (not for children)? If yes, please mention which one(s).
- ▼ What other articles or information would you like to see in Revive?
- ▼ If you have any other organizations / individuals, you would like Revive to be sent to give us their contact info.

Send us your feedback by post or by going online to our website at <http://www.learningnet-india.org>

Learning Spotlight

SIDH



Vinish Gupta writes about The Society for Integrated Development of Himalayas (SIDH), based in the beautiful Uttarkand area's Kempty Village, Jaunpur District, around 12 kms outside of Mussoorie in the Central Himalayas. SIDH's primary mission is to use education as a tool for social change and to encourage a more meaningful exploration and dialogue, not only in the social and political spheres but also within individual mindsets.

A new initiative, the Learning Resource Centre (LRC), houses short term programs such as value-based education workshops with children from government schools, youth courses, teacher training; education curriculum content and design workshops, conferences on education, and exposure camps for adolescents and youth on education and understanding rural life through experiential learning. The campus also houses SIDH's long term residential program, Gap Year College, a 9-month course for young people from all over the world to become more self aware and socially responsible, and engage in meaningful work.

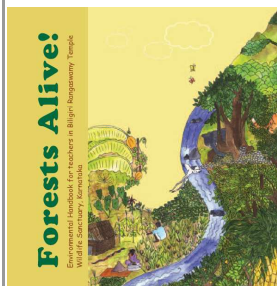
SIDH believes that education should promote understanding the self and its relationship with the body, family, society, nature, and all of existence.

SIDH has research, advocacy, and publication units. Through these various initiatives, SIDH is able to reach out to a large community of people who are concerned with quality in education. At any given time there are nearly 50 people on SIDH's campus with



More information about SIDH and its programmes can be had from the websites www.sidhsri.com and www.gapyearcollege.org Hazelwood Cottage, P.O. Box 19, Landour Cantt., Mussoorie 248179, Uttarakhand, India. Email: gapyearcollege@gmail.com, sidh.bodhigram@gmail.com Telephone: 0135-6455203, 6213060, 09411144021

Announcements



Forest Alive: An environmental education handbook and CD

This environmental handbook and activity CD, jointly produced by ATREE, Kalpavriksh and Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK) was created for teachers of the VGKK School, located within the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple (BRT) sanctuary. It is intended to help them, and other educators, create a more effective learning process in environmental education (EE) and learning for life. The BRT Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka, is one of South India's finest sanctuaries. Home to a host of wildlife including the tiger, the area is a vital link between the Western and Eastern Ghats.

*Authors: Sujatha Padmanabhan, Sunita Rao,
Yashodara Kundaji*

Illustrator: Madhuvanti Anantharajan

Publishers: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd.

CD Design; Aletha Tavares.

Kannada Version "Vana Sanjeevana",

Translator: Nagesh Hegde

Publishers: Navakarnataka.



FOREST ALIVE

English Version: CD only, Rs. 150/-. Email Swathi at kvbooks@vsnl.net

Kannada Version: Vana Sanjeevana Handbook only, Rs 275/-. Email: Sunita

Rao: sunitasirsi@gmail.com or Yashodara: justyasho@gmail.com. By Post:

Kalpavriksh, Apt. 5 Shree Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana Pune 411004

The book has information on Soliga tribals and their settlements, religion and nature conservation, the VGKK campus forests and wildlife of the BR Hills, maps and map reading, non-timber forest products, agriculture, health and nutrition, and environment and development. Generously illustrated, the CD also contains descriptions of over 175 activities. Educational aids like posters, flash cards and game cards

specific to the BR Hills have also been developed. The entire package can be used as part of an EE program for students from Classes 1 to 10. The program can be adapted for non-formal learning as well. While the handbook is set in the BR Hills, its contents and activities can easily be modified and used elsewhere in the country and outside. All the pictures and text can be downloaded and printed for use.



Anubhava Science Centre

Anubhava Science Centre has been conceptualised with the aim of providing an experiential learning environment for children to explore and express themselves in the field of science.

Anubhava propels the child to "inquire". This facility provides a well designed environment for children to conduct science experiments, engage in discussions and recording observations thereby providing a unique opportunity to learn through experiences.

As an initial offering, Anubhava Science Centre announces *Children's Science Lab facility* for children in the age group of 5-10 years. Number of children per batch is limited to encourage more interaction between child and facilitator. The program is structured differently for 5-7 yrs and 7-10+ yrs. Each child learns at his/her own pace through his/her own experiences. Some of the other programs that are being envisioned include Science Exhibition, Summer projects in Science and regular Facilitators Training sessions.

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If undelivered return to :
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About the Learning Network

The learning network is a network of groups exploring various approaches to holistic learning . It is a resource for educators, parents and organizations seeking meaningful approaches to education.

For more information on workshops, seminars, publications and members, Contact us at

Web www.learningnet-india.org

Email info@learningnet-india.org

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